**Holistic Scoring: Method**

The Writing Assessment Program uses a holistic scoring method to score the Placement Exam, WP002, and WP003. Elliot, Plata, & Zelhart offer the following definition of holistic assessment:

To view a sample of writing holistically is to attempt to view the writing as more than the mere sum of its elementary parts. In considering a sample of writing from a holistic perspective, readers do not judge separately the singular factors—treatment of topic, selection of rhetorical methods, word choice, grammar and mechanics—that constitute a piece of writing. Rather, raters are asked to consider these factors as elements that work together to make a total impression on the reader. It is this total impression that is sought in holistic scoring. (17)

In holistic scoring, essays are not given low scores just because they contain many mechanical errors, nor are they given high scores just because they are well organized. The reader considers the overall impression created by the student's writing sample and assigns a score consistent with that overall impression. The scoring criteria used by the Writing Assessment Program can be found here; the scoring scale used by the program can be found here.

No marks of any kind are made on test essays by the evaluators. There are two reasons for this procedure. First, actually marking the papers would take far too much time given the number of essays to be scored: the evaluation team must score hundreds of essays in a short time. In order to speed up the evaluation process, the following method has been adopted.

The evaluation scale is divided into two halves: the top half is labeled "mastery," and the bottom half is labeled "non-mastery." The three scores in each of the halves then represent high, medium, or low levels of mastery or non-mastery. Bearing in mind all of the writing traits to be considered, a test reader first decides whether the essay shows, overall, some kind of mastery or some kind of non-mastery. This is a yes or no decision. Then, having made that decision, the evaluator decides whether the level of mastery or non-mastery is high, medium, or low. If the reader decides that the test shows low mastery (or just barely "yes"), he or she gives it an overall score of 4. For medium mastery, the score is 5, and for high mastery the score is 6. In the same way, essays demonstrating high non-mastery (or just barely "no") are assigned a 3. For medium non-mastery the score is 2, and for low non-mastery the score is 1.

The second reason for not actually marking papers is that such marks would inevitably prejudice the second reader. All essays are evaluated by two scorers in a double blind reading: that is, the two readers do not know each other's score or each other's identity. Nor do readers know who wrote the essay. In this way, students are guaranteed that their papers truly have been evaluated impartially. Because test readers have been carefully trained, the two readers will almost always give an essay the same score or touching scores (e.g., a 3 and a 4 are "touching"). When the readers do disagree by more than one score (e.g., a 3 and a 5), a third reader will score the essay and make a final determination of the score to be assigned to the paper.