

Introduction to the PWA Rubrics:

What you need to know to understand and use them

- **Each PWA rubric is intended to span an entire year of study.** Grade level work (a “3” on the rubric) is defined as what children’s writing should look like at the end of a year of frequent, quality writing instruction at that grade level. For example, most teachers should find about 75% of their class scoring at levels 1 or 2 at the beginning of the year. By the end of the year, the same percentage should be scoring at level 3. Only students with exceptional writing skills will score at level 4; and many students may continue to score below grade level even at the end of the year. This is true especially if their English language skills are still developing, or if they have not had access to a regular, quality writing program throughout the year.
- **The PWA rubrics are meant to be *recursive* as opposed to *linear*.** The beginning and ending levels for each grade level deliberately overlap significantly with the previous and subsequent grade levels to allow for the broad range of student experience with literacy, various paces of development, and the cyclical nature of learning.
- **The PWA rubrics are designed to be *cumulative*.** That means that students will experience the most success in writing if the PWA is implemented and used to guide instruction in all the grade levels. Especially if no other writing instruction is in place, the consistent implementation of the PWA across the grade levels over the years will at least ensure that an incoming second grade student, for example, will have had a minimum six weeks’ instruction and assessment in expository and narrative writing—the minimum time necessary to administer the Fall, Winter and Spring PWAs in K and 1st grade.
- **The PWA rubrics are intended to guide curriculum and planning.** Unlike summative assessments which may be unconnected to the curriculum or to student pathways of learning, these rubrics are meant to formatively assess student learning and guide instructional decisions. For example, if early assessments show that most students are not punctuating the ends of sentences, and the rubric shows that by the end of the year this skill will be necessary in order to score a “3,” then teachers should plan to give direct instruction and practice opportunities in ending punctuation.
- **Teachers and schools are invited to incorporate the PWA rubrics into their school practice.** Consistently evaluating *all* student writing by the PWA rubric will help students and teachers develop a thorough understanding of the

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What you need to know to understand and use them

elements of quality writing, and may lead to higher scores on the PWA assessment. Over time, the PWA can provide a common framework of language and expectations for teachers discussing writing at their school. Schools might want to consider keeping one copy of each student's Spring PWA rubric with notes about strengths and weaknesses in the portfolios or cumulative folders.

- **The PWA rubrics are *not* specific to the PWA writing prompts and can be used to assess *any* student writing at the appropriate grade level and/or genre.**

- **Students will experience the most success with this assessment if it is embedded in a rich writing program that emphasizes:**
 - 1) Daily writing opportunities for authentic audiences;
 - 2) Development of a community of writers;
 - 3) Opportunities for students to develop their own story ideas as well as explore teacher-assigned topics and genre;
 - 4) Study and practice of the writing process (brainstorming, drafting, revision, editing, publication);
 - 5) Regular assessment of student writing outside of the PWA and frequent adjustment of teaching in accordance with students' needs;
 - 6) Direct teaching of writing concepts and skills. through mini-lessons and student conferences

See the list of Best Practices in the Teaching of Writing (included in the PWA materials) for more ideas about how to support optimal performance on the PWA.

- **The PWA rubrics and their associated lessons and prompts are aligned with the California Language Arts Standards and compatible with the themes and literature of the Open Court Reading Program. However, teachers with other Language Arts curricula should find the themes to be broad enough to align with student interests in their classes. All Six Traits of Writing are incorporated into the PWA Features of Writing, even when not labeled exactly the same: "Ideas & Content" addresses the trait of voice and "Language & Audience" addresses voice, word choice and sentence fluency. The PWA also incorporates the trait of presentation into its formulation as part of a writing process which includes publication.**

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What you need to know to understand and use them

- Teachers should expect English Language Learners to progress through the levels of the rubrics commensurate with their ELD levels. These equivalents are noted for each score level and based on the California ELD Standards. Therefore a student entering third grade as a Beginning English speaker and ending third grade as an Early Intermediate speaker might progress just one score level in a given year, and should not be necessarily be expected to write beyond a Level 2 even by the end of the year. Students' performance will depend on such factors as: whether or not child has already attained literacy in the first language; what kind of English oral language and reading opportunities/support are available; and the presence/absence of a year-long, quality writing program. Teachers of ELL students should keep in mind that language acquisition usually occurs first in listening, then speaking, then reading, and finally writing. ELL students may enter a grade level with an English proficiency more advanced than the highest ELD level reflected on the rubric; in this case writing may be scored and interpreted as for native speakers. No matter what their ELD level, English language learners should absolutely participate in a full writing program throughout the school year and teachers should be prepared to scaffold these activities for all learners in the classroom.

- **The PWA is an assessment of *first draft* writing.** This should be taken into account during scoring. In Kindergarten and first grade, when non-mastery of conventions typically interferes with expression of ideas (for example, irregular directionality in kindergarten or lack of spacing between words in the first grade), assessing conventions will give a good idea of a student's score level. In the second and third grades when revision and editing have become a regular part of the writing process, first draft writing may not accurately demonstrate students' mastery of conventions of print. You should expect some first draft errors and inconsistency in punctuation and penmanship, particularly toward the end of a piece of writing as students abandon attention to conventions in favor of getting their ideas down in a first draft. Students should not necessarily be marked down in conventions for these errors; instead, look for evidence of *capacity* in conventions of print such as editing or infrequency of error, and score accordingly.

- **Teachers will find great benefit in collaborating to assess their student writing with the rubrics.** One advantage to collaborative scoring is that other teachers represent an authentic audience for your students' writing. Since they are not as familiar with your students' talents, idiosyncrasies, English language

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What you need to know to understand and use them

development, etc., they are more likely to evaluate the writing objectively on its own merit. Collaborating to assess student writing can also help you to calibrate your use of the rubrics across the school and develop school-wide expectations around the development of writing. Finally, as you identify strengths and weaknesses in your students' writing, other teachers may be a great resource for curriculum and instruction ideas.

- **Teachers may want to use the Writing Sample Analysis form (blackline master included in this packet of materials) when scoring the PWA writing samples** to record what they notice about strengths, weaknesses, questions and what to teach when looking at any particular writing sample or set of samples. These notes may then help plan and guide future writing instruction. The form may be used for just one student, a sample of students, or a whole class. It can be used in conjunction with the PWA, other writing assessments, or any other writing sample the teacher collects for assessment purposes throughout the year.