

Responding to Student Writing

Every middle level teacher recognizes the important role response plays in the growth of student writers. The materials in this packet—appropriate for self-study or group work—are designed to give teachers an opportunity to consider their options for responding to student work and compare their ideas with those of another experienced teacher.

The packet includes the following materials:

- Three authentic samples of uncorrected student drafts: an editorial, a poem, and a personal narrative (p. 2, p. 8, and pp. 14-15)
- Corresponding rubrics listing criteria that were discussed, modeled, and practiced in the students' classrooms (p. 3, p. 9, and p. 16)
- Completed rubrics reflecting another teacher's responses (p. 4, p. 10, and p. 17)
- Detailed comments by the teacher about each student's writing and its instructional implications (pp. 5-7, pp. 11-13, and pp. 18-21)
- An explanation of the scoring system used in the rubrics (p. 22)

After reading one of the drafts, you can use the accompanying rubric to determine how you might respond to the student's writing. Then you can look at the responses and comments of the other teacher.

The criteria listed on the grids are designed to trigger thinking and discussion among teachers. They are not intended to suggest that there is only one correct way to respond to student writing. In practice, the criteria for judging any piece of writing will vary from teacher to teacher. Teachers also consider a variety of factors to determine how they will respond, including the student as an individual and a writer; school, district, or state curriculum requirements; whether the writing is an early or late draft; important features of the genre; techniques and strategies for writing; the student's purpose, ideas, and feelings; the amount of time available and the number of students; and whether the response is written or oral.

The comments included in this packet are meant to be fairly comprehensive. However, in practice, teachers generally recognize that they may not be able to respond as fully as they like, and they also realize that overloading a student with comments may be counterproductive. So, in responding, teachers are selective; they focus on what they think is especially important to help the student grow as a writer.

Though the options for what to respond to are numerous, teachers usually are systematic in their approach. They establish a routine for working as a community of writers, in which students regularly receive responses to their writing from the teacher, classmates, and others. They organize methodically, for example, in a writing workshop, to provide response to students' work. They also help their students understand important criteria for writing, and they refer consistently to these criteria when they respond to students' work. Often, the criteria are listed on a chart or on a rubric, checklist of criteria, or other such form that is available to students, held in a writer's notebook, and even displayed in the classroom. This set of criteria can reflect the general characteristics of effective writing, or it can be tailored to fit the characteristics of a specific genre.

An editorial written by a sixth-grade student (early draft)

Cell Phones in Our Schools... Would They Be So Bad?

Cell phones have been used for many things. In the past, cell phones have been used in many ways. For example, on 9/11 people on the flights and in the Twin Towers used cell phones to call the police or their loved ones and explain their situation. Read on to see about why we should use cell phones in school.

Cell phones are used in emergencies at some schools in Tennessee and Michigan. One time at my school in Old Hickory, Tennessee, there was an unidentified man who had a gun. He was in the hallway outside of the "Pod". (3rd and 4th grade classes). We were in a lockdown. Some kids and teachers were hiding in the restrooms that were in the middle of the "Pod". The rest were hiding in closets. My friend Kassie was under a desk and remembered that the teacher had a cell phone in her purse. Kassie opened the purse and got the cell phone to call 911. Another time one of the teachers had a heart attack during class. My friend Jamie ran to another room told the principal (who was watching the kids) to call an ambulance because Mrs. Adams was having a heart attack. The school phone lines were down, but Mrs. Colone (the principal) had a cell phone. She called an ambulance and saved Mrs. Adams' life.

You probably think that cell phones would be a distraction because of the games. But that could be solved very easily. If you caught a student playing a game you could give them a referral or ISS. Or, it could be a rule that kids have to keep the phone put away at all times, unless they are being used. "I bring my cell phone to school and keep it in my locker." said my friend Michelle who lives in Michigan. "It's never a distraction."

Another reason is that a lot of people agree with me. I did a survey and eight out of 13 people said we should be able to use them. "We should be able to use cell phones in school incase of emergencies" said Jessa, a sixth grader at Meece Middle School. "They would be helpful to parents." said Cathy Desmet, the parent of a 6th and 7th grader at Meece.

Like I said in the beginning of my piece, cell phones can be used in emergencies. That day in Tennessee would've been tragic. About 500 kids could've lost their lives if Kassie hadn't have used the cell phone. Please take using cell phones at school into consideration. Schools would be even safer than they are now. Would you want your kids to get hurt at school? I didn't think so. Now whats your opinion?

**Rubric for Early-Draft Editorial:
 “Cell Phones in Our Schools...Would They Be So Bad?”**

Key for Scoring

- 1 = Novice
- 2 = Apprentice
- 3 = Proficient
- 4 = Distinguished

This scoring system is based on the scoring system used for Kentucky’s state-assessed Writing Portfolio.

Criteria	1	2	3	4
Audience Awareness				
Statement of Opinion				
Statement of Purpose				
Lead				
Organization				
Choice of Argument				
Supporting Detail				
Conclusion				
Sentence Variety				
Language Choice				

Rubric for Early-Draft Editorial:
“Cell Phones in Our Schools...Would They Be So Bad?”
with teacher’s responses

Key for Scoring

- 1 = Novice
- 2 = Apprentice
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This scoring system is based on the scoring system used for Kentucky’s state-assessed Writing Portfolio.

Criteria	1	2	3	4
Audience Awareness		X		
Statement of Opinion				X
Statement of Purpose	X			
Lead		X		
Organization		X		
Choice of Argument		X		
Supporting Detail			X	
Conclusion		X		
Sentence Variety			X	
Language Choice			X	

Teacher’s Comments for Early-Draft Editorial: “Cell Phones in Our Schools...Would They Be So Bad?”

Audience Awareness (Apprentice):

Showing awareness of readers is important in all writing, especially in editorials, and audience awareness is not an easy skill for young writers to develop. The main audience for this editorial seems to be parents, but the writer might also have in mind school administrators or teachers. Both are logical choices for an audience to influence through the editorial.

To strengthen audience awareness, the writer could clarify the “target” readership in the opening paragraph, perhaps indicating that she wants to influence educators at the school to change the rules. Establishing this target reader might help the student clarify her purpose and provide more support that would interest the readers. For either readership, though, the writer has chosen effective support in the two stories that show the danger students faced and the way cell phones enabled them to deal with the danger. The argument that cell phones can help promote safety in schools is one that likely would appeal to readers.

Also, this writer knows that to be effective with readers she must provide support—not merely state an opinion. One of the best signs of audience awareness is that the writer anticipates the resistance to students’ use of cell phones in school (paragraph 3). She probably needs to consider other kinds of opposition, but the possibility of cell phones being a distraction is certainly an important issue. Considering the way others might think about an issue is a good technique because it reveals a degree of critical thinking and a willingness to consider the “other side”—which can be persuasive with readers. This writer also offers a reasonable “counter” to this view, that school officials could establish rules for the misuse of cell phones, and she provides some support that cell phones have not been a distraction at other schools.

In a revision conference, the writer might need some more help in thinking about the kind and amount of support that might be effective with certain readers. For example, the survey of *students* and the quotes from students might not persuade parents and educators. Still, this student does know that critical readers will expect relevant, specific support and an awareness of the views of others concerning an issue.

The ending of the editorial could be strengthened if the student were more specific about what she wants to accomplish with her audience; taking something “into consideration” is not as assertive as asking readers to do something. Asking the student to think more, then, about her audience and purpose, beyond stating an opinion, would help this student make the writing even stronger.

Statement of Opinion (Distinguished):

In the introduction, the writer clearly states an opinion that students “should use cell phones in school,” and the writing is developed consistently to support this opinion. As the support and reasoning for this opinion are presented in the body paragraphs, the student might bring the opinion back to the reader’s attention more often, but the opinion is again clearly indicated in the conclusion through the direct request of the reader and through the questions raised.

Statement of Purpose (Novice):

The writer’s *opinion* on the matter of student use of cell phones is clear; however, the student’s *purpose* in writing the editorial, beyond simply stating an opinion, is not as clear or as assertively stated as it might be: “Please take using cell phones at school into consideration.” If

the student's purpose is to advocate a change in school rules, such a purpose should be stated more directly, in both the introduction and conclusion, and more explanation concerning this change would be useful.

Through a conference, the student could be encouraged to be more specific about her purpose: "What exactly do you want this writing to accomplish with readers?" If the purpose is to urge educators and parents to change school rules so that cell phones may be used, then a more direct statement of this purpose would help.

Lead (Apprentice):

Though this lead probably needs some more background on the *issue* of cell phone use in schools, the writer does reveal an understanding that leads typically provide some needed background, indicate a purpose/opinion, and strive to engage readers. Some readers may think the first two sentences are too general or repetitive, but the writer does quickly move to something specific.

The references in the lead to use of cell phones in the 9/11 tragedy likely will engage readers and show the significance of the topic, but the connection of the 9/11 event with the use of cell phones in schools is not established smoothly. The writer does indicate an opinion in the lead but does not directly call for the change in school rules, which seems to be the purpose. The student knows some fundamentals about writing a lead but would benefit from a mini-lesson or conference on leads and from reading other writings that use different approaches to leads.

Organization (Apprentice):

The student clearly organizes in an introduction, body, and conclusion, and shows ability to paragraph logically. For the most part, the flow of thought is orderly and unified. The student does not digress. She uses transitions effectively in several places. In the conclusion, she refers to previously mentioned support (Kassie's story); doing so contributes to the unity of the writing. These are good signs for a middle school writer.

Paragraph 4 may need to be moved to become paragraph 3. Paragraph 2 is one block of support, and paragraph 4 presents more support based on a survey (it probably should be expanded). The two blocks of support logically fit in sequence, so paragraph 4 might well be moved. Another option would be to eliminate paragraph 4 and use the reference to the survey and the quote in paragraph 4 in the conclusion.

In a conference, the teacher could suggest these possibilities and encourage the writer to reconsider paragraph 4. Students could be encouraged to focus on organization in a peer conference, and likely this student would quickly spot a way to strengthen the organization of her writing.

Choice of Argument (Apprentice):

The main argument here is that cell phones should be permitted in schools because they can promote safety. This is a logical argument, and it shows awareness of the audience (parents and educators). The argument is developed well in paragraph 2 through the examples that illustrate how cell phones were used to protect students and teachers.

In the last paragraph, the writer draws a logical conclusion from evidence provided in support of her opinion ("About 500 kids could've lost their lives if Kassie hadn't have used the cell phone."). The paragraph that considers possible resistance to the student's opinion probably needs to be developed more fully, but including such a paragraph in developing the writing strengthens the

argument. That a writer at the middle school level reveals ability to develop the argument in this way is a good sign.

The writer might be more effective in accomplishing her purpose if she more clearly indicated that she wants parents and educators to change school rules to promote safety. The argument might be stronger also if the writer added more support from the survey (especially quotes from parents) and more support to show that cell phones have *not* been a distraction at other schools.

Use of Detail to Support Arguments (Proficient):

Throughout the writing, the student reveals awareness of the need for a writer to provide specific and relevant details to support an opinion. Paragraph 2 is especially well detailed. Also, this student knows how to include a variety of forms of support: facts, quotes, examples, survey findings, references to incidents in her personal experience. Overall, the choice of detail is pretty good and shows awareness of readers.

More details about the survey and its findings would strengthen the support—for example, noting that parents and teachers were included in the survey and giving more quotes from them. Adding more of what she learned from her friend Michelle (paragraph 3) about cell-phone use at her friend’s school would be helpful. Nevertheless, this student shows strength in her ability to collect and organize detailed, relevant, and varied support for her opinion. A question or two from the teacher in a conference could lead this student to take some more steps to make the support even stronger.

Conclusion (Apprentice):

The student knows to provide a separate conclusion that is aimed at emphasizing her opinion and that seeks to be persuasive with readers. The writer is not overly general in the conclusion, and the return in the conclusion to the previously mentioned incident with Kassie contributes unity to the writing. The student raises questions for the reader to consider, a typical approach in conclusions, and these questions connect with the student’s argument concerning promoting safety in schools. The student knows some strategies for developing effective conclusions.

An option the student might consider is to include information presented in paragraph 4. Doing so would add emphasize to her argument. Also, the conclusion (and the writing overall) would be strengthened if the writer more directly advocated that her “target” readers (educators and parents) change school rules, which seems to be the writer’s goal. In a conference, a question like this might be offered to the student: “OK, I see your main idea here, but what do you want your readers to do?”

Sentence Variety (Proficient):

Though in a revision session this student might be encouraged to combine some sentences, overall this writing does not reveal serious problems with sentence construction, and the writer does use a variety of sentence structures. For this writer, it would be more important to focus on such matters as purpose, reader awareness, and support for her argument than to concentrate on sentence construction.

Language Choice (Proficient):

Word choice in this writing is reasonably precise; the meaning is clear, and the tone of the writing is appropriate. A mini-lesson on selection of strong verbs might help this student, but language choice is not a serious problem area in this writing.

A poem written by an eighth-grade student (an early draft)

The Watch glass

School is like a watch glass
that I am forced to enter
with people watching my every move.
They laugh until I frown,
then they lay off
and wait for my next move.
I do something good to impress them,
but they throw it back in my face
with words I shouldn't hear.
I try to run away
but they don't seem to disappear.
I run to shadowy corners
but pointing fingers appear.
I run to the bathroom
but laughter breaks my ears.
I run away from class to class,
but they don't seem to stop.
I scream at the glass,
but it's too strong for me.
So, I wait and wait
for that faithful bell.
Then, it goes off
and breaks that evil glass.
So, I run home
away from that evil prison,
where sure enough
I can find safety
in my family's hands.

**Rubric for Early-Draft Poem:
"The Watch glass"**

Key for Scoring

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- 2 = Apprentice
- 3 = Proficient
- 4 = Distinguished

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Criteria	1	2	3	4
Meaningful Purpose				
Ideas, Emotions, Effects				
Poetic Techniques				
Rhythm and Sound				
Organization and Form				
Language				

**Rubric for Early-Draft Poem:
"The Watch glass"**
with teacher's responses

Key for Scoring

- 1 = Novice
- 2 = Apprentice
- 3 = Proficient
- 4 = Distinguished

This scoring system is based on the scoring system used for Kentucky's state-assessed Writing Portfolio.

Criteria	1	2	3	4
Meaningful Purpose			X	
Ideas, Emotions, Effects			X	
Poetic Techniques		X		
Rhythm and Sound		X		
Organization and Form			X	
Language		X		

Teacher's Comments for Early-Draft Poem: "The Watch glass"

Authentic, Meaningful Purpose (Proficient):

The student is not writing merely to demonstrate skill with a particular form or poetic technique but to express ideas and feelings about his experience in school. As we read the poem, we can sense an honest voice. The reason for writing, then, is authentic and student-based, not contrived. The student has learned to accept responsibility for determining a thoughtful purpose in writing, a good sign of progress as a writer. Sometimes writers stray from the purpose they start with, especially in a first draft, but this student sticks pretty well to the purpose throughout the poem.

In determining a purpose, the student shows awareness of readers; the poem is not so private that others cannot connect with the ideas and feelings expressed. Many readers likely have experienced the criticism of others and the sense of confinement in school or in another area of life. Some readers of this poem might think the purpose lacks depth of insight, needs a more interesting angle, but for a young writer, there are a number of good signs of progress here. The writer does establish an authentic purpose, one that is writer-based and reader-based, and sticks to this purpose in developing the poem. Reading and discussing more examples of poetry and some mini-lessons focusing on the poet's purpose or angle in writing will help this student progress.

Ideas, Emotions, Effects (Proficient):

This student recognizes the importance of meaning-making in poetry and also shows awareness that poets often express ideas and emotions in an indirect, subtle way. In this poem, the watch glass and prison are the main vehicles for the writer's thoughts and feelings. The comparisons here are not elaborated and the images are not especially vivid, but they reveal a young writer beginning to learn the craft of writing poetry. They convey the writer's feelings about being criticized and confined, feelings that many people have experienced. The poem leads readers to think about their own relationships and the conditions of the various watch glasses and prisons in their lives.

One especially effective part of the poem is the repeated use of the image of running to escape the criticism of others. The student crafts the lines of the poem to move the reader through the negative emotions felt in the watch glass/prison to the relief experienced in the security and acceptance provided by family.

The thoughts here are not especially complex, but they ring true to the writer's experience and probably to the experience of many readers, and we do see a writer purposefully developing a poem to convey certain ideas and emotions. The writer even achieves some degree of irony in that the experience in school should be positive, yet he shows that it is not.

This writer, then, demonstrates awareness that a poem should be more than a prose paragraph broken into lines to look poetic, more than an exercise to show ability to use one or more poetic techniques. This student has a good sense of what poets strive to do and has made a good attempt at expressing ideas and emotions that he finds important. More experience reading, writing, and talking about poetry will enable this student to progress in crafting his poems with more subtlety and depth. Though young, this writer already is thinking seriously about his experience and overall has been successful in creating a meaningful poem.

Images and Other Poetic Techniques (Apprentice):

This writer employs some important techniques used by poets to present ideas and express emotions. Two of the most important techniques here are comparison (metaphor and simile) and imagery. The student compares his school to a watch glass and prison and manages these comparisons consistently. Using these particular comparisons also naturally leads readers to the emotions they likely feel when they, too, are subjected to criticism and confinement.

The poem also tells the story of the student's experience in a clear account; though appropriately concise, the narrative line makes sense. The student shows some skill in using repetition to express ideas and create effects ("I run.../but..."). The student creates a scary scene, almost like one of those dreams in which we are running and running and cannot seem to escape.

The central images, the watch glass and prison, are good choices for the writer's purposes; however, these images are not developed in much detail. The student might add more concrete images or details that connect with a watch glass and prison. The student might look at models of how others revised to make their poems more concrete. Reading more samples also will help the student notice how other poets pick vivid details for images.

Rhythm and Sound (Apprentice):

Rhythm and sound are important in poetry, a feature of this genre that this student clearly has begun to understand and apply. In this poem, the writer's decision not to use end rhyme probably was a good one. Of course, rhyme works in some poems, but it might have taken away some from the genuine voice in this one. There is some repetition of sounds in the poem ("hear," "disappear," "appear," "ears"), but these are natural sounding, not artificially poetic. So, this writer has learned not to sacrifice meaning just to create rhyme. It is likely that this student has had lessons on line breaks, one technique poets use not only to build up the meaning of the poem but also to create rhythm.

The main strategy used to create rhythm is the repetition of word groups in lines ("I run.../but...; I run.../but..."). This technique works pretty well, and it shows the writer's progress in consciously using a specific poetic technique to create both meaning and effect.

In revising, this student might identify some places where a word could be omitted to improve the rhythm (for example, would "I find safety" sound better than "I can find safety"?). Reading the work aloud to classmates to test out the revisions is a good technique in working on the rhythms and sounds of poetry. This student clearly is attentive to the way poets strive to create effective rhythms and sounds, though revision of this poem with rhythm specifically in mind could help the student develop as a poet.

Organization and Form (Proficient):

This poem is "free verse," which is especially appropriate for the student's ideas about loss of freedom in an "evil prison"—a nice connection of form and meaning. The student has centered all the lines on the page; the lines are not bound to the left or right margins. In this way, the form and format of the poem contribute to the meaning. The poem has a logical sequence: the poet enters the school, experiences the painful criticism and confinement, runs to escape, and finally leaves the school to safety with the family.

This poem is pretty well unified. What works especially well in terms of organization in this poem is the pattern created through repetition of a word group: "I run.../but..." This pattern

establishes a rhythm, as has been mentioned, and it also develops thoughts in a logical arrangement, creating unity and coherence.

The student also is working with line lengths, another organizational tool. He might be encouraged to reconsider the line breaks in this poem. However, the main point is that this student is developing skills in organizing poetry and in striving for form that pleases esthetically and also enhances meaning. This purposeful attention to form and organization is important evidence of this student's progress in writing poetry.

Language (Apprentice):

The word choice in this poem sounds natural, not contrived, which is a good sign. Another is the selection of strong verbs, for example, "I scream." That verb packs some punch.

In revision, this student might look some more at the verbs. "Run" works well, but what about "goes off" and "but they don't seem to stop"? A conference might lead the student to focus some more on choice of verbs.

The sentences and lines (syntax) here make sense, but in some places the student might omit some words to good result. The student seems to understand that poets create lines and sentences so that they say a lot with a little, but a bit more practice with conciseness would help, as would talking of options with classmates and concentrating on conciseness in poems written by others.

Of course, words are chosen for many reasons, including clarity of meaning, relevance to an important metaphor, and contribution to an effective sound. The student might consider, for example, "I run away from class to class, /but they don't seem to stop." Who is "they," and would rhythm improve if "away" were omitted? Poets think hard about even the "little things" in their poems.

In this poem, the student misses an opportunity to enhance the power of his ideas by not using words relevant to watch glass and prison. Of course, this student's work is an early draft, and typically word choice is strengthened in revision. Helping the student see some options for revision of word choice would be important in a conference. Because this poem concerns something that is important to the poet, the odds are good that the student will be interested in revising to improve word choice.

A personal narrative written by a seventh-grade student (a late draft)

Skates 280

I've been really embarrassed before, but this moment takes the cake! I had been liking a girl all through elementary school when one day, out of the blue, she invited me to her birthday party! Of course I was rambled, so I gawked for awhile, and finally managed to stammer out, "s-s-sure!"

The party was at skates 280, and all was well until it came time to skate. I couldn't skate, so I had to make an excuse...and quick!

"I, uh, didn't bring my skates!"

Little did I know they would rent skates out to you. Then I tried,

"I'm uh, out of money."

Then in walks my grandmother, the human ATM.

"I've got some mony darlin'!"

"Gee. Thanks a lot Grandma."

"Your welcome sweet pea"

So, I was stuck. I could either rent the skates, and get caught out on the rink not being able to skate, or I could risk my pride (what little I had) by admitting I can't skate. I made the wrong decision. "Sure. I can skate! I'm the best skater out there! Gimme' some o' them there skakin' ...things..." (I couldn't roller blade worth beans, so I had to take the 4 wheelers.) So after fighting to get the skates on for awhile, off I went to the wooden, pergo rink of death. Just looking at it made my skin crawl. Those boards were teeth, just waiting to eat me alive.

For maybe the first 10 minutes (which seemed more like hours to me), I clung to the wall like a piece of driftwood from a shipwreck. When I finally unclung, I...I could skate! Oh it was wonderful! When people noticed I was catchig up to them, they were patting me on the back, congratulating me. I was so full of myself I turned on the afterburners and started off at a whopping 2 miles an hour. Things were going great until I decided to do tricks. Not a good idea. I tried pulling a 360 and hit a wall. But, luckily only my friends saw it, and helped me up with a friendly laugh and encouraging words...Yeah right!!!! After they laughed at me they left me there to either get up on my own or rot. I decided to live a bit longer, so I got up (not without much difficulty, I might add).

That, however, was nothing in comparison to what would happen in about an hour.

After that I thought, “well, that’s enough shenanigans for one day!” So, I made my way over to a bench to take off my skates, when, all of a sudden, a hideous voice came over the loudspeaker. It was DJ Mac! Here to announce the vile, nasty announcement ever conceived to reach a non-skater.

“Race time guys and gals!!!”

I froze in my tracks. Race Time: He wanted me to put my skates back on and ...race?!?!? Surely I had heard wrong, so I went on about my business, removing my skates, when good old Mac turned on the loudspeaker and said.

“You! Yeah you! The one with the glasses! Why’re you takein’ your skates off? Didn’t ya’ here me? It’s race time! Everybody loves race time!”

Horrified, I looked at my grandmother who was about to take me home. I was trying as hard as I could to send her a message with my mind, saying, “Please, save me! Don’t let them do this to me! Please!”

But, she heard it as, “Please let me! Don’t let them stop me! Please!”

So, she smiled and nodded, telling me to do it.

“NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”

There I was. Betrayed by my own bloodline, I slowly made my way back toward the rink. I got in position next to one of my friends, and all of a sudden, my thoughts of fear were interrupted by DJ Mac once again.

“Yo yo yo! Word up everybody! It’s DJ Mac once again telling ya’ll to clear the rink for our racers! So if everybody’s ready, let’s do it! On yo mark, get set, GO!!!!”

Then, I was pummeled by other racers yelling at me along with DJ Mac and the entire crowd. Suddenly realized that I was supposed to going *around* the little orange cones! So once I got the hang of this whole racing thing, I starting doing a little better (I was still in last place by a mile, mind you). Once I miraculously caught up to the guy in front of me and passed him, I got full of myself again. Bad idea. I turned around and looked to see how far behind me everyone else was (that ‘everyone else’ was only one person), and when I turned around again, I ran into that same dad-blamed wall again, and got passed again and lapped, and skated on, and everything else you can do with a skate. I tried to get up, couldn’t, and just laid there. They had to stop the race, get me up, and walk out of the rink with me around their arms. little did I know how hard everyone was laughing at me, including the girl who invted me!

Fortunately, I walked away with the only major damage being done to my pride.

**Rubric for Late-Draft Personal Narrative:
"Skates 280"**

Key for Scoring

- 1 = Novice
- 2 = Apprentice
- 3 = Proficient
- 4 = Distinguished

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Criteria	1	2	3	4
Story Sense				
Details				
Dialogue				
Reflection				
Organization				
Language				
Mechanics				

**Rubric for Late-Draft Personal Narrative:
"Skates 280"**
with teacher's responses

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Criteria	1	2	3	4
Story Sense				X
Details		X		
Dialogue			X	
Reflection				X
Organization				X
Language			X	
Mechanics		X		

Teacher's Comments for Late-Draft Personal Narrative: "Skates 280"

Story Sense (Distinguished):

This student writer has a mature sense of story. The story line is clear, easy to follow, and interesting. The narrative is well focused; the writer does not ramble and include unneeded details, a common problem in students' personal narratives. Especially important is that the writer strives to craft the narrative, not just tell what happened and tack on a moral. Along with the clear account of the events, presented in a lively pace appropriate for the work's meaning and effect, the writer reveals a sense of irony, conveys insight into himself and human nature, and develops the story with interesting dialogue.

In developing the work, the writer shows awareness of readers and takes steps to create an engaging narrative. The writer skillfully portrays a young man's struggle to perform well in the eyes of his friends, his growing confidence, and then his eventual "fall," creating an up and down movement in the narrative that is effective. Just as it seems he is going to be able to escape, he is caught up again in the race. This turn of events is well managed in the narrative. As a reader, I said to myself, "Oh, no!" and laughed. I identified with the young man's plight. There is even a subtle sub-plot, as we see the young man's comical relationship with his grandmother, "the human ATM," whose best wishes that her grandson have a good time ironically contribute to his predicament.

Importantly, as a personal narrative, the work reveals the personality of the writer, a person with a good sense of humor who is caught in one of those embarrassing, humbling incidents with which readers can easily identify and, in reflection, often find amusing. This narrative is engaging in its humor and its portrayal of the young man's character. The writer has a strong sense of story. Since the young man went to the party especially because of his interest in the girl who invited him, a little more reference to that part of the experience might help.

Details (Apprentice):

Although this writer creates an engaging story, providing a satisfactorily detailed account of the events, more descriptive detail about the place and the people would make this narrative even more vivid for readers. As noted above, the motive for the young man to go to the skating party is his affection for the girl who invites him, yet we have no details that show either the girl or the friends (the main basis for his embarrassment). Agreed, the focus of the narrative is on the young man himself, but adding a few more well-selected descriptive details would help. As a reader, I could use some more help in seeing the scene: the place, the friends, the girlfriend, and...Grandma! This student is an effective writer, and asking him to help another student with descriptive detail probably would lead him to add more detail in his own narrative.

Dialogue (Proficient):

In crafting this narrative, the writer has a good awareness of how to use dialogue to move the story along, reveal character, and create a realistic account. Some writers of personal narratives tend to include dialogue that is not always needed, but this writer has a good sense of when to use dialogue and how much. The brief exchanges between the young man and his grandmother are effective. They reveal the personalities of the two and contribute to the irony of his predicament.

In the opening of the narrative, as the young man is recognizing his predicament and seeking some form of escape, he claims that he cannot skate because, “I’m uh, out of money.” And then the subtle exchange with Grandma, “Then in walks my grandmother, the human ATM.” Grandma, wishing the best for her grandson, says, to his dismay, “I’ve got some money darlin’!” The young man replies, “Gee. Thanks a lot Grandma.” Dialogue is very well managed here.

The student has a good ear, too, in capturing for the reader the way DJ Mac spoke or might have spoken: “Yo yo yo! Word up everybody! It’s DJ Mac once again telling ya’ll to clear the rink for our racers!” The dialogue is natural sounding and not belabored. This writer also knows how to use interior monologue as a narrative device, drawing the reader into his thoughts and feelings and adding depth to the narrative. Hoping that his grandmother will rescue him, he writes, “I was trying as hard as I could to send her a message with my mind, saying, ‘Please save me! Don’t let them do this to me! Please!’” One might wish that the writer had followed with the grandmother’s actual response, but this writer’s use of exaggeration here and in other places is effective. Likely many readers have sent similar mental messages in their lives and can identify with the young man’s plight.

This student writer has applied well what he has learned about narrative, perhaps through his reading and through mini-lessons on the use of dialogue. Since this narrative relies heavily for its meaning and effect on the writer’s strong voice, including dialogue is a good strategy. The writer, then, has done a good job overall in using dialogue; however, adding more dialogue clips of the friends and, especially, the girlfriend would be useful for this writer’s purposes. Since this writer has a good sense of story and obviously enjoys writing about this experience, he likely would respond well to a suggestion to help us hear more from the friends and the girlfriend.

Reflection (Distinguished):

One of the most effective parts of this narrative is the ongoing reflection of the writer on his experience. Early in the narrative, the writer reflects, “Little did I know they would rent skates out to you.” And, later, “So, I was stuck. I could either rent the skates, and get caught out on the rink not being able to skate, or I could risk my pride (what little I had) by admitting I can’t skate. I made the wrong decision.” Such commentary on the experience reveals the writer’s good sense of humor and his insight into human experience and human nature.

Subtle reflective touches are used throughout, “Things were going great until I decided to do tricks. Not a good idea.” The writer moves the reader smoothly from the “outside action” to the “inside action” of the narrative. He has learned an important strategy for developing narrative. “Once I miraculously caught up to the guy in front of me and passed him, I got full of myself again. Bad idea.” Through what I sometimes refer to as the “inside narrative,” this writer successfully portrays the blend of youthful confidence, sense of humor, and humility that characterizes this young man and makes the narrative so engaging.

So, the effectiveness of this narrative is due in large part to the writer’s reflection on the experience and on himself, a mark of a maturing writer. Effective also is the way the student ends the narrative, with a brief statement, not an extended sermon, as often occurs when young writers are encouraged to “tell what this experience taught you.” Giving the student an opportunity to read this piece aloud not only would encourage and celebrate his development as a writer but would model for other students an important strategy in writing personal narrative.

Organization (Distinguished):

This writing develops smoothly, coherently, with no unnecessary scenes or confusing digressions. The writer does a good job in crafting a well-unified narrative. Sometimes young writers of narrative include details, scenes, or events that distract the reader from the heart of the story. The writer's purpose becomes blurred. This writer has avoided that typical problem.

The narrative is arranged in a beginning, middle, and end, and the writer shows skill in creating an effective lead and closure. Some writers spin their wheels too much at the outset of the narrative before hitting the pavement, and some belabor the ending. Not so in this narrative.

Paragraphing, a major organizational tool, is effective. The writer "blocks" the action logically and also knows how to paragraph for effect and transition. Following the paragraph recounting his first encounter with the skating rink wall while trying to do tricks, he starts a new paragraph, a single sentence, "That, however, was nothing in comparison to what would happen in about an hour." The writer shows skill in controlling the development of the story for his purposes.

One of the most skillful techniques of this narrative is the way the writer organizes to surprise the reader with a sudden turn of events. Just as the young man thinks he will be able to escape and makes his way to the bench to remove his skates, "...all of a sudden, a hideous voice came over the loudspeaker. It was DJ Mac? Here to announce... 'Race time guys and gals!!'" As a reader imagining the writer's feelings at this point, I laughed, an effect he obviously sought in the narrative. From this point the narrative continues, casting the young man back into his predicament.

This writer, then, shows skill in organizing both to convey meaning and to create effects with readers. Organization has to do, in part, with choosing the right parts and arranging them logically and effectively. A part of this experience that might be useful to include is that which more fully portrays the young man's friends and girlfriend. In the next to the last paragraph, following the embarrassing consequences of the race, the writer might have provided a separate paragraph to show the reactions of his friends. True, details throughout the narrative could be added to help the reader see and hear these people and, true, the writer might not want to divert attention from his own "sad" outcome as he runs into the wall again, is lapped, and skated on, but a short separate paragraph focusing on the friends might help. Nevertheless, this writer obviously has developed skill in organizing his work.

Language (Proficient):

Perhaps one of the most engaging features of this narrative is the voice of the narrator, conveyed through what he says, of course, and through his choice of words. This writing sounds natural, genuine.

In some places, the writer needs to reconsider word choice, for example, he writes in the first paragraph, "Of course, I was rambled...." "Rambled" does not seem to be the right word here. Nevertheless, overall, this writer does a good job in choosing words for meaning and effect. He conveys his sense of humor, "...I ran into that dad-blamed wall again, and got passed again and lapped, and skated on, and everything else you can do with a skate." He captures the personality of DJ MAC, "Yo Yo Yo! Word up everybody!" and the grandmother, "I've got some money darlin'!"

There are a number of nice touches in phrasing; for example, the writer refers to the skating rink as "the wooden, pergo rink of death," and after his well-meaning grandmother unintentionally

prevents the young man from escaping from his predicament, he writes, “There I was. Betrayed by my own bloodline...” This is mature use of language by a young writer. Strong verbs appear throughout: “gawked,” “stammer,” “pummeled,” but the writer might well return to the piece to reconsider verb choice, so important in writing.

The student crafts the narrative with a variety of sentence structures. Sentences flow well, creating a fast pace that is appropriate for the writer’s meaning. The writer uses parentheses to embed comical observations on himself and his situation: “Sure. I can skate! I’m the best skater out there! Gimme’ some o’ them there skatin...things...’ (I couldn’t roller blade worth beans, so I had to take the 4 wheelers.)” The writer shows a willingness to take some risks in the use of language to create effects, which is a good sign for a developing writer.

Mechanics (Apprentice):

Through the writer might develop the piece a bit more fully, it is in pretty good shape. It is ready for closer editing, especially for spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. Like many writers, young and old, this writer is concentrating on the meaning and effect he is trying to create in the narrative. He probably does not even see some of the errors, and some of them seem clearly to be oversights. Arranging for a time for him to look closely at the piece, read it aloud to a classmate in an editing session, and note the oversights would help him. He has put his sentences together grammatically for the most part; there are no serious interferences with his meaning. Given the overall success of this piece, the student should feel encouraged to edit the work. Since the student obviously has an investment in this narrative—he likes it—the odds are better that he not only will be willing to take the time to edit but will learn more about mechanics.

An Explanation of the Scoring System Used in the Rubrics

The three rubrics in this packet reflect the scoring system adopted for Kentucky's Writing Portfolio, part of the statewide assessment program initiated in 1990. Kentucky's assessment program is a cornerstone of the Kentucky Education Reform Act, which is recognized worldwide as the most comprehensive and sustained education reform effort ever undertaken in the United States. Students' portfolios—assessed in the fourth, seventh, and twelfth grades—include narrative, literary, and informational pieces written for a variety of audiences and purposes.

Kentucky's Holistic Scoring Guide, reproduced below, specifies criteria for each category of performance. The Holistic Scoring Guide is used to score published pieces, so it addresses mechanics and spelling as well as content, organization, and language. However, since two of the rubrics in "Responding to Student Writing" are designed to help teachers respond to early drafts, they don't include a criterion related to mechanics. The rubrics also have been modified to reflect the characteristics of the three genres represented in this packet.

Novice

- Limited awareness of audience and/or purpose
- Minimal idea development; limited and/or unrelated details
- Random and/or weak organization
- Incorrect and/or ineffective sentence structure
- Incorrect and/or ineffective language
- Errors in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization disproportionate to length and complexity

Apprentice

- Some evidence of communicating with an audience for a specific purpose; some lapses in focus
- Unelaborated idea development; unelaborated and/or repetitious details
- Lapses in organization and coherence
- Simplistic and/or awkward sentence structure
- Simplistic and/or imprecise language
- Some errors in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization that do not interfere with communication

Proficient

- Focused on a purpose; awareness of audience; evidence of voice and/or suitable tone
- Depth of idea development supported by elaborated, relevant details
- Logical, coherent organization
- Controlled and varied sentence structure
- Acceptable, effective language
- Few errors in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization relative to length and complexity

Distinguished

- Well-established purpose and clear focus; strong awareness of audience; evidence of distinctive voice and/or appropriate tone
- Depth and complexity of ideas supported by rich, engaging, and/or pertinent details; evidence of analysis, reflection, insight
- Careful and/or subtle organization
- Variety in sentence structure and length that enhances effect of writing
- Precise and/or rich language

- Control of spelling, punctuation, and capitalization