May 2008

New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK)

Grade 6

Criterion-Based Holistic Scoring: A Writing Handbook

October 2008

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May 2008

NEW JERSEY ASSESSMENT OF SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE
(NJ ASK)

Grade 6

Criterion-Based Holistic Scoring:
A Writing Handbook

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CRITERION-BASED HOLISTIC SCORING

New Jersey has been assessing students’ ability to write standard English since 1984. From 1985–86 through 1989–90, this assessment was conducted with ninth-grade students as a component of the Grade 9 High School Proficiency Test (HSPT9). In 1993–94, the HSPT9 was replaced with the Grade 11 High School Proficiency Test (HSPT11) and an eighth-grade Early Warning Test (EWT). The Writing section of these two tests consisted of two components: a writing sample, which assessed students’ abilities to write sustained discourse, and a multiple-choice portion, which assessed how well students were able to read critically, revise, and edit the written text of others. With the May 1996 adoption of the Core Curriculum Content Standards and a subsequent update in 2004, test specifications were developed to align testing with the knowledge and skills described in the language arts literacy standards. These test specifications identify the components of the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA) and New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK). National trends in support of standards-based education and educational accountability led to the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), which required that every state establish annual standardized assessments. As a result of the No Child Left Behind requirements, New Jersey established additional statewide assessments in grade 3 (starting in 2003) and in grades 5 through 7 (starting in 2006). The statewide assessments for elementary and middle school grades are administered under the name New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK).

The NJ ASK elicits two samples of student writing. In 2008, students wrote original texts in two modes of discourse (narrative and persuasive). This handbook focuses on the writing samples resulting from the May 2008 administration of the NJ ASK. It presents the scoring method and criteria used to evaluate student writing and offers suggestions for using New Jersey’s scoring rubric and student test data to improve classroom instruction.

Student writing on the NJ ASK is scored holistically using a criterion-based rubric or scale, the Registered Holistic Scoring Rubric (RHSR). Developed by the New Jersey Department of Education in a research study involving approximately 200 educators, criterion-based holistic scoring has been used since 1986 as the scoring method for state-developed writing assessments. The RHSR is not only an index of students’ ability to apply standard written English in sustained discourse; it also is a measure of students’ ability to communicate effectively within a range of situations and audiences that they are likely to encounter as adults.

Criterion-Based Holistic Scoring: An Operational Definition

Criterion-based holistic scoring brings uniformity to the evaluation of writing across contents and settings by specifying salient features of writing quality and levels of writing proficiency. The RHSR focuses on four features: content/organization, usage, sentence construction, and mechanics. For any given sample, these criteria serve as indicators of how well the writer communicates an intended message to a given audience.
In criterion-based holistic scoring, these predetermined features are anchored by descriptions that vary for different values on a scoring guide or rubric. The point values or score points describe the proficiency level or how well the student handles the features.

The RHSR is based on a six-point score scale: 1 (lowest) to 6 (highest). Each score point on the six-point scale has the same four features but with different descriptions for each level of proficiency; with the RHSR, evaluations are first made with respect to content/organization and then adjusted with reference to the other three. In this way, an integration of these descriptive features enables readers to evaluate the quality of a written response with respect to a point value on the scale. Much of the focus of the RHSR is on the content/organization of the response. Thus, the organization of a response assigned a value of 2 is not as high quality as the organization of a response assigned a value of 3.

Criterion-based scoring does not rely upon the readers inferring performance criteria from exemplars or anchor papers. Rather, the method defines consistent criteria for judging writing quality independent of the sample of responses. Training and qualifying sets of student papers are used to illustrate how the scoring criteria are applied across the range of possible score points. The samples and accompanying annotations included in Appendix C of this document are examples of student performances with respect to the features of written language targeted by the rubric.

In summary, a criterion-based scoring method:

- uses score-point criteria representing progressive levels of writing skill proficiency;
- uses consistent language across all score points;
- defines each feature at each score point; and
- provides accuracy and consistency through stringent controls on the training and qualifying of scorers.

**Appropriateness of Criterion-Based Holistic Scoring**

- Criterion-based scoring rubrics anchor consistent features of writing, independent of purpose and audience from year to year. This consistency is necessary because a different population sits for the test at each administration, and different writing tasks are administered each time. To assure the same meaning of score points from one test administration to the next (the same level of student writing), the scoring method focuses upon invariant criteria of good writing. Although a task can elicit a variety of responses written in a variety of rhetorical modes (narrative, persuasive, etc.), a paper’s rating is based on the student’s facility with the identified features. That facility is registered by a point on the score scale that describes the student’s command of written language.

- The established criteria allow the anchoring of the features consistently from year to year and therefore eliminate scoring procedures that are strictly normative or based on differing evaluation criteria. That is, a paper receiving a 4 one year could conceivably receive a 2 the following year if it were scored with reference to the
sample of student skills or to varying scoring criteria. Scored according to New Jersey’s criterion-based method, a paper receiving a 4 one year will more consistently receive a 4 the next year.

- Because the criteria for scoring are set forth at each score point as descriptive features, scorer reliability can be maintained. The descriptive statements of each feature at each score point describe the quality of writing assigned that score.

- The distribution of scores based on criterion-based methods permits evaluation of districts’ instructional programs because the uniform scoring criteria are published and disseminated for inclusion in these programs.

- Reader bias (a personal preference for scoring based on form/number of paragraphs, flavor or style, etc.) is diminished because the criteria are established prior to the actual scoring of the students’ responses. In addition, the criteria are essential factors within the training and qualifying papers used to select readers who can consistently and reliably apply the scoring criteria of the score scale.

- New Jersey’s criterion-based scoring rubric emphasizes writing as a higher-order thinking skill as measured by the NJ ASK. Writing requires knowledge of one’s topic (content) and a cogent application of that knowledge (organization); use of the English language according to a recognized standard (usage); the structuring of words and sentences to present a complete thought or message to the intended audience(s) (sentence construction); and the application of the conventions of the English language that serve to clarify the author’s intended message (mechanics).

- The scoring rubric permits an analysis of students’ strengths and needs when writing on demand in a timed setting. This benefits educators by providing feedback on the effectiveness of instructional strategies with respect to the evaluation criteria expressed by the rubric.
CRITERION-BASED HOLISTIC SCORING: 2008

Scoring with the Criteria

During May and June of 2008, approximately 105,000 New Jersey sixth-grade student writing responses were scored by two independent readers each, by Measurement Incorporated (MI), the NJ ASK assessment contractor. In addition to scoring the NJ ASK writing tasks, MI also handscored student responses to constructed-response reading, mathematics, and science test items.

To accomplish the scoring of the sixth-grade writing samples, MI selected 100 of its most experienced readers. All readers, regardless of experience, were required to participate in an intensive training for three days. Only readers who met the 80% agreement standard qualified to score New Jersey writing. By the end of training, the readers had “internalized” the defined criteria (four features) at each of the six score points of the Registered Holistic Scoring Rubric by practice-scoring and discussing over one hundred sample student responses. It took approximately six weeks to complete the scoring.

Current procedures for scoring student writing on the NJ ASK are consistent with those used by New Jersey since the inception of a performance-based writing component in statewide assessments. All writing sections of the sixth-grade tests are monitored and scored by trained, experienced personnel who have met the same rigorous standards established with the initial holistic scoring study conducted in 1986. Many individuals are responsible for ensuring the success of scoring any large-scale writing assessment. Key to the process of scoring New Jersey’s sixth-grade responses accurately and reliably were MI’s senior project manager, the chief reader, team leaders, the readers, and clerical aides.

MI’s readers were also responsible for recognizing and flagging nonscorable responses (fragment, off-topic, not English, no response) and “alert” papers (e.g., suspicion of child abuse) so that these papers could be handled in the correct manner. The Office of State Assessments in the Department of Education brings these alerts to the attention of school district personnel. Alert papers are flagged if they reflect potential abuse, emotional or psychological difficulty, or possible plagiarism.

Summary

Scorers using the criteria of the Registered Holistic Scoring Rubric must first focus their attention on the content and organization of the student’s writing as it addresses the topic and then adjust their 1 (lowest) to 6 (highest) score point based upon the effect of three other criteria: usage, sentence construction, and mechanics. Only one score point is assigned by each of the two independent readers, and the final score represents either the average of the two scores (for the speculative prompt) or the sum of the two scores (for the persuasive prompt). Student narratives (speculative prompt) are reported on a scale of 1 to 6; student essays (persuasive prompt) are reported on a scale of 2 to 12.
USING THE STUDENT RESPONSES AND CRITERION-BASED HOLISTIC SCORING FOR STUDENT AND PROGRAM EVALUATION

Students’ responses are the best measure of student writing and can provide significant information regarding both the writing curriculum and individual student strengths and needs; therefore, teachers at all grade levels are encouraged to examine this source of information about their students and about their instructional program.

Analysis of the responses alongside the scoring criteria can yield data about how the top-, middle-, and lower-level writers in the school and district write when required to compose or to revise and edit on demand. The series of questions below can be used to help analyze the students’ writing. Note that the questions, which are directly linked to the criteria of the two rubrics, can be used to evaluate students’ understanding of the writing tasks.

Content/Organization
- What organizational patterns have been chosen by the writers? Can they all establish a focus for their papers? Do they have beginnings? Do they have endings? Are the papers cluttered with irrelevant information? Do they progress logically from beginning to end? Are transitions appropriate and varied?

- How many of the students appear to be able to express themselves on a given task? How many seem to find it difficult to write on a given task? For a given purpose? For a given audience?

- Are keys ideas developed with appropriate and varied details? Are responses highly effective and vivid?

Usage
- Do students use words that are grammatically correct?

- Does the word usage reflect appropriate tense form and sequence, proper pronoun case, correct use of negatives, pronoun agreement, use of proper modifiers, as well as subject-verb agreement?

- Are the word choices appropriate to the context, purpose, and audience of the responses? Are they vivid, rich, and meaningful?

Sentence Construction
- Is a variety of sentence types used by the writers? What type of sentence construction do they use? Are the statements incoherent, unintelligible, fragmented, repetitive, or rambling?

Mechanics
- What is the impact of the mechanical errors in the papers? Does any pattern emerge with respect to spelling, capitalization, and punctuation?
From the answers to these and other questions, district staffs can determine a great deal about their programs. For example, perhaps most of the sixth-grade writers in a school fail to use descriptive detail. Is this because the skill is not part of the writing program? Is it because the sixth graders cannot apply it to their own writing? Perhaps they are taught various methods of sentence construction, but they cannot apply this knowledge to their own papers.

With the implementation of language arts literacy assessments at grades 3 through 8, local districts should recognize their responsibility to monitor students’ written language fluency in the primary and intermediate grades in order to prepare them for the writing tasks. Districts should assess student writing at all grades, and they should incorporate the rubrics into the instructional program so that students will be familiar with the features of good writing and the criteria by which student writing is evaluated on the statewide assessments. The Registered Holistic Scoring Rubric is an appropriate tool for assessing the writing of those who can convey meaning in sustained written discourse (i.e., of students at grade 3 and up). Monitoring student writing ability in the primary and intermediate grades will produce information about students’ progress in writing and will provide an “early warning” of students’ needs.

**Student-Teacher Analysis of NJ ASK Responses**

In order to improve student writing skills, teachers and students should study the features of written language discussed in this handbook and practice what they learn about the use and control of standard written English. In addition to having students write regularly across varying linguistic contexts, teachers need to help individual students apply an inquiry approach by reviewing the sample responses in this handbook, the annotations on each of the samples, and the features of the respective score scales. This inquiry approach should then be practiced by having students evaluate their own writing for these features. Conference approaches, such as teacher-student or student-student conferencing, will increase student awareness of these features. Writers improve most when they have had an opportunity to confer and then revise in light of the suggestions that result from an audience-author interaction. Since student responses will be returned to your school, take advantage of the opportunity to engage students in attending to the features of their own writing. In addition, students should serve as critical readers (the audience) of the writing of other students and suggest possible revisions or edits.

The Registered Holistic Scoring Rubric included in Appendix A should assist educators and students when they confer about specific strengths and needs as indicated by the students’ written responses to the NJ ASK writing tasks. The rubric should be duplicated and distributed to students not only as instruments to help them evaluate their writing, but also as tools to increase their understanding of the descriptors at each score point. The rubric should also provide them with more information about the developmental progression of criteria across the scale points.

When working with the RHSR, remind students that a score of 8 (two 4s assigned by independent readers) describes their command of standard written English as “adequate.”
Direct students to look at the description of features for a score point of 4 and to review their own paper for known strengths and needs.

On the 2 to 12 scale in which the two readers’ ratings are summed, papers scored 2 through 5 tend to lack command of standard written English and are, therefore, unable to convey the task message sufficiently for the purpose and audience intended. Papers scored 6 through 12 show varying acceptable degrees of command of standard written English and are, therefore, able to effectively address the purpose and audience intended.

**A Practical Classroom Application of the RHSR: Bringing Students into the Evaluation Process**

Evaluation should be a natural extension of the writing process. By using the rubric in the classroom frequently, students can understand not only how their writing is evaluated, but also what constitutes good writing.

Teachers may introduce the rubric to their students in many ways; however, the following method is one that has been used successfully with students in grades 3–12.

Before introducing the RHSR, the teacher should pass out three papers that represent a range of writing scores. Sample papers may be obtained from Appendix C (narrative responses) or from previously published writing handbooks distributed with sample papers. If papers are selected from any of these sources, the teacher may use sample responses that received a 1, 3, or 6. The papers should have the scores and annotations removed before they are distributed to the students. The teacher may also choose to select grade-appropriate papers from previous assignments for this activity. (Be sure to remove student names.)

Working in small groups, students should read the sample papers and decide which one they would rank highest, which one in the middle, and which one lowest. After each group has come to a consensus on the ranking of the papers, the students should talk about what makes good writing. They should also consider what makes one piece of writing better than another. Based on their reading of the sample papers and their discussion, each group should decide what criteria constitute effective writing.

When the groups have finished their discussion, a recorder should report each group’s criteria for good writing to the entire class. Either a student or the teacher can keep a running list of all the criteria on the chalkboard or flip chart. The teacher should then pass out the Registered Holistic Scoring Rubric (see Appendix A) and point out the similarities between the students’ criteria for good writing and those identified by the New Jersey Department of Education.

As the teacher reviews the characteristics at each of the score points, students should become more familiar with them. One way to help the students internalize the criteria on the guide is to have them actually score sample papers. When students are practicing scoring these papers, they should work in small groups. After each person decides individually what score the paper should be given, the group as a whole should discuss what scores were assigned. Group
should be given, the group as a whole should discuss what scores were assigned. Group
discussion of the paper helps the students better understand the strengths and weaknesses in
writing and helps them become comfortable with using the terminology in the scoring rubric.

As students use criterion-based holistic scoring to evaluate papers, they develop a better
understanding of the problems as well as the successes of writing. This understanding helps
students produce better writing.

**Multiple Uses of the Author’s Self-Reporting Form**

The features and criteria of holistic scoring have been an integral part of both the scoring of
student responses and professional development training sessions for teachers since 1986. The
Author’s Self-Reporting Form (see Appendix H) incorporates these established features and
criteria in a structural context that provides versatility in the assessment of writing and the
opportunity for greater involvement of individual students in the evaluation of their own
writing. It is intended to help students and teachers not only evaluate strengths and needs as
indexed by the score on the responses to the NJ ASK writing tasks, but also to increase their
awareness and understanding of the elements of effective writing. In addition, it has been
designed to incorporate key components of the writing process: self-assessment at all stages
of draft development, revising, editing, student-teacher conferencing, peer conferencing, and
monitoring individual growth over time.

One use of the Author’s Self-Reporting Form would be in conjunction with the teacher-
student review of the scored responses to the NJ ASK writing tasks. Prior to scheduling
student conferences, teachers may provide students with a copy of this form. At that time,
teachers could review the RHSR features and discuss with the students the overview and
criteria as listed in this handbook. Students could then assess their own responses, focusing
upon the individual criteria of each feature. Part of the self-evaluation would include
determining whether, in that given paper, each criterion was a strength or a need. Further
analysis would be reflected in the comments that the students made about these strengths and
needs. These comments on the self-reporting form could then be the basis for opening the
dialogue between the student and teacher in an individual conference setting.

This same procedure can also be incorporated as an instructional strategy for other
conferencing situations throughout the school year. As students meet with the teacher and
with each other to discuss their writing in varying stages of development, reference to
common criteria and language provides objectivity to the evaluation process. Using the
Author’s Self-Reporting Form to record the strengths and needs identified during a
conference is one way of documenting what was discussed during the conference, as well as
monitoring individual growth. These self-reporting forms could become part of the
systematic, cumulative record in each student’s writing portfolio or folder.

In addition, this self-reporting form could help teachers tailor their instruction to meet the
individual needs of their students. By analyzing patterns of student strengths and weaknesses
that emerge in a cumulative review of forms for each student, teachers can determine criteria
with which the student has met success and those areas that require further instructional emphasis.

Another instructional and curricular use of this form lies in the analysis of patterns that emerge from an entire class, school, and district. This type of study can provide teachers and administrators with information about the present collective status of students’ writing abilities. This type of evaluation is key to discovering instructional and curricular strengths and needs and determining future strategies for the improvement of writing.

Summary

Students should write frequently for a variety of purposes and audiences. Much of students’ writing is based on personal experience and self-expression. Patterns of sound symbol relationships are still being formed, so spelling errors may be common in the early grades, though these may have little effect on the child’s overall communication skills. Writing in all content areas should be encouraged. Since frequent experience in writing is essential for the development of students’ writing skills, teachers are encouraged to use student journals, free writing exercises, and other writing activities, which may or may not be graded. Students should be encouraged to generate a topic, plan a piece of writing, write, revise, and edit. Regular experience in writing will increase students’ confidence about writing as well as their competence.

To this end, the following practices are recommended:

1. Regular writing instruction
2. A systematic approach to writing instruction
3. Frequent and varied writing assignments
4. Inclusion of writing assignments in all content areas
5. Use of writing folders or portfolios to monitor student progress
6. Establishment of writing standards that are clearly understood by faculty and students
7. Use of student-teacher conferences as an instructional method
8. Use of modeling as an instructional method
9. Peer sharing of writing
10. Coordination of the elements common to the teaching of reading and the teaching of writing
GRADE SIX
APPENDIX A

NEW JERSEY ASSESSMENT OF SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

RUBRIC FOR SCORING STUDENT WRITING

New Jersey Registered Holistic Scoring Rubric
# NEW JERSEY REGISTERED HOLISTIC SCORING RUBRIC
## FOR WRITING
### (Grades 6–8)

In scoring, consider the grid of written language:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Inadequate Command</th>
<th>Limited Command</th>
<th>Partial Command</th>
<th>Adequate Command</th>
<th>Strong Command</th>
<th>Superior Command</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>May lack opening and/or closing</td>
<td>Minimal response to topic; uncertain focus</td>
<td>Attempts to focus</td>
<td>Generally has opening and/or closing</td>
<td>Opening and closing</td>
<td>Opening and closing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Opening and closing</td>
<td>Usually has single focus</td>
<td>Some lapses or flaws in organization</td>
<td>Single focus</td>
<td>Single focus</td>
<td>Single, distinct focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Opening and closing</td>
<td>Consistent and clear</td>
<td>Ideas loosely connected</td>
<td>Key ideas developed</td>
<td>Moderately fluent</td>
<td>Unified and coherent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Opening and closing</td>
<td>Logical progression of ideas</td>
<td>Transitions evident</td>
<td>Logical progression of ideas</td>
<td>Attempts compositional risks</td>
<td>Well-developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Opening and closing</td>
<td>Ideas effectively organized</td>
<td>Variety in syntax</td>
<td>Logical progression of ideas</td>
<td>Compositional risks successful</td>
<td>Coherent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Opening and closing</td>
<td>Well-developed</td>
<td>Variety in syntax</td>
<td>Logical progression of ideas</td>
<td>Compositional risks successful</td>
<td>Cohesive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Content and Organization**:
  - Communication:
    - Fits intended purpose
    - Attention to topic
  - Audience:
    - Addresses intended audience
    - Clearly written
  - Focus:
    - Clear focus
    - Logical development of ideas
  - Structure:
    - Appropriate and effective
    - Appropriate details

- **Usage**:
  - Tense formation
  - Subject-verb agreement
  - Pronoun usage/agreement
  - Word choice
  - Word choice/meaning

- **Sentence Construction**:
  - Variety in type, structure, and length
  - Correct construction
  - Appropriate details and information

- **Mechanics**:
  - Spelling
  - Capitalization
  - Punctuation

**NON-SCORABLE RESPONSES**

- **NR** = No Response
  - Student wrote too little to allow a reliable judgment of his/her writing.
- **OT** = Off Topic/Off Task
  - Student did not write on the assigned topic/task, or the student attempted to copy the prompt.
- **NE** = Not English
  - Student wrote in a language other than English.
- **WF** = Wrong Format
  - Student refused to write on the topic, or the writing task folder was blank.

Note: All unscorable responses (NSRs), with the exception of NR, must be coded by the Scoring Director.
APPENDIX B

NEW JERSEY ASSESSMENT OF SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

TEST ADMINISTRATION MATERIALS
FOR WRITING A NARRATIVE
Directions for the Student

In Part 4, you will respond to a writing task. You may write in this test booklet, but nothing you write here will be scored. Only what you write in your answer folder will be scored.

Things to remember about the writing task:

1. Carefully read the writing task. Think about what you have been asked to do. You may refer back to the writing task whenever necessary, and you may make notes as you read.

2. You may use the space in your answer folder to plan your response. As you plan your response to the writing task, use the Writer’s Checklist you have received to help you remember important points to consider.

3. Be sure to write your response in your answer folder. Only what you write in your answer folder will be scored. Write as neatly and clearly as possible in the appropriate space in your answer folder.

4. You must use a Number 2 pencil. You may either print or write your final copy. You may not use a dictionary or any other reference materials during the test. However, you may use the Writer’s Checklist, which lists important points for you to remember as you write.

5. You will have 25 minutes to complete the writing task. If you finish before the time is called, review what you have written using the Writer’s Checklist to read critically and improve your composition. Then, close your test booklet and wait quietly until you receive further instructions.
Writing Task

A young boy was very excited because he was going fishing with his uncle. Saturday finally arrived, and they drove to the lake. He listened to his uncle tell stories about special tricks for catching fish. When they arrived at the lake, they got into a small fishing boat and headed toward his uncle’s favorite fishing spot.

Just as the boy was about to cast his fishing line into the water, he heard a loud noise behind him.

Write a story about what happens next on the fishing trip.

The writing you do in your answer folder will be scored. You may use the space provided on pages 14 and 15 of your answer folder to plan your ideas before you begin writing your response. Then write your response on pages 16–19 of your answer folder.
Writer’s Checklist

Important Points to Remember as You Write

CONTENT/ORGANIZATION

1. Focus on your purpose for writing and your audience.

2. Develop a clear topic or central idea.

3. Support your ideas with details, explanations, and examples.

4. Put your ideas in the order that best communicates what you are trying to say.

SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION

5. Use clear and varied sentences.

USAGE

6. Use words correctly.

7. Use varied and vivid vocabulary.

MECHANICS

8. Capitalize, spell, and punctuate correctly.

9. Write neatly.

NEW JERSEY STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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APPENDIX C

DESCRIPTION OF THE NARRATIVE WRITING TASK (SPECULATIVE PROMPT) AND SAMPLE STUDENT RESPONSES
DESCRIPTION OF TASK

The responses selected to appear in this handbook were written by sixth-grade students who took the narrative writing section of the May 2008 NJASK. The responses appear as the students wrote them; no corrections have been made other than the deletion of specific names that appear to identify the student or the student’s school district. A typed version of each response appears before the handwritten response.

Samples are included for each score point of the New Jersey Registered Holistic Scoring Rubric (a 6-point scale). These sample responses, which are grouped by score point, represent the range of approaches that sixth-grade students take with this writing task. Each score point is described in detail, and each response is annotated according to the score point criteria.

Students were provided a writing prompt and given 25 minutes to construct a narrative or story based on the prompt or some aspect of it. Prewriting/planning was encouraged, and space was provided for this endeavor. A Writer’s Checklist of important ideas was also provided to encourage students to read, revise, and edit their written work. All students’ writing was considered a first draft in this writing process since students were not permitted to confer with others nor to refer to outside resources (dictionary or thesaurus) and therefore were unable to rely on the feedback and constructive suggestions that result from strategies appropriate for classroom instruction. In this way, the test obtains a sample of each student’s baseline writing ability within the context of consistent standards that ensure fairness to all who participate.
Score Scale Point 1

The response indicates an **INADEQUATE COMMAND** of written language. The writing samples in this category:

**CONTENT/ORGANIZATION**
- May not have an opening and/or closing. These papers are on topic and demonstrate at least a minimal attempt to respond to the topic by stating a subject or giving a list of subjects. Some of the lengthier papers are disorganized, making them consistently difficult to follow. In these papers the reader has to infer what the focus is. The overriding characteristic of many of these papers is a lack of control with no sense of planning. Details may be random, inappropriate, or barely apparent.

**USAGE**
- May display severe/numerous errors in usage. This includes problems in tense formation, subject-verb agreement, pronoun usage and agreement, word choice, and use of proper modifiers.

**SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION**
- May demonstrate an assortment of grammatically incorrect/incomplete sentences and/or incorrect rhetorical modes. Statements may be either incoherent or unintelligible.

**MECHANICS**
- May display errors in mechanics so severe as to detract from the meaning of the response.
Suddenly a big ugly man come’s swimming like a jet come’s yelling scared out of his mind and hits the “boat” the boy, his uncle, and the man were never heard from again.
Suddenly a big ugly man came swimming like a jet. He came yelling scared out of his mind and it hits the boat. The boy, his uncle, and the man were never heard from again.

Score Point: 1

This response demonstrates a minimal attempt to address the topic. The student mentions the boy, the boat, and his uncle, which is sufficient to show that the student read the prompt, but none of the ideas presented are elaborated with any details. The response also lacks an opening and there is no evidence of planning by connecting ideas with some transitions. In addition, there is no punctuation to indicate where sentences begin and end. Overall, this response demonstrates an inadequate command of language.

Continue your writing on the next page if you need to.
Thar is a Big fish behind him an The fishe gup out of the wather his uncle Thaks a fishing net an he trap The fish he trap The fish an he Tis the Nokt on The bout an the fishe is poleing fhom a cras The lake Then a notre fishe is casing tham an a notre fishe casing Tham his uncle Tak a spar an is stabing, the fish iT is a sord fish The fishe are stabag The Tha are peke hols Thre The bout the fish cep on casing them The boy uncle is stil staBag the fish his uncle take an thther spear an stape the fish. The uncle tres the bote motr on an The are GAting Awge from The fishe but The fishe are still poling Them bake Then a natr fishe are casing Them now thar are four fish caing Them The boys uncle is tring to Get rit of The fish. Then The 1 boys uncle gets stabt in the lag by The sort fish Then the boy sape The fish an kills it Then thed makit bak home Thea cot one fish The boys uncl wento the hopitl an wen the Bos uncle gEt bak homy Thea haD a soDe fishe for Ditr.
Thor is a big fish behind him. The fish jump out of the water. His uncle takes a fishing net and he trap the fish. He trap the fish on the net on the boat. The fish is poling from the grass. Then a notre fish is casing in man on a notre fish casing. Then his uncle take a spar on it stabbing the fish. It is a bad fish. The fish are stabbing. The fish are poling hole Thro the boat. The fish keep on casing them. The boy uncle is still stabbing. The fish high uncle take another spear on stage. The fish. The uncle takes the bote. motr on and the are eating. Angel from the fish but the fish are still poling them. Bore thing the fish are casing them now. Thor are four fish casing. Them. The boy uncle is trying to get rid of the fish.

Continue your writing on the next page if you need to.
Then the boy's uncle goes story in the lag by the coast fish. Then the boy Says the fish or killed. Then the marlin bag homy the end of the fish. The boy's uncle went to the hospital and went the boy's uncle cast bag homy they had a good fight for life. The end

Score Point: 1

While this student attempts to tell a story about a boy and his uncle being chased by a big fish, the errors in sentence construction, word usage and mechanics are so numerous and severe that they detract from the meaning of the response. With the amount of detail provided and the attempted organization, this response could have received a higher score, but the quantity and severity of the errors keep the score at the one level.
Score Scale Point 2

The response indicates a **LIMITED COMMAND** of written language. The writing samples in this category:

**CONTENT/ORGANIZATION**
- May not have an opening and/or a closing. These responses will exhibit an attempt at organization. In other words, there will be some evidence the writer attempted to control the details. The responses relate to the topic, but in some papers, the writer drifts away from the primary focus or abruptly shifts focus. In other papers, there is a single focus, but there are few, if any, transitions, making it difficult to move from idea to idea. Details are presented with little, if any, elaboration—highlight papers.

**USAGE**
- May have numerous problems with usage, but they are not totally out of control.

**SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION**
- May demonstrate excessive monotony in syntax and/or rhetorical modes. There may be numerous errors in sentence construction.

**MECHANICS**
- May display numerous severe errors in mechanics.
As Robert’s heart began to beep fast he heard the noise again. Robert turned around with a scared face as he looked in back of him he saw a huge lake monster. The lake monster had green lack leaves on him and had nasty teeth. “Rober, yelled Robert’s dad paddle paddle yelled Robert’s dad yelled louder as the lake monster moved closer the lake water shooked and began to tip the small yellow boat over it was hard for Robert to paddle. Robert was very afraid “Who’s out there yelled a lady. She was light skin, with really short hair her voice was deep. As the lady moved close Robert and his dad noticed that she had a rope “Who’s out there she yelled again help yelled Robert “I’m coming said the lady. She mad a long circle with the rope like a cowboy and threw the rope in the lake as the rope raped around the boat as the boat shook rah rah rah went the lake monster it looked mad. “Ah went the lady as she struggled to pull them to land “your all most “ah she pulled. Rah went the monster as Robert and his dad got closer to land. The lack monster shook the water so hard the Robert and his dad fell out “swim swim for your life Robert and his dad swam to land “Thank you so much Robert said “your welcom replied the lady. The lady moved the bushes as she showed them ther car - thank you Roder and his dad got in there car thank you thank you so much as they drove off as the lady walked she noticed that Robert had left a silver pice. She wouder what it do the lady carryed on her Journey saving live and keeping Robert in her life. She wouder if she will she them again?
As Robert's heart began to keep fast, he heard the noise again. Robert turned around with a scared face as he looked in back of him. He saw a huge lake monster. The lake monster had green hair down on him and had nasty teeth. Robert yelled Robert's dad paddled a paddle. Robert's dad yelled out as the lake monster came closer to the lake water. Shooked and began to freeze the small yellow boat over. It was hard for Robert to paddle. Robert was very afraid. Who's out there? yelled a lady. She was light skin with really short hair. Her voice was deep. As the lady came closer Robert said to his dad, noticed that she had a rope. "Who's out there?" she yelled again. Help yelled Robert. "I'm coming said the lady. She made a long circle with the rope like a cowboy and threw the rope.
In the lake on the rope roped around the boat as the boat shook rah rah rah went the wave monster it looked mad "ah went the lady as she struggled to pull them to land " your all most " ah she pulled rah went the monster as Robert and his dad got closer to land the back monster shook the water so hard the Robert and his dad fell out "swim swim for your life Robert and his dad swam to land "Thank you so much Robert and your welcome miss the lady the lady moved the brushes as she showed them the car thank you Robert as they drove car as the lady walked she noticed that Robert had not a spill er face she wondered.

Continue your writing on the next page if you need to.
Score Point: 2

This response tells the story of Robert and his dad escaping from a lake monster with the aid of a lady on the shore. By using the simple transition “as,” the student attempts to connect the series of events, and the reader is able to follow the sequence. Some of the ideas have a little elaboration (scared face, small yellow boat, really short hair), but many of the details are bare. The overriding characteristic of this response is that there are numerous errors in sentence construction, word usage, and mechanics, but none are so severe that they detract from the meaning, which demonstrates a limited command of language.
It was a bear! The boy and his uncle were so extatic they both fell out of the boat, and it tiped. They were so scared they didn’t even get back in the boat they just kept swimming. Once they got to shore they didn’t even look back. They had to run all the way home with out there car because it was on the other side of the lake with their lunch in it. Finally they made it to the boys uncles’ house. His Uncle sat him down and put a blanket on the boy. Both of them were shivering. The boys’ aunt came in “what happened to you?” They both said “A bear... thats what.”
It was a bear! The boy and his uncle were so ecstatic they both fell out of the boat, and it tipped. They were so scared they didn't even get back in the boat. They just kept swimming. Once they got to shore they didn't even look back. They had to run all the way home with out their car because it was on the other side of the lake with their lunch in it. Finally they made it to the boy's uncle's house. His uncle sat him down and put a blanket on the boy. Both of them were shivering. The boys' aunt came in and asked, "What happened to you?"

Continue your writing on the next page if you need to.
Score Point: 2

This brief narrative response outlines the story of a boy and his uncle running away from a bear. The events are told in a logical sequence with a few simple transitions (once, finally), demonstrating some attempt at organization. Most of the events in the story, however, are told with very few details to elaborate. The only attempt to elaborate comes in the explanation of why they had to run home (the car was on the other side of the lake with their lunch in it). More elaboration on what happened that day would be needed for this response to achieve a higher score.

Continue your writing on the next page if you need to.
Score Scale Point 3

The response indicates a **PARTIAL COMMAND** of written language. The writing samples in this category:

**CONTENT/ORGANIZATION**
- May not have an opening and/or a closing. These responses relate to the topic and usually have a single focus. Some of these papers may drift from the focus or abruptly shift focus; however, in these papers, at least one of the subjects focused upon clearly meets the criteria for a 3. For example, some 3 papers are sparse—they have several details with a little elaboration, but they are organized and controlled; some 3 papers will ramble somewhat, repeating ideas resulting in a lengthy response that otherwise would be sparse; and other 3 papers have elaborated ideas and details, but the writing sample is interrupted by organizational flaws/lapses or by a lack of transition between ideas or between clusters of ideas.

**USAGE**
- May display a pattern(s) of errors in usage.

**SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION**
- May demonstrate little variety in syntax structure and/or rhetorical modes. There may be errors in sentence construction.

**MECHANICS**
- May display a pattern(s) of errors in mechanics.
“Yes, it’s finally Saturday!” I would say to myself. “My uncle Joe will be here any second to take me fishing,” I said. I had always wanted to go fishing, and learn my uncle’s special tricks for catching fish. One day, he came home with a the biggest fish I had ever seen. I was about 7 when that happened, it was perhaps smaller then what I can remember; but still it was hugh. I was as big as a table.

My uncle finally came, we got our equipment and left. When we arrived we chose a spot opened our chairs and stared fishing. He was teaching me some of his special tricks when suddenly we herd a noise. Whe looked back and saw a bear that was like a dinasour! My uncle had never had an encounter with a bear in this area so he was shocked. We dropped everything and ran for the car! My heart was beating like a well oiled machine. The bear chased us half way, then stoped and ate some of the food the had left on the ground. We got into the car and when home.
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My uncle first said we got our equipment and left. When we arrived, we chose a spot opened our chairs and started fishing. He was teaching me some of his special tricks when suddenly we heard a noise. I looked back and saw a bear that was like a dinosaur! My uncle had never had an encounter with a bear in this area, so he was shocked. We dropped everything and ran for the car! My heart was beating like a well-oiled machine. The bear chased us half way, then stood and ate some of the food we had left on the ground. We got into the car and drove home.
Score Point: 3

This focused, controlled response opens with a brief flashback which sets the scene and builds a sense of anticipation for the coming fishing trip. Through the use of transitions the writer connects the events in the story and organizes the response. There is sufficient elaboration (*as big as a table, like a dinosaur, heart was beating like a well-oiled machine*) to extend the development of the story beyond the highlight level. While there are errors, they are not numerous and serious and do not detract from the meaning. Overall, there is sufficient development to indicate a partial command of language, but more sustained elaboration would be needed for a higher score.
They boy with a surprise looks back and he is astonished and does not believe what he was seeing, it was a lake monster. The gigantic creature was over a hundred feet tall and was so wide it was blocking everything behind it. It was wet and tons of water was dripping down from it. It had a sharp face similar to the ancient dinosaurs, it had big marvelous looking fins like a dolphin. It tail had big spikey thorns all over it covered with blood and meat of other fishes, soon it opened its mouth the roaring sound was so loud it could have heard from a thousand miles away. The boy and his uncle frantically tried to get away by turning their boat to the other direction but the monster was blocking the way with it tail. Uncle scared and nervous hit the monster with his fishing rod and angered the monster. The lake monster with it fifty ton tail wagged and shoved uncle and the little boy out of its way. Desperate to survive the boy and his uncle grabbed each other and swam. The monster followed them, water was spalishing all over as as the monster raced to get it delicious meal.
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Continue your writing on the next page if you need to.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Point: 3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This controlled and organized response focuses on an attack by a lake monster. Specific details are provided throughout to enhance the events (<em>hundred feet tall, fins like a dolphin, thousand miles away, fifty ton tail</em>). However, there are many errors in sentence construction (comma splices) as well as word usage, sufficient to constitute a pattern of errors and keep the response from achieving a higher score.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continue your writing on the next page if you need to.
Score Scale Point 4

The response indicates an **ADEQUATE COMMAND** of written language. The writing samples in this category:

**CONTENT/ORGANIZATION**
- Generally will have an opening and a closing. The responses relate to the topic. They have a single focus and are organized. There is little, if any, difficulty moving from idea to idea. Ideas may ramble somewhat, and clusters of ideas may be loosely connected; however, an overall progression is apparent. In some papers, development is uneven, consisting of elaborated ideas interspersed with bare, unelaborated details.

**USAGE**
- May display some errors in usage, but no consistent pattern is apparent.

**SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION**
- May demonstrate a generally correct sense of syntax. They avoid excessive monotony in syntax and/or rhetorical modes. There may be a few errors in sentence construction.

**MECHANICS**
- May display some errors in mechanics, but these errors will not constitute a consistent pattern, nor do they interfere with the meaning of the response.
“Are we almost at your favorite fishing spot yet Uncle?” Alex asked after they had been on the boat for a little over two minutes.

“Very close. Actually, I think it is right here.”

Alex was about to cast his rod he received from his grandfather for his birthday into the water. He flicked his rod back with his wrists and then “Boom!” The boat had struck a rock on the left side and water was racing in.

Alex and his Uncle dipped and zipped their life jackets as tight as possible and dove into the water. The water was a frigid 50° F and Alex and his Uncle struggled to catch their breath. The swim looked to be about ¾ of a mile to the shore. About 30 seconds into the swim, Alex heard a loud shriek coming from his right. His Uncle had collided with an enormous rock underwater. His arm was full of scratches and scrapes that made Alex feel sick.

The Uncle was trying to use his right arm more than his left as he and Alex swam to shore. The swim took about 15 minutes with Uncle’s bad arm. When they reached the point where they could stand, they ran to shore and kissed the ground five times. The drive home was uncomfortable with the soaking wet clothes on, but they managed. When they got home, Alex told the whole story to his mother while his uncle was yelled at for not paying attention. Alex will never forget what he felt as the boat was sinking and getting to shore. That would be the only fishing trip where Alex never caught a fish!
"Are we almost at your favorite fishing spot yet Uncle?" Alex asked after they had been on the boat for a little over two minutes.

"Very close. Actually, I think it is right here."

Alex was about to cast his rod he received from his grandfather for his birthday into the water. He flicked his rod back with his wrists and then "Boom!" The boat had struck a rock on the left side of water was faring in.

Alex and his Uncle clipped and zipped their life jackets as tight as possible and dove into the water. The water was a frigid 50°F and Alex and his Uncle struggled to catch their breath. The swim looked to be about 8 or a mile to the shore. About 30 seconds into the swim, Alex heard a loud shieik coming from his right. His Uncle had collided with an enormous rock underwater. His arm was full of scratches and scrapes that made Alex feel sick.

The Uncle was trying to use his right arm more than his left as he and Alex swam to shore. The swim took about 15 minutes with Uncle's bad arm. When they reached the point where they could stand, they ran to shore and kissed the ground five times. The drive home was uncomfortable with the soaking wet clothes on, but they managed. When they got home Alex told the whole story to his mother while his uncle was yelled at for not paying attention. Alex will never forget what he felt as the boat was sinking and getting to shore. That would be the only fishing trip where Alex never caught a fish!

Continue your writing on the next page if you need to.
Score Point: 4

This response is controlled and organized focusing on a story about the sinking of the fishing boat. The story progresses logically with evident transitions to move the reader through the events of the day. While there is some elaboration with specific detail (frigid 50 F, loud shriek, kissed the ground five times) none of the events are described with the development that would be needed to achieve a higher score. In addition, the syntax, though varied at times, is sometimes simplistic with short, choppy sentences leading to a lack of fluency. Overall, the command of language is adequate.
Tom sped through the living room and raced to the garage to get his fishing rod. It was Saturday, the day Tom had been waiting for, the day when his Uncle George would take him to the lake to go fishing. Tom tied the laces of his Reebok shoes and stormed out the door. His Uncle George was waiting in a feeble army-green jeep with a mess of fishing gear lying next to him.

Tom dashed to the jeep with a huge smile across his face and opened the door.

“Hi Uncle George!” Tom said as he buckled his seatbelt.

“How’s it going Tom?” Uncle George asked as he started the motor of the jeep.

“Great! I can’t wait to get to the lake!” Tom said as the jeep rattled from the crevices on the bumpy road. As Tom and his uncle continued their journey to Silent Hill Lake, Uncle George explained to Tom about special strategies to catch fish. Tom reached the lake shortly and got into Uncle George’s schooner. As Tom casted his line he heard a ferocious sound. A black bear was nose-to-nose with Uncle George! Tom and his uncle dropped their rods and reached for the boats paddles. The bear gave good fight, it chased the boat across the lake and into a river. The bear was aiming for the sandwiches Uncle George had packed for lunch. Tom and his Uncle escaped the angry bear and disembarked the rowboat panting for breath. The bear had ran back into the woods and Tom and his Uncle continued fishing on the shoreline, just in case the massive bear planned to strike again!
Begin your writing here.

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Continue your writing on the next page if you need to.
the angry bear and disembarked the rowboat panting for breath. The bear had ran back into the woods and Tom and his Uncle continued fishing on the shoreline, just in case the massive bear planned to strike again!

Score Point: 4

This narrative response is focused and controlled telling a story about a bear attack. While the opening scene is elaborated with specific details (the day Tom had been waiting for, army-green jeep, mess of fishing gear, huge smile), the scene describing the bear attack, a key event in the story, is bare and unelaborated (The bear gave a good fight, it chased the boat across the lake. Tom and his Uncle escaped). This unevenness in development keeps this response from achieving a higher score.

Continue your writing on the next page if you need to.
Score Scale Point 5

The response indicates a **STRONG COMMAND** of written language. The writing samples in this category:

**CONTENT/ORGANIZATION**
- Have an opening and a closing. The responses relate to the topic and have a single focus. They are organized and progress logically from beginning to end. The key ideas are developed with appropriate and varied details. Clusters of ideas are strongly connected. Some writers take compositional risks and are, for the most part, successful. Although these papers are flawed, they have a sense of completeness and unity.

**USAGE**
- Have few errors in usage.

**SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION**
- Demonstrate syntactic and verbal sophistication through an effective variety of sentences and/or rhetorical modes. There are few, if any, errors in sentence construction.

**MECHANICS**
- Have few errors in mechanics.
The boy flipped around only to see something big and brown disappear beneath the murky water. His uncle didn’t seem to mind.

“Uncle Lester, didn’t you just see that thing?” he asked worriedly.

“Don’t worry, boy,” said Uncle Lester. “It’s probably a cub who got stuck in a fish trap again. We see it all the time.”

A little reassured, the boy went back to fishing. He cast his line out as far as he could and sat down, rocking the boat again.

“Try not to fidget around, boy, you’re gonna sink the boat!” said Uncle impatiently. “It ain’t cheap ya know!”

The boy tried figuring out how such a cramped boat could be expensive. But his thoughts were suddenly interrupted by a tug on his line. It pulled and pulled and the boy felt himself being pulled, rocking the boat and Uncle Lester’s short temper.

“Boy, I told ya --”

“It’s not me, Uncle!” the boy said, holding onto the sides of the boat for dear life. “Look at my line, I got a big one!”

Uncle suddenly turned around and his eyes became wide with fear.

“That ain’t no fish,” he shuddered. “It’s a-a-sh-sh-shark.”

The boy panicked and let go of the fishing rod, watching it skid away on the lake’s surface. That’s when he saw the shark.

It hopped up out of the water, snapping its ferocious teeth closed. There was blood on its mouth and fur caught in its teeth. The boy realized that cub didn’t get stuck in a trap. It was eaten.

With sudden compassion for the animal, he took out all the bait and dumped it in the water. He then grabbed the sharpest knife in the box and waited for the beast to come.

“You idiot!” said Uncle Lester. “That’s gonna attract the shark, not keep it away!”

“Exactly!” the boy yelled.

In a split second, the shark popped up, tipping the boat. The boy pounced on the shark, stabbing the knife into its mouth. It sunk to the bottom.

“That was amazing!” said Uncle.
The boy flipped around only to see something big and brown disappear beneath the mucky water. His uncle didn't seem to mind.

"Uncle Lester, didn't you just see that thing?" he asked worriedly.

"Don't worry, boy," said Uncle Lester. "It's probably a cub who got stuck in a fish trap again. We see it all the time."

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"That ain't no fish," he shuddered. "It's a...sh-sh-shark."

The boy panicked and let go of the fishing rod, watching...
Score Point: 5

This fluent, controlled response narrating the story about a shark attack is well developed, and all key events are elaborated with specific details. The writer uses both humor (tried figuring out how such a cramped boat could be expensive) and realistic dialogue (“It ain’t cheap, ya know”) to bring life to the characters. More precise word choices (murky, shuddered, ferocious, compassion) and varied syntax contribute to the fluency of the response, and demonstrate a strong command of language.
The boy’s heart skipped a beat. He was shivering and had goosebumps tingle his body all over. The noise had been a splash, but not just any splash. This was louder than a large human make a cannonball into a pool.

It was such a quiet lake, and the boat was completely isolated. They heard something behind the boat. The uncle got excited thinking it was some type of new, extremely large fish. The boy didn’t think that at all and his gut told him danger.

The Uncle leaned over the boat with his rod and checked it out. Before the boy knew it, his uncle was being taken down into the depths of the lake.

The boy started panicking and screaming at the top of his lungs for help. Unfortunately, his uncle had told him that it was a secret fishing spot that only he had known about.

The boy’s only thought now was to get out of there, and fast. He grabbed the paddles and rowed with all of his might. Suddenly though, he heard something swimming and splashing toward the boat. He didn’t want to look but he had to know if it was his uncle, and maybe he could have escaped and survived. The boy turned around and what he found was terrible and disastrous.

A huge figure almost larger than a grown male crocodile swam toward him. It looked ferocious with teeth the size of pencils and razor sharp. It’s eyes were the size of humans’ except they were bloody red. The creature had spikes running up his back. The worst part though, for the boy was that it had his uncle’s rod in between his teeth and it looked hungry for dessert.

The boy turned back around and started paddling faster then ever. Right when he was coming close to shore, he heard a crack. The beast had taken a bite out of the boat and kept coming after the boy.

What happened after that, no one really knows, but the boy and his uncle were never seen or heard from again.
Begin your writing here.

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It was such a quiet lake, and the boat was completely isolated. They heard something behind the boat. The uncle got excited thinking it was some type of new, extremely large fish. The boy didn't think that at all and his gut told him danger.

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paddling faster than ever. Right when he was coming
close to shore, he heard a crack. The
beast had taken a bite out of the boat
and kept coming after the boy.

Continue your writing on the next page if you need to.
What happened after that, no one really knows, but the boy and his uncle were never seen or heard from again.

Score Point: 5

This fluent, well developed response tells the story of a crocodile attack. The action builds from a dramatic opening (the boy’s heart skipped a beat) and culminating in a suspenseful conclusion leaving the reader to surmise the actual outcome. Key events throughout are elaborated with specific and appropriate details (louder than a human . . . cannonball, teeth the size of pencils). The syntax is varied and there are relatively few errors, demonstrating a strong command of language, but the response lacks the sophistication and precision needed for a higher score.
Score Scale Point 6

The response indicates a **SUPERIOR COMMAND** of written language. The writing samples in this category:

**CONTENT/ORGANIZATION**
- have an opening and a closing. The responses relate to the topic and have a single distinct focus. They are well-developed, complete compositions that are organized and progress logically from beginning to end. A variety of cohesive devices are present, resulting in a fluent response. Many of these writers take compositional risks resulting in highly effective, vivid, explicit, and/or pertinent responses.

**USAGE**
- have very few, if any, errors in usage.

**SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION**
- demonstrate syntactic and verbal sophistication through an effective variety of sentences and/or rhetorical modes. There will be very few, if any, errors in sentence construction.

**MECHANICS**
- have very few, if any, errors in mechanics.
Brandon’s big, green eyes slowly opened to small bedroom that was filled with sunshine. He blinked, rubbed the sleep from his eyes, and yawned heartily. Even though he wasn’t at his home in the noisy, bustling city of New York, he felt right at home at his Uncle Joe’s big, old house in Kentucky.

Then he remembered—today was the day that he and Uncle Joe were going fishing in the big lake that was in the back of the massive backyard. Brandon had been anticipating this day very much; he loved fishing because he always went fishing with his father when he was alive.

Quickly, Brandon dressed and ran down the stairs to find Uncle Joe cooking pancakes on the griddle. The table was set, complete with orange juice, maple syrup and butter. Yum—it was Brandon’s favorite.

After a hearty breakfast, the two went outside and headed for the lake. The air was crisp and refreshing and the sun shone bright. Uncle Joe inhaled deeply and exhaled with a relaxed look on his face.

“A mighty fine day it is”, he remarked. “Perfect for fishing.”

“I hope we catch something big!” Brandon exclaimed. He secretly hoped that he might find some adventure, too...

But it seemed that they wouldn’t be bringing any fish home tonight. After three hours, all they had found was a tiny little fish, which was half-dead, and a boot.

“Well, maybe we should get packed up. I’m sorry, boy. The fish are hiding today,” said Uncle Joe.

“Okay,” Brandon replied, disappointed. He began to clean up when he heard a loud, cracking noise. It sounded like a thousand pines were breaking at once.

Surprised, they both looked behind them, but splash! The boat tipped over and they were in the cold, deep water.

“A giant fish!” Screamed Uncle Joe, and they both started swimming for safety.

And it was! The fish was long, maybe ten feet and red and yellow scales sparkled in the water. “Oh my gosh! That was huge!” Brandon panted, trying to catch his breath after he and Uncle Joe had reached land.

Well, he thought, we didn’t catch any fish. But we definitely had a little adventure there.

Every summer when Brandon came back to Uncle Joe’s, he looked for the fish. But it was never to be seen again.
Brandon's big, green eyes slowly opened to a small bedroom that was filled with sunshine. He blinked, rubbed the sleep from his eyes, and yawned heartily. Even though he wasn't at his home in the noisy bustling city of New York, he felt right at home at his Uncle Joe's big old house in Kentucky.

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But it seemed they wouldn't be bringing any fish home tonight. After three hours, all they had found was a tiny little fish, which was half-dead and a boot.

“Well, maybe we should get packed up. I’m sorry, boy. The fish are hiding today,” said Uncle Joe.

“Okay,” Brandon replied, disappointed. He began to clean up when he heard a loud, cracking noise. It sounded like a thousand brooks were breaking all once.

Surprised, they both looked behind them, but splash! The boat tipped over and they were in the cold, deep water.

“A giant fish!” Screamed Uncle Joe, and they both started swimming for safety.

And it was! The fish was long, maybe ten feet and red and... yellow scales sparkled in the water.

Continue your writing on the next page if you need to.
“Oh my gosh! That was huge!” Brandon panted, trying to catch his breath after he and Uncle Joe had reached land.

Well, he thought, we didn’t catch any fish. But we definitely had a little adventure there.

Every summer when Brandon came back to Uncle Joe’s, he looked for the fish. But it was never to be seen again.

Score Point: 6

This sophisticated narrative opens with a vivid description of the start to the day. The story progresses smoothly and logically to an effective conclusion which provides unity and coherence. The student uses vivid vocabulary throughout to capture the mood and create the scene (rubbed the sleep from his eyes and yawned heartily, the air was crisp and refreshing, red and yellow scales sparkled). The student also successfully uses literary devices such as imagery (sounded like a thousand bones breaking) and onomatopoeia (splash!). The syntax is varied with some sophistication, and word choices are both vivid and effective. Overall, the response demonstrates a superior command of language.
My Fishing Trip

Ever since I was a little boy of 5 years old, I had been going on fishing trips with my uncle and my father. They were both very profound fishermen, and I idolized them equally. I just loved those sunny days when we would all get into my dad’s truck and ride out to the lake. This would usually be an overnight trip, so as soon as we got there we would set up our tents, take out all our fishing supplies, and then wade into the cool water. I found the way the little fish swammed around to be absolutely mcerozing! We would all fish until sunset, and then the greatest part of the day would begin. My dad and uncle would pick up sticks and dry wood around us, and then we would all sit around the campfire telling stories. Sometimes my dad would talk of the fishing trips he went on when he was a little boy, and of grandfather who had passed away several years before. Other times we just told scary stories; either way this was always entertaining. These fishing trips continued on for several more years until I was nine, and that’s when the bad news came.

One day after school, I came home to find that my parents were sitting on the coach with worried looks in their eyes. I really did not know what was going on, but I had a feeling something bad was going to happen. “Sit down, Sammy,” my mother told me. I did as I was told and sat next to my dad; it was he who spoke next.

“Sam, I don’t know how to tell you this,” just as he said that I looked at his face, he looked weary and tired, as though he had grown 10 years older. The look in his eyes scared me, he was crying.

“What is it, daddy?”

“Well son, I found out that I am a victim of leukemia.”

I honestly did not know how to take this news, I was angry, and terrified, and devastated at the same time. He couldn’t leave me, he just couldn’t! He was my best friend, my father, my love and support. But he did. Two years after we found out he left us, and that’s when the fishing trips stopped. When I was 13 my uncle came to our home, he said that it was time to start fishing again. I was ecstatic! I didn’t know why but I knew I had to go on this trip.

As I waded into the cool water, and took my fishing pole out, I heard a loud BANG! I turned around, it was my uncle trying to put up the tent himself, he was never good at that. That night we sat around the fire and talked of my dad. Everywhere I looked, everywhere I turned, I saw him. His face was in the water, in the trees, in the sky. Tears trickled gently down my face, as the memories I had with him came flooding in. I wasn’t bitter any more, I knew that he would always be in my heart. He wasn’t here, and yet I knew he was; he was always with me in spirit. I couldn’t give up hope, because I knew that one day I would see him in a better place.

After that day I realized why that fishing trip was important. It helped me move on and let go. My dad was everything to me, and he still is. Sometimes I can still hear him say, “There goes a big fish, go get it Sammy, go get it.” And I do. I chase my dreams.
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my parents were sitting on the couch with worried looks in their eyes. I really did not know what was going on, but I had a feeling something bad was going to happen. "Sit down, Sammy," my mother told me. I did as I was told and sat next to my dad; it was he who spoke next.

"Sam, I don't know how to tell you this, just as he said that I looked at his face, he looked weary and tired, as though he had grown 10 years older. The look in his eyes scared me, he was crying.

"What is it, daddy?"

"Well son, I found out that I am a victim of leukemia."

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I didn't know why but I knew I had to go on this

Continue your writing on the next page if you need to.
As I walked into the cool water, and took my fishing pole out, I heard a loud BANG! I turned around, it was my uncle trying to put up the tent himself; he was never good at that. That night we sat around the fire and talked of my dad. Everywhere I looked, everywhere I turned, I saw him. His face was in the water, in the trees, in the sky. Tears trickled gently down my face, as the memories I had with him came flooding in. I wasn’t bitter any more, I knew that he would always be in my heart. He wasn’t here, and yet I knew he was; he was always with me, in spirit. I couldn’t give up hope, because I knew that one day I would see him in a better place.

After that day I realized why that fishing trip was important. It helped me move on and let go. My dad was everything to me, and he still is. Sometimes I can still hear him say, “There goes a big fish, go get it – Sammy, go get it.” And I do, I chase my dreams.
Score Point: 6

In this extremely well controlled response, the student successfully takes a compositional risk by skillfully weaving the use of both flashback and foreshadowing techniques to tell the story of how important the fishing trips with his father and his uncle are to the narrator. The student uses a variety of literary devices – pathos (his face was in the water, in the trees), humor (uncle trying to put up the tent, he was never good at that), precise vocabulary, controlled dialogue - to engage the reader and enhance the response. Sophisticated syntax and the presence of very few errors indicate a superior command of language.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RHSM FEATURES</th>
<th>OVERVIEW</th>
<th>DESCRIPTIVE CRITERIA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CONTENT/</td>
<td>Extent to which the response is:</td>
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<tr>
<td>ORGANIZATION</td>
<td>• focused on task, purpose, and audience</td>
<td>1. Opening and closing</td>
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<td>• supported by relevant and elaborated details</td>
<td>2. Single, clear focus</td>
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<td>• clearly and logically ordered</td>
<td>3. Sense of unity; completeness</td>
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<td>4. Even development of key ideas</td>
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<td>5. Logical progression of ideas</td>
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<td>6. Appropriate and varied details</td>
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<td>7. Clear transitions</td>
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<td>8. Coherence and fluency</td>
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<td>9. Controlled compositional risks (if</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Usage</strong></td>
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<td>Extent to which the response is written in standard written English</td>
<td>10. Correct tense formation</td>
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<td>11. Subject-verb agreement</td>
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<td>12. Correct pronoun usage and agreement</td>
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<td>13. Effective and varied word choice</td>
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<td>14. Use of proper modifiers</td>
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<td><strong>Sentence Construction</strong></td>
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<td>Extent to which the response includes complete and controlled sentences</td>
<td>15. Correct sentence construction (syntax)</td>
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<td>16. Variety in length and structure</td>
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<td>17. Controlled use of words and phrasing</td>
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<td><strong>Mechanics</strong></td>
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<td>Extent to which the response is technically correct</td>
<td>18. Few errors in spelling</td>
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<td>19. Few errors in capitalization</td>
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<td>20. Few errors in punctuation</td>
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# SELF-REPORTING FORM

## ANNOTATION GUIDE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRENGTHS +</th>
<th>NEEDS –</th>
<th>COMMENTS ABOUT WRITING STRENGTHS AND NEEDS</th>
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CONFERENCE LOG

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