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AUTHOR Cronnell, Bruce
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ABSTRACT

Although the design of the writing task itself may present assessment problems, the scoring of the piece of writing raises the greatest difficulties for large-scale testing of writing ability. A study investigated whether teachers and staff members of the Southwest Regional Laboratory (SWRL) (1) scored the same way, (2) agreed with each other in scoring, and (3) agreed with themselves when rescoring the same writing sample. Writing samples from 263 third grade and 248 sixth grade students were obtained from the 1980 composition section of the Survey of Essential Skills administered by the Los Angeles Unified School District. Samples were evaluated by the SWRL-developed methods. Results indicated that teachers and SWRL scorers highly agreed on their ratings. Even greater agreement was found among SWRL scorers alone, and when the SWRL scorers rescored writing samples, they were highly consistent in their scoring.

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THE SCORING OF WRITING SAMPLES: A STUDY

Bruce Cronnell

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine the reliability of scorers when rating writing samples with the SWRL-developed method for evaluating writing samples. Teachers and SWRL scorers were found to agree highly on their ratings of writing samples. Even greater agreement was found among SWRL scorers alone, and when the SWRL scorers rescored writing samples, they were very consistent in their scoring.

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THE SCORING OF WRITING SAMPLES: A STUDY

Bruce Cronnell*

A valid measure of writing ability should include at least one writing sample--that is, an actual piece of writing. Although the design of the writing task itself may present assessment problems, the scoring of the piece of writing raises the greatest difficulties for large-scale testing of writing ability.

Humes (1980) has developed a method of scoring writing samples that has the following features:

1. It is closely related to the specific prompt for the writing sample.
2. It does not require training.
3. It can be used quickly (usually 1-3 minutes per paper at the elementary level).
4. It provides diagnostic information.

In an earlier study (Humes, 1979), the writing-sample scoring system was also found to be reliable--that is, different scorers tended to assign the same score for the same piece of writing. The present study was instigated to investigate additional questions of reliability:

1. Do teachers and SWRL staff members score the same?
2. Do SWRL staff members agree with each other in scoring?
3. Do SWRL staff members agree with themselves when rescoring the same writing sample?

*The following staff members provided considerable assistance in this study: Toni Pratt, Caroline Fieker, Joseph Lawlor, Larry Gentry, Ann Humes, William Brock.

The writing samples used to study these questions were obtained from the 1980 administration of the Composition section of the Survey of Essential Skills (SES) administered by the Los Angeles Unified School District (Cronnell, Lawlor, Gentry, Humes, & Maltbie, 1980). The 1980 SES included a writing sample at grades 3 and 6. In grade 3, students were presented with a picture and asked to write a story about it; see Appendix A for the grade 3 writing prompt, scoring key, and scoring guide. In grade 6, students were asked to write a letter to a friend, telling the friend to watch a television program and giving reasons why the friend should watch the program; see Appendix B for the grade 6 writing prompt, scoring key, and scoring guide.

Writing samples were obtained from 12 third-grade classes (263 students) and 10 sixth-grade classes (248 students). These classes were from four schools; the distribution of classes is shown below.

<u>School</u>	<u>Number of Classes</u>	
	<u>Grade 3</u>	<u>Grade 6</u>
A	6	4
B	4	4
C	1	1
D	1	1

Do teachers and SWRL staff members score the same?

All the writing samples had been scored by classroom teachers, using the scoring guide printed in the directions for administering the SES; no other assistance was provided by SWRL. Each classroom set of writing samples was scored by two SWRL staff members, distributed as shown in Table 1. All four staff members used for this scoring were highly experienced in composition and in other language-arts areas.

Table 1
Distribution of Classroom Sets to SWRL Scorers

<u>Grade 3</u>	<u>School</u>	<u>Class</u>	<u>Scorers</u>
	1	1	A C
		2	BC
		3	AB
		4	CD
		5	A D
		6	B D
	2	1	A C
		2	B D
		3	AB
		4	CD
	3	1	B D
	4	1	A D
<u>Grade 6</u>	1	7	A D
		8	BC
		9	AB
		10	CD
	2	5	A C
		6	B D
		7	A D
		8	BC
	3	2	A C
	4	2	BC

When papers are scored according to the criteria in Appendices A and B), each paper is given a rating on the ratings-- 3, 2, and 1--indicate good, acceptable, and poor performance, respectively. In order to assign each paper a composite score, a total was computed of all the 3, 2, and 1 ratings.

The average scores for each class are shown in Table 2. In general, the three scores for each class are within 1 point of each other. In grade 3, teachers tended to score higher than SWRL scorers; in grade 6, they tended to score lower. But at both grade levels, teachers scored higher than SWRL scorers on Content, but lower on Form (and Format--in grade 6). SWRL scorers also differed in a consistent pattern: scorer C tended to score higher than the other SWRL scorers, while scorer D tended to score lower.

The interrater correlations (Guilford & Fruchter, 1978, p. 270) range from .29 to .91 (see r in Table 2). Except for three classes, the correlations are higher than .50.** The correlations for one-third of the classes were over .80. Overall, these correlations indicate that there is a relatively high agreement among scorers.

*Other ways of computing composite scores are possible. For example, Content criteria could be given twice the value of Form criteria, or specific criteria could be weighted more heavily than others.

**Visual analysis suggests that the low correlations tend to result from erratic teacher scoring--both much higher and much lower than the SWRL scoring. In some cases the higher/lower teacher scores cannot be interpreted (that is, the paper is clearly not that good/bad). One possible reason for such discrepancies is that some papers may have been inadvertently mixed up (so that teacher and SWRL scores are actually for different papers); another possibility is that teachers were unduly influenced by their prior knowledge of students.

Table 2
Average Class Scores and Correlations

	<u>School</u>	<u>Class</u>	<u>Teacher</u>	<u>SWRL Scorers</u>				<u>Mean</u>	<u>r</u>
				<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>		
Grade 3	1	1	18.7	19.0		19.8		19.1	.91
		2	19.8		22.2	22.8		21.6	.58
		3	19.6	20.2	20.6			20.1	.58
		4	19.2			20.4	17.9	19.2	.78
		5	25.0	24.7			24.9	24.9	.56
		6	19.2		16.8		16.4	17.2	.58
	2	1	23.4	22.7		24.0		23.4	.83
		2	20.5		18.9		18.9	19.5	.47
		3	23.8	22.3	21.5			22.5	.83
		4	26.5			25.8	24.2	25.5	.76
	3	1	15.7		17.2		16.6	16.5	.84
	4	1	26.1	25.6			25.7	25.8	.78
Grade 6	1	7	28.0	30.2			28.8	29.0	.69
		8	29.8		28.5	30.7		29.7	.63
		9	26.9	26.7	26.9			26.8	.87
		10	28.1			28.8	26.3	27.7	.85
	2	5	30.8	31.1		31.8		31.2	.37
		6	27.1		28.6		28.1	28.0	.29
		7	29.9	30.6			30.2	30.2	.87
		8	31.3		30.5	32.4		31.4	.69
	3	2	25.9	27.6		28.4		27.3	.67
	4	2	25.0		29.2	30.4		28.2	.52

Hillocks (1980) reports that it takes a great deal of training and practice to obtain reliabilities around .90 for a primary-traits kind of scoring: eight hours for two scorers, 20 hours for three scorers. Thus, the present results--with no training, no practice, and no communication among scorers--are really quite good.

When scoring individual criteria, at least two of the three scorers agreed 96% of the time (see Tables 3 and 4). In grade 3, all three scorers agreed 52% of the time; in grade 6, 45% of the time. When a scorer disagreed with the other two, it was generally by only one rating point (except for the grade 3 indentation criterion--number 6--where 3 and 1 were the only possible ratings). Interestingly, when there was disagreement, the person in disagreement tended to be one of the SWRL scorers rather than the teacher. Complete agreement was high on grade 6 Format criteria and on those criteria for which only two ratings were possible: creativity (number 5) in both grades and indentation in grade 3. With the exception of the indentation criterion, complete agreement was higher on Content criteria than on Form criteria.

Table 3
Scoring Agreement: Grade 3

<u>Criterion</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2/1</u>	<u>2/1-</u>	<u>1/1/1</u>
Content				
1. (Title)	52%	45%	2%	1%
2. (Characters)	57	41	1	1
3. (Story line)	43	51	1	5
4. (Conclusion)	38	54	1	6
5. (Creativity)	66	34	-	-
Subtotal	51	45	1	3
Form				
6. (Indentation)	88	-	12	-
7. (Capitalization)	47	42	4	7
8. (Periods)	55	40	3	2
9. (Spelling)	37	57	2	4
10. (Legibility)	36	59	-	5
Subtotal	<u>53</u>	<u>39</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>4</u>
Total	52	42	2	4

Note: 3 = all three scorers agree

2/1 = two scorers agree; third scorer disagrees by one point

2/1- = two scorers agree; third scorer disagrees by two points

1/1/1 = no agreement (i.e., each of the three scorers used a different rating)

Table 4
Scoring Agreement: Grade 6

<u>Criterion</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2/1</u>	<u>2/1-</u>	<u>1/1/1</u>
Content				
1. (Point of view)	57%	37%	3%	2%
2. (Feelings)	32	55	4	8
3. (Reasons)	36	57	3	5
4. (Content conventions)	34	62	2	3
5. (Creativity)	59	41	-	-
Subtotal	44	50	2	4
Format				
6. (Inclusion)	73	24	-	2
7. (Placement)	54	43	1	2
Subtotal	64	34	*	2
Form				
8. (Complete sentences)	40	48	5	7
9. (Correct grammar)	37	53	3	7
10. (Capitalization/punctuation)	40	56	2	2
11. (Spelling)	38	57	-	4
12. (Legibility/indentation)	36	57	2	4
Subtotal	<u>38</u>	<u>54</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>5</u>
Total	45	49	2	4

* less than 0.5%

Note: See key for Table 3.

Do SWRL staff members agree with each other in scoring?

On the original scoring by SWRL staff members, only two staff members scored each set of papers. As reported above, there was relatively high agreement on scores. To look at SWRL scoring only, new sets of writing samples were compiled, using two papers randomly selected from each class. These papers were scored by all four original scorers, plus two new SWRL scorers: one was the author of the writing-sample prompt, scoring key, and scoring guide, and is highly experienced in composition and in other language-arts areas; one had assisted in data reduction for this study, but otherwise had no experience in composition and very little experience in language arts.

The interrater correlation (Guildford & Fruchter, 1978, p. 270) for the average scores at both grade levels was .87. Scoring agreements for individual criteria are given in Tables 5 and 6. The level of complete agreement (39% in grade 3 and 27% in grade 6) is rather high considering the number of scorers involved, and two-thirds agreement was found 88% of the time in grade 3 and 83% of the time in grade 6. Interestingly, complete agreement was never found on the grade 3 legibility criterion (number 10) or on the grade 6 creativity criterion (number 5)--although the grade 6 creativity criterion had the highest level of complete agreement of any criterion. The new, inexperienced SWRL scorer was the primary source of disagreement on ratings.

Table 5

Scoring Agreement by Six Scorers: Grade 3

Criterion	<u>6</u>	<u>5/1</u>	<u>5/1-</u>	<u>4/2</u>	<u>4/2-</u>	<u>4/1/1</u>	<u>3/3</u>	<u>3/3-</u>	<u>3/2/1</u>
Content									
1.	54%	13%		25%		4%			4%
2.	29	33		21		13	1%		
3.	17	38		29			8		8
4.	33	46		13			8		
5.	83	8		8					
Subtotal	43	28		19		3	4		3
Form									
6.	71		4%		13%			13%	
7.	29	38		13		4	13		4
8.	33	25		25			13		4
9.	38	17		17		4	25		
10.		33		38		17	8		4
Subtotal	<u>34</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>
Total	39	25	*	19	1	4	8	1	3

*less than 0.5%

- Note: 6 = all six scorers agree
 5/1 = five scorers agree; sixth scorer disagrees by one point
 5/1- = five scorers agree; sixth scorer disagrees by two points
 4/2 = four scorers agree; other two agree, but off by one point
 4/2- = four scorers agree; other two agree, but off by two points
 4/1/1 = four scorers agree; other two each at different scores
 3/3 = scorers split evenly, but disagree by one point
 3/3- = scorers split evenly, but disagree by two points
 3/2/1 = three scorers agree; two scorers agree; one scorer alone

Table 6

Scoring Agreement by Six Scorers: Grade 6

<u>Criterion</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>5/1</u>	<u>5/1-</u>	<u>4/2</u>	<u>4/2-</u>	<u>4/1/1</u>	<u>3/3</u>	<u>3/3-</u>	<u>3/2/1</u>
Content									
1.	70%	5%	5%	5%			5%	5%	5%
2.	30	35	5	10			5		15
3.	25	30		30			10		5
4.	20	5		20		15	35		5
5.		80		10			10		
Subtotal	29	31	2	15		5	12		6
Format									
6.	35	25		30		5	5		
7.	25	40		25		10			
Subtotal	30	33		28		8	3		
Form									
8.	30	20	5	25			10		10
9.	15	30		20		5	25		5
10.	25	15		40		10			10
11.	40	25		20			5		10
12.	5	15		40			50		10
Subtotal	<u>23</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>29</u>		<u>2</u>	<u>14</u>		<u>9</u>
Total	27	27	1	23		5	11		6

Note: See key for Table 5.

Do SWRL staff members agree with themselves when rescored the same writing sample?

Another reliability concern is whether a scorer will score the same paper the same way at two different times. To investigate this, approximately two weeks after the original SWRL scoring had been completed, each scorer was given a set of papers comprised of three papers randomly selected from each class that the scorer had originally scored. These papers were rescored without reference to the first scoring.

The interrater correlations (Guildford & Fruchter, 1978, p. 270) were very high in grade 3: .96 for scorer A, .84 for scorer B, .94 for scorer C, and .95 for scorer D. They were somewhat lower, although still quite good, in grade 6: .82 for A, .79 for B, .81 for C, and .92 for D. On individual criteria, identical ratings were given on both scorings 81% of the time in grade 3 (see Table 7) and 77% of the time in grade 6 (see Table 8). When the two scorings differed, the difference was nearly always by only one rating point, with the original rating more frequently higher than the second rating.

Table 7
Rescoring Agreement: Grade 3

<u>Criterion</u>	<u>=</u>	<u>0+1</u>	<u>0-1</u>	<u>0+2</u>	<u>0-2</u>
Content					
1.	78%	14%	8%		
2.	89	4	7		
3.	75	15	10		
4.	79	17	4		
5.	83	13	4		
Subtotal	81	13	7		
Form					
6.	99				1%
7.	79	11	8	1%	
8.	88	6	6		1
9.	67	22	11		
10.	78	18	3	1	
Subtotal	<u>82</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>
Total	81	12	6	*	*

* less than 0.5%

Note: = = same score both times
 0+1 = original higher by one point
 0-1 = original lower by one point
 0+2 = original higher by two points
 0-2 = original lower by two points

Table 8
Rescoring Agreement: Grade 6

<u>Criterion</u>	<u>=</u>	<u>0+1</u>	<u>0-1</u>	<u>0+2</u>	<u>0-2</u>
Content					
1.	92%	7%			2%
2.	77	12	8%	2%	2
3.	68	20	10		2
4.	85	8	7		
5.	87	12	2		
Subtotal	82	12	5	*	1
Format					
6.	73	20	7		
7.	75	18	7		
Subtotal	74	19	7		
Form					
8.	72	10	18		
9.	62	18	20		
10.	72	13	15		
11.	80	13	7		
12.	77	15	8		
Subtotal	72	14	14		
Total	77	14	9	*	*

Note: See key for Table 7.

CONCLUSIONS

This study of writing-sample scoring indicates that untrained scorers, working from a well designed scoring guide, can rate writing samples with a high degree of agreement. Even greater agreement could undoubtedly be obtained if the scorers were trained and monitored. However, because the current method is so inexpensive (a teacher can score the papers for her or his class in an hour or so), it remains practical for the large-scale assessment of writing ability.

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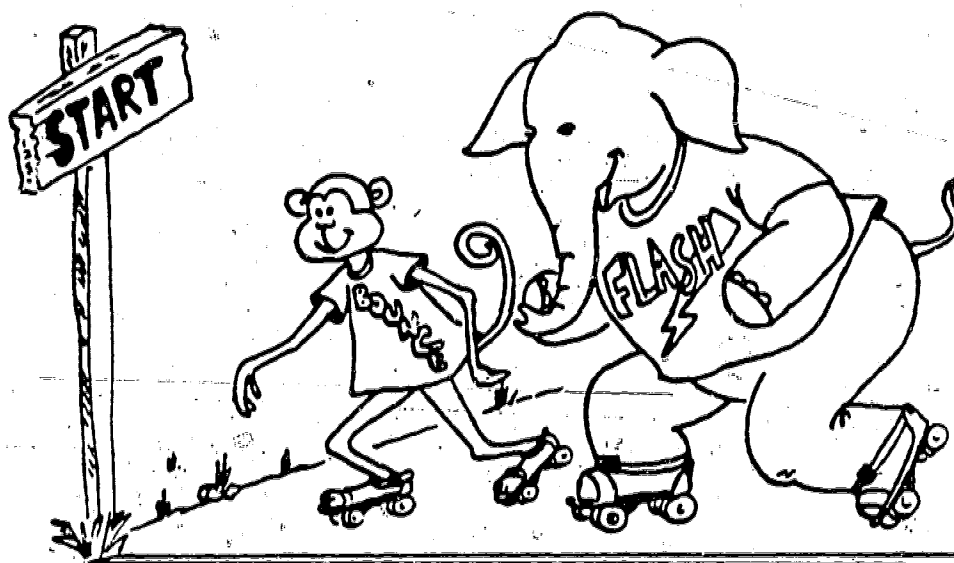
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APPENDIX A

GRADE 3 WRITING SAMPLE *

PROMPT



Look at the picture of these animals. Both animals are wearing skates. The monkey's name is Bounce. The elephant's name is Flash. Write a story about the picture and the animals in it.

- Tell something about the way the animals look..
- Tell what they do together on their skates.
- Have something strange or funny happen to them.
- Write a good ending for your story.
- Give your story a title.

SCORING KEY

CONTENT

1. Writes a title.
2. Describes characters.
3. Writes a story line that is appropriate for the picture.
4. Includes an appropriate conclusion.
5. Shows creativity and originality.

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FORM

6. Indents first word of paragraph.
7. Capitalizes first word of sentences.
8. Includes periods at the ends of sentences.
9. Spells correctly.
10. Writes legibly.

SCORING GUIDE

CONTENT: Students are to describe the pictured animals and write a story about the picture. They are to include a strange or funny event, write a "good ending," and give the story a title.

1. WRITES A TITLE.

3. The title is appropriate and original.
2. The title is appropriate, but unimaginative (for example, "The Race," or "The Animals").
1. The title is not relevant to the story or is not included.

2. DESCRIBES CHARACTERS.

3. Both characters are included and their physical appearances are described.
2. Both characters are included, but the only descriptors included are the animals' names or types.
1. One or no characters are included.

3. WRITES A STORY LINE THAT IS APPROPRIATE FOR THE PICTURE. [For example, the animals start the race; an event occurs that affects the animals or the race; a resolution concludes the race.]

3. The story line is interesting and appropriate for the picture, and the events are appropriately sequenced.
2. The story line lacks interest, but is appropriate, and most events are appropriately sequenced.
1. The story line is not appropriate, and/or the events are sequenced so that the story is difficult or impossible to understand.

4. INCLUDES AN APPROPRIATE CONCLUSION:

3. A significant and interesting conclusion is included, and it fits the story line.
2. A conclusion is included, but it is not significant.
1. A conclusion is not included or it is not appropriate.

CONTENT: (continued)

5. SHOWS CREATIVITY AND ORIGINALITY

3. Color, style, and/or content distinguish the story from other students' stories.
2. The story is similar to other students' stories.

FORM: The form skills described below are important to written composition. Scoring guidelines for these skills are not precisely defined by numerical counts or values. Rather, they are dependent upon teacher judgment. Utilizing teacher judgment rather than exact numerical criteria expedites the handscoring process and gives accurate relative scores.

6. INDENTS FIRST WORD OF PARAGRAPH.

3. The first word is indented.
1. The first word is not indented.

7. CAPITALIZES FIRST WORD OF SENTENCES. [Sentences here include fragments that students perceive as sentences.]

3. All or most sentences have a capital letter for the first word.
2. Some sentences have a capital letter for the first word.
1. Many or all sentences do not have a capital letter for the first word.

8. INCLUDES PERIODS AT THE ENDS OF SENTENCES. [Sentences here include fragments that students perceive as sentences.]

3. All or most sentences end with periods or with other appropriate terminal punctuation.
2. Some sentences end with periods or with other appropriate punctuation.
1. Many or all sentences do not end with periods or other appropriate punctuation.

9. SPELLS CORRECTLY.

3. All or most words are spelled correctly.
2. Several words are misspelled.
1. Only a few words are spelled correctly.

Comment: Many misspellings of the same word should be evaluated as one misspelled word.

10. WRITES LEGIBLY.

3. All or most words are readable and have appropriate size, shape, spacing, and alignment.
2. Many words are readable, and unreadable words do not interfere with comprehension of content.
1. Many words are unreadable so that content is difficult or impossible to read.

APPENDIX B

GRADE 6 WRITING SAMPLE *

PROMPT

Write a letter to a friend. The purpose of the letter is to convince your friend to watch your favorite television program.

- Tell your friend that you think he or she should watch the program.
- Give the name of the program.
- Tell how the program makes you feel when you watch it. Use exact words that describe your feelings.
- Give two more good reasons why your friend should watch the program.
- Include all parts of a personal letter and put each of them in the right place on the page.
- Use good grammar and language.
- Write complete sentences.

SCORING KEY

CONTENT

1. States a point of view.
2. Describes feelings in specific words.
3. Includes reasons to support opinion.
4. Includes content conventions appropriate for a personal letter.
5. Shows creativity and originality.

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FORMAT

6. Includes all parts of a personal letter.
7. Places letter parts correctly on the page.

FORM

8. Uses complete sentences.
9. Uses correct grammar.
10. Capitalizes and punctuates correctly.
11. Spells correctly.
12. Writes legibly and indents paragraphs.

SCORING GUIDE

CONTENT: Students are to write a letter to a friend to convince that friend to watch their favorite television program. They are to state their opinion of the named program, describe how the program makes them feel, and give two more reasons why the friend should watch it.

1. STATES A POINT OF VIEW.

3. A point of view is stated. (For example, the student says he/she thinks the friend should watch a specific television program.)
2. A statement of fact is given. (For example, the student says he/she watches a specific television program.)
1. Neither point of view nor statement of fact is included.

2. DESCRIBES FEELINGS IN SPECIFIC WORDS. [For example, specific words like "happy" rather than general words like "good" describe feelings.]

3. Feelings are described in specific terms.
2. Feelings are described in general terms.
1. Feelings are not described.

3. INCLUDES REASONS TO SUPPORT OPINION [that friend should watch program].

3. Two or more reasons are included.
2. One reason is included.
1. No reasons are included.

4. INCLUDES CONTENT CONVENTIONS APPROPRIATE FOR A PERSONAL LETTER [For example, begins and ends with audience amenities such as saying "I hope to hear from you soon" so that the composition reads like a letter rather than like an essay; uses the pronouns I/me and you.]

3. The content suggests a personal letter.
2. Only part of the content suggests a personal letter.
1. The content does not suggest a letter at all.

CONTENT: (continued)

5. SHOWS CREATIVITY AND ORIGINALITY.

3. Color, style, content distinguish the letter from other students' letters.
2. The letter is similar to other students' letters.

FORMAT: Students are to use the correct format for writing a personal letter.

6. INCLUDES ALL PARTS OF A PERSONAL LETTERS. [Date, greeting, body, complimentary closing, signature; the sender's address may also be included above the date; for scoring this criterion, proper placement is ignored--see number 7.]

3. All or nearly all parts of the personal-letter format are included.
2. Some parts of the personal-letter format are included.
1. Few or no parts of the personal-letter format are included.

7. PLACES LETTER PARTS CORRECTLY ON THE PAGE [see parts above].

3. All or nearly all letter parts are correctly placed.
2. Some letter parts are correctly placed.
1. Few or no letter parts are correctly placed.
[This criterion is also scored if no parts are included.]

FORM: The form skills described below are important to the writing product. Scoring guidelines for these skills are not precisely defined by numerical counts or values. Rather, they are dependent upon teacher judgment. Utilizing teacher judgment rather than exact numerical criteria expedites the handscoring process and gives accurate relative scores.

8. USES COMPLETE SENTENCES.

3. All or most sentences are complete.
2. Some sentences are complete.
1. Most sentences are fragments and/or run-ons.

9. USES CORRECT GRAMMAR [for example, subject-verb agreement, pronoun form].

3. The letter has few or no grammatical errors.
2. The letter has some errors in grammar.
1. The letter has many errors in grammar.

10. CAPITALIZES AND PUNCTUATES CORRECTLY.

3. The letter has few or no errors in capitalization and punctuation.
2. The letter has some errors in capitalization and punctuation.
1. The letter has many errors in capitalization and punctuation.

11. SPELLS CORRECTLY.

3. Most or all words are correctly spelled.
2. Several words are misspelled.
1. Many words are misspelled.

Comment: Many misspellings of the same word should be evaluated as one misspelled word.

12. WRITES LEGIBLY AND INDENTS PARAGRAPHS [cursive writing, with appropriate size, shape, slant, spacing, alignment; paragraph indentation].

3. The letter has few or no exceptions to the criterion.
2. The letter has some exceptions to the criterion.
1. The letter has many exceptions to the criterion.