

# Writing Assessment Handbook

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**California Assessment  
Program**

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## **Grade Eight**

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# Report of Information

(Originally written for middle school teachers and students.)

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The writer's main task in preparing a report of information is to convey information accurately and effectively so as to (1) increase readers' knowledge of a subject; (2) help readers better understand a procedure or process; or (3) help to enhance readers' comprehension of a concept or idea. Report of information... is a carefully organized recounting of facts about a specific subject; the skills necessary to accomplish this task are related to skills used in several other types of informational writing, notably reporting the problem in *problem solution* and presenting a scene in *observational writing*.

## Importance of Reports of Information

To complete a report of information, the writer must gather, organize, and report useful information in a clearly organized manner.... Reports of information are regularly assigned to students in class as part of I-Search papers and oral and written reports. (I-Search papers result when a person conducts a search to find out something he or she needs to know for his or her own life and writes the story of his or her adventure.)

Outside the school setting, reports of information appear regularly in newspapers, magazines, public speeches, interviews, product manuals, television and radio programming, and personal or business letters. Such reports of information involve such things as a comparison of products (brands of skateboards, shampoos, backpacking gear), services (motorcycle repairs, fast-food restaurants), or techniques (methods of styling hair, cooking food, or surfing). In addition, students frequently use reports of information to provide written or oral directions for making something or for getting to an unfamiliar location.

## Characteristics of a Report of Information

Writers who report information establish themselves as authorities on their subjects by identifying the needs of their audience and then carefully selecting, describing, and ordering the appropriate facts and details. The primary purpose in writing the report is to convey information rather than to validate opinions, argue in favor of a specific viewpoint, or persuade readers to make a decision. In a report of information, the writer:

- Speaks with an authoritative voice
- Organizes selected information
- Develops a controlling idea
- Elaborates information with supporting explanations, facts, or details (organization)

## Voice

In a report of information the writer presents information clearly and conveys a sense of authority about the subject. By knowing both the subject of the essay and the audience for whom the essay is written, the writer expresses his or her commitment to sharing information through effective use of language.

**Organization**

The organization of a report of information depends on the content and the writer's purpose. The writer's goal is to organize the information so that readers can follow the essay easily and understand and remember the key points. Organization in the best essays will appear to be almost inevitable, arising naturally from the writer's carefully focused intent.

**Controlling Idea**

The controlling idea is the writer's primary concern and determines the writer's choice of points for elaboration. The controlling idea may be either directly stated or implied; however, the idea will be clear to the careful reader. The writer often uses the controlling idea to convey his or her point of view or attitude toward the topic of the essay. In some reports of information, however, the writer will attempt to maintain an objective stance.

**Elaborated Information**

The writers of the most successful reports of information rely on a variety of strategies, including elaborating and providing carefully selected examples, facts, and details. Strategies used by eighth-grade writers for elaborating information include the following:

- Listing or describing activities
- Differentiating, naming, and describing parts
- Narrating a personal anecdote
- Narrating the process of making, using, or participating in an activity
- Reporting the history of a subject
- Explaining benefits
- Comparing and contrasting subjects
- Imagining a scenario
- Creating images and analogies
- Narrating the writer's history of involvement with the topic
- Exploring motives for interest
- Outlining the requirements for knowing or participating in an activity

# Rhetorical Effectiveness Scoring Guide for Report of Information

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Writers must satisfy special demands when they prepare reports of information. They must present themselves as authorities on a subject and impress readers -with their knowledge and understanding. They must select and present enough specific details to characterize their subject for their readers. They must quickly orient readers to a subject, help keep them on track with a coherent report, and end the essay in a satisfying manner. In the best reports of information, writers express their involvement with the subject and commitment to sharing it with readers. They develop their report around a single theme that they use to provide coherence to their essay.

In reporting information, writers are not concerned with persuading readers to take action, justifying judgments or opinions or presenting autobiographical disclosures. Instead, they are concerned with informing readers. Reports of information may be found in textbooks, research reports, technical manuals, newspapers, letters, and essays about familiar activities and places. The prompts for report of information ask eighth-grade students to write about their schools, communities, and interests.

Writers organize reports of information around a theme that they use to integrate the information included in the report. They classify and carefully arrange their information so their readers can easily read and understand the report. They support main points and elaborate their ideas with specific facts and concrete examples.

## **Score Point 6-Exceptional Achievement**

**Voice.** The writer reports the subject in an interesting and clear manner. The writer establishes himself or herself as an authority on the subject. We hear a lively voice.

**Information.** The writer includes specific information in the report-facts, details, examples, anecdotes, explanations, and definitions. By identifying objects carefully and accurately, the writer indicates to readers that he or she is an authority on the subject. The writer presents specific and concrete information relevant to the subject and the point the writer is making.

Depending on the writing situation, writers may choose several of the following strategies to present information (examples are taken from eighth-grade students' test papers):

- Using a personal anecdote (telling about a fishing trip as a way of sharing information about fishing)
- Creating a scenario (an imaginary baseball game as a way of informing readers about the agonies and uncertainties of baseball)
- Differentiating, naming, and describing the parts of a subject (administrators, teachers, goals, groups, activities at a school; different types of fins on a surfboard)
- Demonstrating a claim or assertion (describing how students carelessly drop trash around a school)

- Listing or describing activities associated with a subject (swimming, hiking, biking, walking, sight-seeing in a town; reading, writing, working on projects, participating in group work, socializing in a class; riding, racing, washing, currying, spraying, feeding a horse)
- Comparing or contrasting subjects as a way of generating information about a subject (contrasting a private and a public school)
- Telling the history of a subject (what the earliest surfboards were like, how a school or a team began)
- Narrating the process of making, using, or participating in an activity (waxing a surfboard, playing in a football game)
- Creating images or analogies (a surfboard leash is like a dog leash)
- Naming and providing details about the features of a subject (trout, salmon, shad; American River, Nimbus Dam, Sacramento River, a surfboard leash is a solid line of plastic, about as thick as a pencil, with a velcro strap at the end)
- Explaining the benefits of a subject ("When I play the piano, all of my frustrations disappear. . ." "Football takes your mind off things. . .")
- Narrating the history of involvement with the subject ("When I first started playing the piano I hated it...; I quit...but then...")
- Exploring motives for interest in a subject ("I will keep on playing piano (softball, football, etc.) because it is so enjoyable.")
- Describing the joy of victory, the agony of defeat ("I love to tie flies...")
- Outlining the requirements for knowing about or participating in a subject (passing a three-page test to get into a journalism class)

The writers of the best essays incorporate several strategies in their essays.

*Controlling Idea.* In addition to using the essay to inform us about a subject, the writer of a six-point essay has stated or clearly implied a controlling idea. When we know the writer's controlling idea, we know the writer's attitude toward the subject. The writer uses the controlling idea to provide coherence and a focus to the essay.

*Organization.* A six-point essay is well organized. It begins with helpful orientations to the subject or a context for reading about it. It is coherent and clearly patterned. The writer creates this pattern by focusing on components of the subject and developing one or more components with specific information. The writer ends the essay in a satisfactory manner.

### **Score Point 5-Cornmendable Achievement**

*Voice.* Like the writer of a six-point essay, this writer clearly reports information about the subject in an interesting manner. We hear an authoritative voice in the essay.

*Information.* The writer gives us useful information, but not as much information as the writer of a six-point essay. This information is relevant to the subject and includes facts, details, and examples.

*Controlling Idea.* The writer of a five-point essay has stated a controlling idea and maintains a consistent attitude toward the subject.

*Organization.* Like a six-point essay, a five-point essay is well organized. The writer begins and ends the essay effectively but may not have established as clear a pattern as the writer of a six-point essay and may not display the same degree of control.

#### **Score Point 4-Adequate Achievement**

*Voice.* The writer reports the subject eagerly, but without the authority of the writer of a five-point essay.

*Information.* The writer gives us considerable information, sometimes as much information as the writer of a five-point or six-point essay. However, some information may not be well integrated into the essay and may be general rather than specific or concrete. The writer has arranged and grouped the information but may have as carefully or consciously selected the information as the writer of a five-point or six-point essay.

*Controlling Idea.* The writer of a four-point essay states a controlling idea and in general uses the idea to provide consistency. However, the writer's attitude toward the subject may waver.

*Organization.* In a four-point essay, the writer reveals a plan, but the essay may not be well organized. The essay may have an effective beginning but may end hurriedly and clumsily. The writer of some four-point essays give up control or momentum to respond to the suggestions in the prompt. (An essay can earn a four- or five-point score without paragraph boundaries. Decide whether the essay has some coherence and direction.)

#### **Score Point 3-Some Evidence of Achievement**

*Voice.* The writer of a three-point essay responds to the prompt. The writer may seem interested in informing readers and may communicate the sort of eager personal voice we hear in a four-point or five-point essay. However, the writer may focus on opinion or evaluation rather than on information.

*Information.* A three-point essay generally presents less information than a four-point essay. The writer may rely more on generalization, opinion, or evaluation than on specific information and may not provide enough information to characterize the subject. The writer may only list titles, names, or places without any elaboration or include personal information not relevant to the point or helpful to readers who want to understand the subject.

*Controlling Idea.* The writer may present a simple statement of subject without a controlling idea.

*Organization.* A three-point essay stays on topic but it may be weakly organized. It may circle back to an idea as an afterthought. It may seem added on, sentence by sentence, but it will not digress too far. It may just follow an order of presentation suggested by the prompt.

**Score Point 2-Limited Evidence of Achievement**

*Voice.* The writer of a two-point essay may show some awareness of readers and may even reveal a lively voice does not seem to understand how to report information. Rarely will the writer use specific detail to develop a point. The essay will usually be brief, but some may be as long as three-point or four-point essays without the specific detail.

*Controlling Idea.* The essay may be no more than a simple statement of subject.

*Organization.* Organization may be shaky. We may not be sure where the writer is going, though the essay will usually be readable. Writer sometimes digresses and shows little sense of pointed progression. May rely on suggestions in the prompt for organization.

**Score Point 1-Minimal Evidence of Achievement**

On topic. The writer has a subject.

*Voice.* Will usually reveal little sense of voice or awareness of readers.

*Information.* Unlike a two-point essay, a one point essay does not deliver much information. It contains few points or ideas and rarely includes details. The writer may seem to be giving information but actually is evaluating or asserting opinions.

*Controlling Idea.* May be no more than a simple statement of subject.

*Organization.* The essay is badly organized and sometimes incoherent. Brief.

**Score Point 0-Inappropriate Response**

Off topic