From Cacophony to Harmony

Analyzing the Results of the 2008 Alabama Direct Assessments of Writing
Cacophony

- harsh or discordant sound: **dissonance**
  - specifically: harshness in the sound of words or phrases

- D-Day - May 12, 2008
  - The official results were delivered to superintendents.
Questions?

- Did the scoring process change?
- How did our scores drop if we have been using the same method we have always used?
Percent of Students Who Met or Exceeded Grade-level Writing Standards 2005-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 10</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Percent of Students Who Met or Exceeded Grade-level Writing Standards 2005-2008
Average Percent of Students Who Met or Exceeded Grade-level Writing Standards 2005-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Average 2005-2008</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2008 vs. Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td>61.75%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>64.25%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 10</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Get to the “Root”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 10</th>
<th>Narrative Mode</th>
<th>Expository Mode</th>
<th>Persuasive Mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percent of Grade 10 Students Who Scored at Levels III and IV in 2007 and 2008
Narrative Writing

- Meaningful narrative writing relates a clear sequence of events (fictional or non-fictional) that occurs over time.

  - Purpose
  - Audience
  - Setting
  - Characters
  - Plot
  - Conflict
  - Climax
  - Resolution
DEFINITION OF NARRATIVE WRITING

NARRATIVE WRITING relates a clear sequence of events that occurs over time. Both what happens and the order in which the events occur are communicated to the reader. Effective narration requires a writer to give a clear sequence of events (fictional or non-fictional) and to provide elaboration.

NARRATIVE PROMPT

Everyone has felt embarrassed at one time or another. Think about a time when you or someone you know felt embarrassed. Using precise details, write a story about what happened.
Holistic Rubric - Level III

Alabama Direct Assessment of Writing: Grade Ten Focused Holistic Rubric

Level III - Meets standard

Responses at Level III indicate a good understanding of the writing task for the assigned mode of writing. A sense of audience and purpose is evident in these responses, which have been sufficiently developed. The writers display a sense of author control, using one controlling idea with only minimal wandering from it. A sense of overall completeness is achieved through organization, a variety of sentence structures, and the use of meaningful, precise vocabulary. Level III responses at the tenth grade are characterized by the following:

Purpose:
- Indicates a good understanding of the writing task for the assigned mode of writing.

Content:
- **Narrative:** Clearly presents a sequence of events telling what happened with sufficient development; establishes a setting (time and place); utilizes descriptive words and phrases.
- **Expository:** Clearly presents reasons and explanations or steps in a process; displays logical order and appropriate sequencing of ideas or steps; contains a main idea and sufficient supporting details and may provide a conclusion; utilizes descriptive words and phrases as appropriate.
- **Persuasive:** Clearly states a position and presents sufficient persuasive details, reasons, and/or examples to support the position; utilizes descriptive words and phrases as appropriate.

Audience:
- Displays a sense of audience and purpose in word choice (tone and language).

Organization/Clarity:
- Displays an organizational plan or strategy.
- Displays author control.
- Uses one controlling idea with only minimal wandering from it.
- Introduces the topic and develops it sufficiently.
- Uses transitional words and phrases effectively.
- May provide a conclusion.
- Makes occasional errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics that do not interrupt the flow of communication.
- Uses a variety of sentence structures.
- Uses meaningful and precise vocabulary.
- May display creativity in presenting information.
- Uses description to enhance the development of the essay.
A time when I felt embarrassed is when I came to school and everyone is like you are like a giant. It hurts really bad. I'm 6'0 and taller than all of girls. When I hang out with my friends I feel different because I'm so much taller than them. I'm also embarrassed when someone mentions my feet. I wear a size 15 in women's. Everyone will make fun of me, and I'm so embarrassed. I just walk away. Between me being tall and having big feet it's just like I was meant to be embarrassed my whole life. Everyday I wake up and wonder how embarrassed I'm going to be that day. So why should I get embarrassed when it was gave a perfect life and great family and friends. I wish for once someone would just look at me and say there is nothing to be embarrassed about. I wait everyday and nothing happens. I just get called "jolly green giant," "Shrek," "Oscar," this hurts and I wish I could be treated the same way as everyone else. Why should I feel bad about how everyone thinks about me? What really matters is my family and friends. I know they care. So I have no reason to be embarrassed. Live life by having fun not being embarrassed by what you are and how you look. I know
There is a lot of kids that think they are perfect. Well to me there is no such thing as perfect. Just be yourself. Don't worry about all the embarrassing things about you because what someone says to you is gonna come right back to them eventually in their lifetime. Everyday there is one thing I say to myself that is to live, laugh, and love.
In this Level I response, the writer addresses the correct prompt (Between me being tall and having big feet its just like I was meant to be embarrassed my whole life), but does not write a narrative, which indicates little understanding of the writing task. Instead, the writer engages in a rambling expository discussion about the impact of tallness on her life (I’m 6’0 and taller than a lot of girls. When I hang out with my friends I feel different because I’m so much taller than them.). Although the writer provides good details when explaining why she feels embarrassed and why she should not be embarrassed, there is no movement through time in a meaningful, chronological sense.
“Hahaha!,” the whole room was hysterically laughing as Courtney and David sped off. Courtney would now be known as a nincompoop. She had to face the humiliation of being the girl who super-glued her hand to her forehead while meeting her boyfriend’s family. That day will never leave my memory.

My brother David was coming to visit for a couple of days. He arrived on a sunny Monday afternoon. I was overwhelmed with joy as his car pulled into the driveway. He was greeted at the door by my parents and I couldn’t contain myself, I had the biggest smile on my face. Then I saw her, David’s girlfriend. I instantly became petrified. Why on earth would my big brother bring such a girl home? After all, he did come to see me, right?

I decided to give Courtney a chance. David liked her so I figured I could try to tolerate her. That was a mistake. She was an obnoxious sorority girl who became angry when she didn’t get her way. She wasn’t the sharpest crayon in the box either. I found myself spending a whole week with the girl. I hated most. I thought that the torture would never stop. Boy, was I wrong!

David promised Mom that he would fix the table in the living room and of course Courtney had to stay along. While David super-glued the table back together, Courtney accidentally stuck her hand into some of the glue. She then proceeded to stick the glue covered hand to
Sample Narrative Response

her forehead. The glue instantly dried resulting in her
hand being super-glued to her forehead!

We all laughed so hard we were crying. Laughter
could be heard all over the house as David sped to
dr. hospital with Courtney crying in the passenger
seat. Courtney and David spent two hours in
the emergency room. Courtney has not
stepped foot into my house since. As for the table,
It was never fixed.
This sufficiently developed Level III response has a clear focus with a strong opening that is enhanced by fairly precise word choice and some good descriptive details ("Hahaha!" the whole room was hystERICally laughing as Courtney and David sped off. Courtney would now be known as a nincompoop.). The writer keeps a fairly careful focus on the main event (Courtney gluing her hand to her forehead) and controls the sequence of events throughout, which demonstrates a sense of overall completeness. In the third paragraph, the writer lapses into explanation, but the sequence continues in the next paragraph. Appropriate transitions (He arrived, Then I saw her, After all, While, she then) contribute to both fluency and coherence. Overall, the writer demonstrates a good understanding of the narrative task.
Observations

Many essays were off topic/off mode.

“+”

Many students did not write unified essays, choosing instead to write about several unconnected embarrassing incidents that lacked specificity needed for a higher score point.

= Increased number of Level I and II papers
Expository Writing

- Expository writing is defined as presenting reasons, explanations, or steps in a process.

  - Logical order / sequencing of events
  - Main idea
  - Supporting details
  - Conclusion
  - Transitional words
DEFINITION OF EXPOSITORY WRITING

EXPOSITORY WRITING is defined as presenting reasons, explanations, or steps in a process. Logical order should be used with appropriate sequencing of ideas or steps in a process. Effective expository writing should contain a main idea, supporting details, and a conclusion.

EXPOSITORY PROMPT

Volunteer work or helping others is being considered as a requirement for high school graduation in some states. What do you think about this requirement? Explain the good and bad points. Be sure to give specific examples and/or reasons.
**Holistic Rubric - Level III**

*Alabama Direct Assessment of Writing: Grade Ten*

**Focused Holistic Rubric**

**Level III - Meets standard**

Responses at Level III indicate a good understanding of the writing task for the assigned mode of writing. A sense of audience and purpose is evident in these responses, which have been sufficiently developed. The writers display a sense of author control, using one controlling idea with only minimal wandering from it. A sense of overall completeness is achieved through organization, a variety of sentence structures, and the use of meaningful, precise vocabulary. Level III responses at the tenth grade are characterized by the following:

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- **Expository:** Clearly presents reasons and explanations or steps in a process; displays logical order and appropriate sequencing of ideas or steps; contains a main idea and sufficient supporting details and may provide a conclusion; utilizes descriptive words and phrases as appropriate.
Volunteer work of helping others is being considered as a requirement for high school graduation in some states. What do you think about this requirement? Explain the good and bad points. A suitable topic to give specific examples and reasons.

In some schools, volunteers will do a good job for high school graduation. This can be why it is because, when they can help around in the house, or maybe even the ACT, the volunteers that more big help high school students since that they might have not understood. Essentially, the teachers want students working on the volunteer exam and teaching it. They would help them when a volunteer work that pays, and they can help out. Then, when they make friends in the high school graduation to take a test of something you told the teacher, after the volunteer work was over, it opened doors, that not only to the volunteer but also the volunteer went another way to make sure they know what they need to know, and was good to know them when it comes time for the high school graduation to take a fast exam. If the ACT, they still don’t pass.

Another reason might be a good idea because, the high school graduation marks count or not to know some and
Sample Expository Response

When it comes time for your little brothers/sisters to become a high school graduation, they could tell them what they need to know, or what they want to know. Or maybe if your parents now forgotten something they could tell your parents.

Now you have read all my good and bad points about how I think about volunteer coming to high school graduation school. I think it a good reason for them to come and must pay more attention to those volunteer, then what they do since teachers. If it the volunteer teach it, it may be more interesting to the high school graduation.
Although this response demonstrates a misunderstanding of the prompt, the main idea (volunteers should help students pass exams) is developed with enough reasons to indicate some understanding of the expository purpose. There is evidence of some organization as the writer groups related information about the plan’s good and bad points. The logical progression of ideas is slowed, however, due to some wordiness and awkwardly constructed sentences.
What do you think about high schools making volunteer work a requirement to graduate? I think that this requirement is a good idea. I believe that it will help teenagers with their character building, teach kids responsibility, and bring the community closer together. However, I do think that there are some bad qualities to the requirement, too, such as the time it would take out of studying and the dangerous positions some of the kids would be put in.

I believe that requiring high school students to do volunteer work to graduate will help the student build character. When you help an unfortunate one in their time of need you get an sensational feeling that overwhelms you. This will help kids realize that they have the power to make a difference, whether it’s simply helping an old, weak woman carry her groceries or becoming president of the United States holding our country together. Volunteer work will also help teenagers what it’s like to go out side and work, sweat, do something useful with their time.

Volunteer work can also place our youth in a very dangerous situation, such as working on a house and dealing with machinery that you’ve never used before, or
falling off a roof. There are many things teenagers could do to harm themselves while trying to complete their volunteer work. Therefore, I think we should have certain rules and limits as to what they can do while working as a volunteer.

A close, friendly community is hard to come by. I believe these communities are so strongly bonded through volunteer work. When a neighbor next door's house catches fire and you open your home to them while they have no where to go, that brings that neighbor and yourself closer together. What about the other neighbors who work on the house building them a new home? I really believe its little things like that, little things students can do, that build a community.

I think requiring volunteer work to graduate high school is a good idea. As long as we use proper precautions and the students learn from it, then it should be a requirement for every school across the nation.
Annotation

Paper #9845214

This response uses both general and specific information to explain the good and bad points of the plan, and concludes that requiring volunteer work is a good idea, with certain precautions in place. The use of specific details to support the need for such precautions (dangerous situations such as working on a house) and to illustrate character building (helping an old, weak woman carry her groceries) help this response reach sufficient development. Although author control is evident in the syntactic variety, meaningful vocabulary, and satisfactory organization, some assertions are left unexplained (take time out of studying). Errors in spelling and usage are noticeable, but do not halt the flow of communication.
Observations

A number of students who saw “graduation requirement” in the prompt wrote about the graduation exam itself and were considered off topic (Level I).

“+”

Other students wrote about why volunteers should help with the graduation exam (or with graduations) and received scores no higher than Level II.

______________________________________________

= Increased number of Level I and II papers
• Writing is a process that cannot be learned overnight.

• Each LEA should have a writing program in place that begins in kindergarten.

• Encourage mock assessment for all grades throughout the year.

• Remember, this assessment is just a “snap shot” of a student’s writing ability.