

**Student Language Writing Scoring Guide: Grades 6-8**  
 Informative/Explanatory and Argument Writing and Research Projects

**Ideas and Content**

- Supporting details are explanations, examples, reasons, facts, descriptions, little stories, logical points, etc.
- Insights are understanding about what you have learned about yourself, other people, life, etc., or what other people have learned.
- Connections refer to how your ideas or details are connected to other experiences, people, books, events, things that are happening in the world, etc.

<p><b>6</b>  <b>The writing is very clear, focused, and interesting. It holds the reader’s attention all the way through. Many carefully chosen details provide strong support.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose and main ideas are particularly clear and focused.</li> <li>• Supporting details are specific, interesting, and support the main ideas.</li> <li>• Details are carefully chosen for purpose and audience.</li> <li>• Claims and counterclaims are thoroughly developed with logical reasoning and relevant evidence.</li> <li>• Accurate, credible sources are used to demonstrate an understanding of the topic or text.</li> <li>• Topic is thoroughly developed with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, and other information and examples.</li> </ul>	<p><b>5</b>  <b>The writing is clear, focused, and interesting. It holds the reader’s attention. Carefully chosen details provide strong support.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose and main ideas are clear and focused.</li> <li>• Supporting details are specific and support the main ideas.</li> <li>• Details are carefully chosen for purpose and audience.</li> <li>• Claims and counterclaims are developed with logical reasoning and relevant evidence.</li> <li>• Accurate, credible sources are used to demonstrate an understanding of the topic or text.</li> <li>• Topic is developed with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, and other information and examples.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4</b>  <b>The writing is clear and focused. It is long enough to show that the writer knows how to present ideas and explain them using many specific details.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose and main ideas are easy to understand.</li> <li>• Supporting details are specific and related to the main ideas.</li> <li>• Details are appropriate for purpose and audience.</li> <li>• Claims and counterclaims have logical reasoning and relevant evidence.</li> <li>• Mostly accurate, credible sources are used to demonstrate an understanding of the topic or text.</li> <li>• Topic is supported with facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations and other information.</li> </ul>	<p><b>3</b>  <b>Main ideas are easy to understand, but they may be too general. Specific details are limited.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose and main ideas may be too general or simple.</li> <li>• Supporting details are limited, a little off-topic, or may be simply a list.</li> <li>• Some claims and counterclaims have logical reasoning and evidence.</li> <li>• Some credible sources are used to demonstrate partial understanding of the topic or text.</li> <li>• Few or irrelevant facts, definitions, details, quotations, and other information support the topic.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2</b>  <b>The writing is not clear and focused. Specific details are very limited.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose and main ideas are not clear. The reader may have to guess the main ideas.</li> <li>• Claims are unclear.</li> <li>• Facts, definitions, details, quotations, and other information are limited or irrelevant.</li> </ul>	<p><b>1</b>  <b>The reader cannot understand the purpose and main ideas, or the writing may be much too short to show that the writer can present and develop an idea.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Claims are unclear and may lack reasoning to support the claim.</li> <li>• The writing does not demonstrate understanding of the topic or text.</li> <li>• Relevant facts, definitions, details, quotations and other information are missing.</li> </ul>

Student Language Writing Scoring Guide: Grades 6-8  
Informative/Explanatory and Argument Writing and Research Projects

**Organization**

Transitions are words, groups of words, or sentences that allow the reader to follow along from one idea, detail, or paragraph to the next one (e.g., but, so, because, however, as a result, for example, since, in fact, following, during, in contrast to, etc.).

<p><b>6</b> <b>Organization is strong. It fits the topic, purpose, and strengthens ideas and details. The writing is longer.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organization and order of ideas and details are well-structured and very easy to follow.</li> <li>• The introduction is strong, inviting, and makes the reader want to keep reading.</li> <li>• Details fit where they are placed.</li> <li>• A variety of transitional words and phrases are used effectively.</li> <li>• The conclusion effectively supports the claims, arguments, information and explanations presented.</li> <li>• Connections to source materials flow naturally.</li> <li>• Paragraph breaks are effective.</li> </ul>	<p><b>5</b> <b>Organization fits the topic, purpose, and helps strengthen ideas and details. The writing is longer.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organization and order of ideas and details are well-structured and easy to follow.</li> <li>• The introduction is inviting and makes the reader want to keep reading.</li> <li>• Details fit where they are placed.</li> <li>• A variety of transitional words and phrases are used well.</li> <li>• The conclusion is strong and clearly supports the claims, arguments, information, and explanations presented.</li> <li>• Connections to source materials flow naturally.</li> <li>• Paragraph breaks work well.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4</b> <b>Organization is clear. The writing shows that the writer can organize ideas and details.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organization and order of ideas and details make sense and are easy to follow.</li> <li>• The introduction introduces the topic.</li> <li>• Details make sense where they are placed.</li> <li>• Transitional words and phrases help the reader follow the writing from one part to another.</li> <li>• Writing may follow a formula such as the ‘five paragraph essay.’</li> <li>• The conclusion supports the claims, argument, information, or explanation presented.</li> <li>• Connections to source materials sometimes flow naturally.</li> <li>• Paragraph breaks help the reader follow the writing.</li> </ul>	<p><b>3</b> <b>The writer has tried to organize the writing.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organization and order of ideas may be a little unclear.</li> <li>• The introduction is underdeveloped or too obvious (e.g., “I will present all the reasons for...”).</li> <li>• Some details seem out of place or out of order and may not support the arguments, information or explanation presented.</li> <li>• Transitional words and phrases sometimes work, but the same ones may be used too often or the details are numbered.</li> <li>• The conclusion may not be long enough or is too obvious to support the claims or argument (e.g., “These are all the reasons that...”).</li> <li>• Some paragraph breaks may not be in the right place.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2</b> <b>Organization is not clear. It is so hard to follow that the reader has to re-read major parts. The writing may be too short to show that the writer knows how to organize ideas and details.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some attempt has been made to organize the writing.</li> <li>• The introduction is ineffective or missing.</li> <li>• Many details may be placed where they do not make sense.</li> <li>• Transitional words and phrases may be missing or overused.</li> <li>• The conclusion is ineffective or missing.</li> <li>• Paragraph breaks may be missing or incorrectly placed.</li> </ul>	<p><b>1</b> <b>The writing is extremely difficult to follow. The reader is confused even after re-reading.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The order of ideas and details make it difficult for the reader to understand.</li> <li>• The introduction may be missing.</li> <li>• Most details are placed where they do not make sense.</li> <li>• Transitions may be missing.</li> <li>• The conclusion may be missing.</li> <li>• Paragraph breaks may be missing.</li> </ul>

Student Language Writing Scoring Guide: Grades 6-8  
Informative/Explanatory and Argument Writing and Research Projects

<b>Voice</b>	
<p>- When thinking about appropriate voice, consider purpose (the reason for writing), audience (who will read the writing), and topic (what the writing is about).</p> <p>- One indicator of Voice is the writer's commitment to the topic.</p>	
<p><b>6</b> The writer has chosen a voice appropriate for the purpose, audience, and topic. The writer shows a deep commitment to the topic and wants others to read the writing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The writing maintains a formal style.</li> <li>• The writer is very aware of the audience and the reader feels involved with the writing.</li> <li>• The topic comes to life. The writing shows sincerity, originality, liveliness, honesty, excitement, or strong opinions.</li> </ul>	<p><b>5</b> The writer has chosen a voice appropriate for the purpose, audience, and topic. The writer shows commitment to the topic and wants others to read the writing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The writing maintains a formal style.</li> <li>• The writer is aware of the audience and the reader feels involved with the writing.</li> <li>• The topic comes to life. The writing shows sincerity, originality, liveliness, honesty, excitement, or strong opinions.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4</b> A voice is present. The writer seems committed to the topic. The writing is long enough to show fairly consistent use of an appropriate voice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The writing establishes a formal style.</li> <li>• The writer is aware of the audience most of the time. At times, the reader may sense the writer behind the words.</li> <li>• In places, the writing is expressive, engaging, sincere, or honest.</li> </ul>	<p><b>3</b> The writer seems somewhat committed to the topic. A sense of the writer comes through at times. The writing may not be long enough to show a consistent voice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The writer may be unaware of the audience.</li> <li>• The voice is inconsistent.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2</b> The writing provides little sense of involvement or commitment to the topic. There is no evidence that the writer has considered purpose, audience, or topic.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The writer seems to be unaware of the audience and there is little sense of “writing to be read.”</li> <li>• The writing seems flat, lifeless, stiff or mechanical.</li> <li>• The writing is informal or too casual.</li> </ul>	<p><b>1</b> The writing lacks a sense of involvement or commitment to the topic.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is no audience awareness.</li> <li>• The writing is flat and lifeless with no hint of the writer behind the words.</li> </ul>

**Student Language Writing Scoring Guide: Grades 6-8**  
 Informative/Explanatory and Argument Writing and Research Projects

**Word Choice**

- Descriptive language means specific words or phrases that create images in the mind of the reader, often sensory images (sight, sound, touch, taste, smell).
- Figurative language means words or phrases that are not meant to be taken literally (such as similes and metaphors).
- Domain-specific words and phrases are vocabulary specific to a particular field of study such as biology, health, social studies, math, etc.
- Academic language (e.g., obvious, complex, establish, verify, etc.) means precise language that is used across subjects or areas of study.

<p><b>6</b></p> <p><b>Words communicate in a very interesting and natural way appropriate to purpose and audience. The writer uses a broad range of words that are carefully chosen and placed for impact.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accurate, strong, specific, powerful words energize the writing.</li> <li>• Vocabulary is striking and varied, using domain-specific words and phrases that enhance the overall message.</li> <li>• Carefully selected words, phrases and academic language create cohesion and clarify relationships among information, claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.</li> <li>• Words create vivid images for the reader. Figurative language may be used.</li> </ul>	<p><b>5</b></p> <p><b>Words communicate in an interesting and natural way appropriate to purpose and audience. The writer uses a broad range of words that are carefully chosen and placed for impact.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accurate, specific words energize the writing.</li> <li>• Vocabulary is varied, using domain-specific words and phrases that support the overall message.</li> <li>• Words, phrases and academic language create cohesion and clarify relationships among information, claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.</li> <li>• Words create clear images for the reader. Figurative language may be used.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4</b></p> <p><b>Words communicate the message in writing that is long enough to show variety. Words are appropriate to purpose and audience.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Words communicate meaning, but may not energize the writing.</li> <li>• Domain-specific words are used along with words that are functional and precise.</li> <li>• Academic language is used accurately to convey information or make claim(s), counterclaims, arguments or explanations.</li> <li>• Words may occasionally seem overdone.</li> <li>• Overused sayings or expressions (clichés) are usually avoided.</li> </ul>	<p><b>3</b></p> <p><b>Words lack accuracy and variety. Words may not always be the best choice for purpose and audience. The writing may be too short to show variety.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Words are general and not specific.</li> <li>• Domain-specific words are limited.</li> <li>• Academic language is limited or may be used inaccurately to convey information or make claim(s), counterclaims, arguments or explanations.</li> <li>• Some words may be repeated too often.</li> <li>• Occasionally, wrong words may be used.</li> <li>• Overused sayings or expressions (clichés) may appear often.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2</b></p> <p><b>Words are repeated often and/or are misused. They make it difficult for the reader to understand the message.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Words are inaccurate, colorless, or flat.</li> <li>• Domain-specific words are missing or misused.</li> <li>• Words show little variety or are repeated over and over again.</li> </ul>	<p><b>1</b></p> <p><b>Word choices are extremely limited. The writing has so many misuses of words that the reader cannot understand the message.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General, vague words do not communicate.</li> <li>• Words do not make sense.</li> <li>• Wrong words may be used.</li> </ul>

Student Language Writing Scoring Guide: Grades 6-8  
Informative/Explanatory and Argument Writing and Research Projects

**Sentence Fluency**

- Sentence fluency is the rhythm and flow of the language, the sound of word patterns, the way in which the writing plays to the ear, not just the eye. How does it sound when read aloud? That's the test.
- Sentence structure is the way a sentence is arranged grammatically. Sentence structure includes where the noun and verb fall within an individual sentence.

<p><b>6</b></p> <p><b>The writing has an effective flow and rhythm. Sentences show a high level of craftsmanship. Strong and varied structure makes expressive oral reading easy and enjoyable.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentences glide along with one sentence flowing smoothly into the next.</li> <li>• Great variety in sentences makes the writing more interesting and easy to read.</li> <li>• Sentences begin in many different ways.</li> <li>• There is great variety in the length of sentences.</li> <li>• Variety in sentence structures draw attention to key ideas and relationships among ideas.</li> </ul>	<p><b>5</b></p> <p><b>The writing has an easy flow and rhythm. Sentences are carefully crafted. A variety of structures make oral reading easy and enjoyable.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentences flow smoothly from one to another.</li> <li>• Variety in sentences makes the writing more interesting and easy to read.</li> <li>• Sentences begin in different ways.</li> <li>• There is variety in the length of sentences.</li> <li>• Variety in sentence structures support key ideas and relationships among ideas.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4</b></p> <p><b>The writing is easy to read out loud. It flows and is long enough to show variety in sentence beginnings, lengths, and structures.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentences have a natural sound.</li> <li>• Most sentences begin in different ways.</li> <li>• Some sentences are shorter and some are longer.</li> <li>• Simple sentences read smoothly, but more complex sentences may not be as smooth.</li> </ul>	<p><b>3</b></p> <p><b>Parts of the writing are easy to read, but the reader may have to slow down or re-read because of the way sentences have been formed. The writing may be too short to show variety and control.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Portions of the writing have a natural sound, but others do not.</li> <li>• Some sentences begin the same way.</li> <li>• Many sentences have a similar length.</li> <li>• Simple sentences read smoothly, but more complex sentences are awkward.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2</b></p> <p><b>Most of the writing is difficult to read out loud. Difficult parts often force the reader to slow down or re-read because of the way sentences have been formed.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The writing does not sound natural.</li> <li>• Many sentences begin in the same way.</li> <li>• Many or most sentences are the same length.</li> <li>• Sentence patterns/structures are usually the same, typically short and choppy or long and rambling.</li> </ul>	<p><b>1</b></p> <p><b>The writing is very difficult to read out loud. The reader often has to slow down or re-read because of the way sentences have been formed.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The writing does not sound natural.</li> <li>• Most sentences begin in the same way.</li> <li>• Most sentences are the same length.</li> <li>• Sentence patterns/structures are short and choppy or long and rambling.</li> <li>• Words in sentences may be out of order.</li> </ul>

**Student Language Writing Scoring Guide: Grades 6-8**  
 Informative/Explanatory and Argument Writing and Research Projects

**Conventions**

- Conventions are the rules that apply to written English.
- Run-ons are complete sentences with no punctuation between them. One sentence runs right into another.
- Comma splices are complete sentences separated by only a comma. The use of comma splices is considered to be incorrect. Each complete sentence should end with a period.
- Fragments are only part of a sentence. They are considered incomplete sentences.
- Verb tense (past, present, future) should be consistent.

<p><b>6</b></p> <p><b>The writing shows very strong control of standard writing conventions (e.g., punctuation, spelling, capitalization, grammar and usage) in a piece that is longer and more complex.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentences are complete and have correct punctuation. There are no run-ons, comma splices, or fragments.</li> <li>• Punctuation within sentences is correct.</li> <li>• Spelling is correct, even of more difficult words.</li> <li>• Capitalization is correct.</li> <li>• Grammar is correct.</li> <li>• A wide range of conventions (e.g., colons, semi-colons, ellipses, dashes, parentheses) are used in writing that is longer and more complex.</li> <li>• Few errors. Little or no need for editing.</li> </ul>	<p><b>5</b></p> <p><b>The writing shows strong control of conventions (e.g., punctuation, spelling, capitalization, grammar and usage) in a piece that is longer and more complex.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentences are complete and have correct punctuation. There are no run-ons, comma splices, or fragments.</li> <li>• Punctuation within sentences is correct.</li> <li>• Spelling is correct, even of more difficult words.</li> <li>• Capitalization is correct.</li> <li>• Grammar is correct.</li> <li>• A wide range of conventions (e.g., colons, semi-colons, ellipses, dashes, parentheses) are used in writing that is longer and more complex.</li> <li>• Few errors. Little need for editing.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4</b></p> <p><b>The writing shows control of conventions (e.g., punctuation, spelling, capitalization, grammar and usage) in a piece that is long enough.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentences are complete and have correct punctuation. There are few, if any, run-ons, comma splices, or fragments.</li> <li>• Punctuation within sentences is usually correct.</li> <li>• Spelling is usually correct, especially of common words.</li> <li>• Capitalization is usually correct.</li> <li>• Verb tense is usually correct. Subjects and verbs go together. Other grammatical errors are not severe.</li> <li>• A wide range of conventions may not be used.</li> <li>• Errors require moderate editing.</li> </ul>	<p><b>3</b></p> <p><b>The writing shows limited control of conventions (e.g., punctuation, spelling, capitalization, grammar and usage). In some writing the conventions may be correct, but the writing is too short to show control.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most sentences are complete and have correct punctuation. There may be run-ons, comma splices, or fragments.</li> <li>• Sentences may contain errors in punctuation.</li> <li>• Spelling of common words is sometimes incorrect.</li> <li>• Capitalization errors are present.</li> <li>• Verb tense may not be correct. Subjects and verbs may not agree. There may be other grammatical errors.</li> <li>• Errors distract the reader and require significant editing.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2</b></p> <p><b>The writing shows little control of conventions (e.g., punctuation, spelling, capitalization, grammar and usage). Many errors make reading difficult.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentences may be incomplete. There are run-ons, comma splices, and/or fragments.</li> <li>• Sentences contain frequent errors in punctuation.</li> <li>• Common words may often be misspelled.</li> <li>• Capitalization is inconsistent or often incorrect.</li> <li>• There are major errors in grammar.</li> <li>• Errors require substantial editing.</li> </ul>	<p><b>1</b></p> <p><b>The writing shows very limited skill in using conventions (e.g., punctuation, spelling, capitalization, grammar and usage). There are so many errors that the reader has to re-read and has a hard time understanding the message.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ending punctuation is incorrect, random, or missing. Most sentences do not end where they should with the correct punctuation mark.</li> <li>• Many spelling errors make reading difficult.</li> <li>• Capitalization may seem random.</li> <li>• There are many grammatical errors.</li> <li>• Errors require extensive editing.</li> </ul>

Student Language Writing Scoring Guide: Grades 6-8  
Informative/Explanatory and Argument Writing and Research Projects

**Use of Sources**

- Whenever you take information from a source, whether that source is published on paper, presented in a lecture or broadcast, or available online, you must tell your reader where the information came from. You must cite your source.  
- "Cite" a source means you show, in the body of your writing, where the words or information came from, using an appropriate formatting style. You must also provide complete information about the source (author, title, name of publication, date, etc.) at the end in the bibliography (also called the works cited or references page, depending on the style you use).

<p><b>6</b> <b>The writing shows very strong commitment to the quality and accuracy of the information presented. Documentation is used to avoid plagiarism and to help the reader judge the reliability of a particular source.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple credible print and digital sources are used.</li> <li>• A variety of transitions are used to introduce quotations or paraphrases.</li> <li>• All quoted materials are punctuated correctly.</li> <li>• All sources are correctly cited with correct in-text documentation.</li> <li>• When required, a bibliography page lists all sources cited.</li> </ul>	<p><b>5</b> <b>The writing shows strong commitment to the quality and accuracy of the information presented. Documentation is used to avoid plagiarism and to help the reader judge the reliability of a particular source.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple credible print and digital sources are used.</li> <li>• Transitions are used to introduce quotations or paraphrases.</li> <li>• Quoted materials are usually punctuated correctly.</li> <li>• All sources are correctly cited with correct in-text documentation.</li> <li>• When required, a bibliography page lists all sources cited.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4</b> <b>The writing shows a commitment to the quality and accuracy of the information presented. Documentation is used to avoid plagiarism and to help the reader judge the reliability of a particular source.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Several credible print and digital sources are used.</li> <li>• In general, sources are documented correctly.</li> <li>• Quoted materials are usually punctuated correctly so that errors do not block meaning.</li> <li>• All sources are cited with in-text documentation.</li> <li>• When required, a bibliography page lists major sources cited.</li> </ul>	<p><b>3</b> <b>The writing shows a limited commitment to the quality and accuracy of the information presented. Documentation is used, but may be ineffectively incorporated, inaccurate, or missing. Errors begin to violate the rules of documentation.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More than one source is used, but the writing tends to rely on one source. Not all sources may be credible.</li> <li>• Punctuation of quoted materials may contain errors.</li> <li>• Some sources are cited with in-text documentation.</li> <li>• When required, a bibliography page may be incorrectly formatted or is missing some cited sources.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2</b> <b>The writing shows little commitment to the quality and accuracy of the information presented. Frequent errors in documentation result in instances of plagiarism and often raise questions of the reliability and truthfulness of the sources or final writing.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only one source may be used or the source(s) are not credible.</li> <li>• Ideas taken from source(s) may be changed or incorrectly presented.</li> <li>• Paraphrasing is so close to the original source that it should be set off in quotation marks or should be reworded.</li> <li>• Quoted materials have frequent punctuation errors.</li> <li>• Citations may be omitted or are not correct.</li> <li>• When required, bibliography page is not correctly formatted, or sources that were used are missing.</li> </ul>	<p><b>1</b> <b>The writing shows no regard for the conventions of research writing. Lack of proper documentation results in plagiarism and raises questions about the overall accuracy of the writing.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is little or no evidence of the use of outside sources.</li> <li>• Source material has been copied from the original without setting it off using quotation marks.</li> <li>• Citations for source materials are missing.</li> <li>• When required, no bibliography page is provided.</li> </ul>