Standards for Holistic Evaluation

Holistic evaluation is a method of scoring a piece of writing for its overall quality. Readers evaluate the work as a whole while also considering key elements of writing: focus, organization, supporting details, and conventions or mechanics.

Focus
The focus is the central topic of the piece. The writer must present a clear and consistent focus without extraneous information.

Organization
The organization of a piece is its structure. Evaluators look for a clear beginning, middle, and end and for logical connections between ideas.

Supporting Details
Supporting details are the materials used to develop a work’s focus. Evaluators examine the appropriateness and expressiveness of the details used to explain, clarify, and define.

Conventions
The writer must follow the conventions of grammar, usage, and mechanics—including punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and variation and correctness in word choice and sentence structure.

The Rating Scale
You may begin holistic assessment by thinking in terms of the strong, average, and weak characteristics of pieces of writing. Then, if you wish, you may use a point scale and assign scores to provide more focused feedback. You may find the following six-point scale useful.

Strong
6 points
A paper worth six points has a clear and consistent focus and is organized in a logical pattern. The writer holds to the method of organization throughout, uses transitions to connect ideas, and provides a clear beginning, middle, and end. Supporting details are specific, concrete, and effectively expressed, showing a mature grasp of language. Sentences are complete, except when fragments are used purposely, and sentence structure is varied. Mechanics, usage, and spelling are correct.

5 points
Also a strong piece, the five-point paper has the qualities of a 6-point paper but with a few lapses in organization. Although the paper has a sense of wholeness, supporting details may lack precision in word choice. Sentences are varied, and mechanics, usage, and spelling are generally correct.

Average
4 points
The focus of this paper is generally clear, but some unrelated material may be included. An organizational pattern is present, but relationships between ideas are occasionally difficult to understand. The supporting details sometimes fail to develop the ideas. The writer makes some errors in mechanics, usage, and spelling, but the sentences are generally complete and varied.

3 points
This average paper also has a generally clear focus but with more extraneous material. The writer has attempted to organize the piece, but the connections between some of the ideas are difficult to understand. The supporting details do not adequately develop the piece. Commonly used words are spelled correctly. Sentence structure shows little variety.

Weak
2 points
The writer does address the topic but also includes extraneous or loosely related material. There is little evidence of an organizational structure, and the supporting details are illogical and inadequate. Word choice is limited, and gross errors in mechanics, usage, and spelling occur.

1 point
This very weak paper only minimally addresses the topic. There is almost no evidence of organization, and supporting details are few and not expressed clearly. Numerous errors in sentence structure and usage block communication, and gross errors in mechanics and spelling are evident throughout.

Unscorable
An unscorable paper is one that is unrelated to the topic, is simply a rewording of the prompt, contains too little writing to be evaluated, is written in a foreign language, is illegible, or is plagiarized.