

classroom observations of peer and self-assessment sessions confirmed the students' claims.

To examine the reliability of our assessments, we examined the similarities and differences in grading with the rubrics. Was everyone using the rubrics in

ways that produced similar grades, or were we grading idiosyncratically and, perhaps, unfairly? Lisa Puckey, seventh grade teacher, volunteered to bring copies of students' biographical essays on Malcolm X to a meeting. We each scored an essay independently and then

**Figure 3** Generic grade eight writing rubric

	4	3	2	1
<b>Ideas and Content</b>	The topic is focused. Main ideas are clear. Numerous relevant and accurate details or examples support the ideas (e.g., facts, similes, metaphors, or comparisons).	The topic and ideas are clear, but there is not enough detail. The writing stays on topic but does not address minor parts of the assignment.	There is a very general topic, but the writing strays off topic or does not address major parts of the assignment.	The topic and ideas are unclear. It's hard to see which information is most important. May be repetitious or disconnected thoughts with no main point.
<b>Organization</b>	The writing has a catchy beginning to grab the reader's attention, a developed middle, and meaningful ending. The order of ideas makes sense. Transitions show how ideas connect. Pacing is well-controlled.	The paper has a beginning, middle, and end. The order makes sense. Transitions are used, but some do not work well. Pacing is reasonable.	The paper has an attempt at an introduction and conclusion. Some ideas seem out of order. Transitions need a lot of work. Writing may lunge ahead or hover over details.	There is no real introduction or conclusion. Ideas seem strung together in a loose fashion. Pacing is uncontrolled.
<b>Paragraphs</b>	Paragraphs are properly indented and begin in the right spots. Each has one topic, and has topic, supporting, and closing sentences.	Paragraphs are indented; some begin in the right spots and have topic, supporting, and closing sentences.	Paragraphs tend to begin in the wrong places. May not have topic sentences.	There are either one or two long paragraphs or random paragraph breaks.
<b>Voice</b>	The writing has personality. The writer cares about the topic and speaks right to the intended audience.	The writing seems sincere, but the author's personality fades in and out.	The writer seems to be aware of an audience but does not attempt to engage it.	The style is mismatched with the purpose or audience. The tone is bland.
<b>Word Choice</b>	Vivid, precise words and phrases help make the meaning clear (e.g., 5 senses words). Avoids clichés and jargon.	Words used are adequate and correct, with a few attempts at colorful language.	Words used are ordinary. Some language may seem forced or full of clichés.	Limited, repetitive vocabulary. Words are sometimes used incorrectly.
<b>Sentence Fluency</b>	Sentences are well-constructed and have different beginnings and lengths. Fragments, if used, add style. Dialogue, if used, sounds natural.	Sentences are usually constructed correctly. Some variety in beginnings and lengths.	Many incorrect sentences. Little variety in beginnings or lengths. Dialogue, if used, sounds unnatural.	Incomplete or run-on sentences make the paper hard to read. Little or no variety in beginnings or lengths.
<b>Conventions</b>	Few, if any, errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar. Misspellings are of sophisticated vocabulary.	Spelling, punctuation, caps, and grammar are usually correct.	Errors are frequent enough to make the writing hard to understand.	Errors are so frequent that they are distracting and make the paper almost impossible to read.