

# The AzMERIT Writing Rubric

Grades 6-11 Informative

## Introduction

The AzMERIT Writing Rubric outlines the expectations for students on the AzMERIT Writing Task. The Rubric identifies the qualities a student response should have to achieve a particular score point. Understanding the expectations of the AzMERIT Writing Rubric will help educators better prepare students for the AzMERIT assessment.

### Objectives:



#### Key Elements

Identifying the essential aspects of the rubric



#### Standards Alignment

Understanding the connection between the standards and rubric.



#### Articulation

Identifying how the rubric is used to differentiate scores.



#### Resources

More AzMERIT help for teachers and students.

This document is for the [Grades 6-11 Informative rubric](#). This information can easily be applied to the Grades 6-11 Argumentative rubric. They are very similar. In addition, since the rubrics are banded by grade level, it is important to point out that the expectations for each grade level are still different. Student expectations are guided by the standards at each grade level.

Here are some guidelines to keep in mind while reading the rubric.

- The rubric is not a checklist—a response does not have to contain all the characteristics of a score point to achieve that score point.
- The rubric is not all-encompassing—there are many facets to becoming a great writer. The AzMERIT rubric does not contain them all.
- The rubric is based on the [Arizona English Language Arts Standards](#)—the standards guide the expectations of the rubric.
- The rubric requires some level of subjectivity—there is no secret formula for evaluating writing based on the rubric.
- The “most likely” score—a paper will receive the score that it most represents. If the paper is more like a 3 than a 4, then it will be a 3.



Find more resources, including the test blueprint, sample items, and a webinar of this document at [www.azed.gov/assessment/azmerit](http://www.azed.gov/assessment/azmerit).

The first step in understanding the rubric is identifying the key elements. These elements, which exhibit quality writing, are present throughout the different score points in varying degrees. It is easiest to first identify these elements by looking at one score point on the rubric.

The first domain on the rubric is Purpose, Focus, and Organization. By focusing on just the 4-point score level, it's easy to see there are **eight** key elements. They are highlighted in red italics.

### Score Point 4 of the rubric

### Key Elements

Score	4
Purpose, Focus, and Organization	<p>The response is fully sustained and consistently <i>focused within the purpose, audience, and task</i>; and it has a clear <i>controlling idea</i> and effective <i>organizational structure</i> creating coherence and completeness. The response includes most of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strongly <i>maintained controlling idea</i> with little or no loosely related material</li> <li>• Skillful use of a variety of <i>transitional strategies</i> to clarify the relationships between and among ideas</li> <li>• Logical <i>progression of ideas</i> from beginning to end with a satisfying <i>introduction and conclusion</i></li> <li>• Appropriate <i>style</i> and objective <i>tone</i> established and maintained</li> </ul>

1. Focus within purpose, audience, and task
2. Controlling idea
3. Organizational structure
4. Maintained controlling idea (loose material)
5. Transitional strategies
6. Progression of ideas
7. Introduction and conclusion
8. Style and tone

Key Elements	Score Point 4
Focus within purpose, audience, and task	Fully sustained and consistently focused within the purpose, audience, and task
Controlling idea	Clear controlling idea
Organizational structure	Effective organizational structure creating coherence and completeness
Maintained controlling idea (loose material)	Strongly maintained controlling idea
Transitional Strategies	Skillful use of a variety of transitional strategies
Progression of ideas	Logical progression of ideas
Introduction and conclusion	Satisfying introduction and conclusion
Style and tone	Appropriate, objective, established, maintained

Quickly returning to the idea of the standards guiding the rubric, this table displays each of the elements of the rubric and a standard that applies directly to it. There are many other standards which connect to form each element on the rubric, this chart simply verifies that the basis for the rubric is the standards.

Key Elements	Standards (from Grade 6)
Focus within purpose, audience, and task	7.W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
Controlling idea	7.W.2
Organizational structure	7.W.2 a Introduce a topic clearly, previewing what is to follow; organize ideas, concepts, and information, using strategies such as definition, classification, comparison/contrast, and cause/effect; include formatting (e.g. headings), graphics (e.g. charts, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.
Maintained controlling idea (loose material)	7.W.2 b Develop the topic with relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.
Transitional Strategies	7.W.2 c Use appropriate transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.
Progression of ideas	7.W.2 a
Introduction and conclusion	7.W.2 f Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented.
Style and tone	7.W.2 e Establish and maintain a formal style.
All	<p>7.W.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Apply grade 7 Reading standards to literature.</li> <li>b. Apply grade 7 Reading standards to informational text and nonfiction.</li> </ul>

The differentiation among the characteristics of the score point levels is the key aspect of the rubric. This horizontal articulation allows readers to evaluate a response and score it accordingly on the rubric. Understanding what differentiates a score point 4 from a score point 3 and so on will help educators define student expectations for AzMERIT.

The differentiation between the score point 4 and the score point 3 are similar to the types of differences contained throughout the rubric as the score point goes lower. The changes are identified by the qualifiers which are used to describe the key elements.

Focusing on the highest two score points in the domain, it is easy to see the same seven elements contained within the score points. The seven key elements of the domain are in *red italics*. The differentiation occurs with the underlined words which are used to describe how well the student performs on that key element.

	<u>Key Elements in Score Point 4</u>	<u>Key Elements in Score Point 3</u>
Score	4	3
Purpose, Focus, and Organization	<p>The response is <u>fully</u> sustained and consistently <i>focused within the purpose, audience, and task</i>; and it has a <u>clear</u> <i>controlling idea</i> and <u>effective</u> <i>organizational structure</i> creating <u>coherence</u> and <u>completeness</u>. The response includes most of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Strongly</u> <i>maintained controlling idea</i> with <u>little or no loosely related material</u></li> <li>• <u>Skillful</u> use of a <u>variety</u> of <i>transitional strategies</i> to clarify the relationships between and among ideas</li> <li>• <u>Logical</u> <i>progression of ideas</i> from beginning to end with a <u>satisfying</u> <i>introduction and conclusion</i></li> <li>• <u>Appropriate</u> <i>style</i> and <u>objective</u> <i>tone</i> <u>established and maintained</u></li> </ul>	<p>The response is <u>adequately</u> sustained and generally <i>focused within the purpose, audience, and task</i>; and it has a <u>clear</u> <i>controlling idea</i> and <u>evident</u> <i>organizational structure</i> with a <u>sense of completeness</u>. The response includes most of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Maintained</u> <i>controlling idea</i>, though <u>some loosely related</u> material may be present</li> <li>• <u>Adequate</u> use of a <u>variety</u> of <i>transitional strategies</i> to clarify the relationships between and among ideas</li> <li>• <u>Adequate</u> <i>progression of ideas</i> from beginning to end with a <u>sufficient</u> <i>introduction and conclusion</i></li> <li>• <u>Appropriate</u> <i>style</i> and <u>objective</u> <i>tone</i> <u>established</u></li> </ul>

This table might help display these differences between the two score points better.

Key Elements	Score Point 4	Score Point 3
Focus within purpose, audience and task	Fully sustained and consistently focused within the purpose, audience, and task	<u>adequately</u> sustained and <u>generally</u> focused within the purpose, audience, and task
Controlling idea	Clear controlling idea	a clear controlling idea
Organizational structure	Effective organizational structure creating coherence and completeness	<u>evident</u> organizational structure with a <u>sense of completeness</u> .
Maintained controlling idea (loose material).	Strongly maintained controlling idea	<u>Maintained</u> controlling idea, though <u>some loosely related</u>
Transitional Strategies	Skillful use of a variety of transitional strategies	<u>Adequate</u> use of a variety of transitional strategies
Progression of ideas	Logical progression of ideas	<u>Adequate</u> progression of ideas from beginning to end
Introduction and conclusion	Satisfying introduction and conclusion	with a <u>sufficient</u> introduction and conclusion
Style and tone	Appropriate, objective, established, maintained.	Appropriate, objective, established

Moving on to the Evidence and Elaboration domain, we'll begin in the same manner, by identifying the key elements of the domain. These key elements will be consistent throughout the domain and highlight the different expectations for each score point.

By focusing on just the 4-point score level, it's easy to see there are nine key elements in the Evidence and Elaboration domain. They are highlighted in red italics.

### Score Point 4 of the rubric

### KeyElements

Score	4	
Evidence and Elaboration	<p>The response provides thorough and convincing <i>support</i>, citing <i>evidence</i> for the controlling idea or main idea that includes the effective use of <i>sources</i>, facts, and details. The response includes most of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smoothly <i>integrated</i>, thorough, and relevant <i>evidence</i>, including precise <i>references to sources</i></li> <li>• Effective use of a variety of <i>elaborative techniques</i> (including but not limited to definitions, quotations, and examples), demonstrating an understanding of the topic and text</li> <li>• Clear and effective <i>expression of ideas</i>, using precise <i>language</i></li> <li>• Academic and domain-specific <i>vocabulary</i> clearly appropriate for the audience and purpose</li> <li>• Varied <i>sentence structure</i>, demonstrating language facility</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Support/Evidence</li> <li>2. Use of sources</li> <li>3. Evidence integration</li> <li>4. Reference to sources</li> <li>5. Elaborative techniques</li> <li>6. Expression of ideas</li> <li>7. Language</li> <li>8. Vocabulary</li> <li>9. Sentence structure</li> </ol>



Key Elements	Score Point 4
Support/Evidence	thorough and convincing support/citing evidence
Use of sources	effective use of sources
Evidence integration	smoothly integrated, thorough, and relevant evidence
Reference to sources	precise references to sources
Elaborative techniques	effective use of a variety of elaborative techniques
Expression of ideas	clear and effective expression of ideas
Language	precise language
Vocabulary	academic and domain-specific vocabulary clearly appropriate for the audience and purpose
Sentence structure	varied sentence structure

Quickly returning to the idea of the standards guiding the rubric, this table displays each of the elements of the rubric and a standard that applies directly to it. There are many other standards which connect to form each element on the rubric, this chart simply verifies that the basis for the rubric is the standards.

Key Elements	Standards
Support/Evidence	9-10.W.2 b Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.
Use of sources	9-10.RI.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
Evidence integration	9-10.W.2 a Introduce a topic; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions; include formatting (e.g. headings), graphics (e.g. figures, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.
Reference to sources	9-10.RI.1
Elaborative techniques	9-10.W.2 b
Expression of ideas	9-10.RI.9 Analyze seminal/primary documents of historical and literary significance, including how they address related themes and concepts.
Language	9-10.L.5 Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
Vocabulary	9-10.L.5
Sentence structure	9-10.L.3 Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.
All	9-10.W.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.  a. Apply grades 9-10 Reading standards to literature. b. Apply grades 9-10 Reading standards to informational text and nonfiction.

Focusing on the highest two score points in the domain, it is easy to see the same nine elements contained within the score points. The nine key elements of the domain are in *red italics*. The differentiation occurs with the underlined words which are used to describe how well the student performs on that key element.

### Key Elements in Score Point 4

### Key Elements in Score Point 3

Score	4	3
Evidence and Elaboration	<p>The response provides <u>thorough and convincing</u> <i>support</i>, <u>citing</u> <i>evidence</i> for the controlling idea or main idea that includes the <u>effective</u> <i>use of sources</i>, facts, and details. The response includes most of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Smoothly</u> <i>integrated</i>, <u>thorough</u>, and <u>relevant</u> <i>evidence</i>, including <u>precise</u> <i>references to sources</i></li> <li>• <u>Effective</u> use of a <u>variety</u> of <i>elaborative techniques</i> (including but not limited to definitions, quotations, and examples), demonstrating an understanding of the topic and text</li> <li>• <u>Clear and effective</u> <i>expression of ideas</i>, using <u>precise</u> <i>language</i></li> <li>• <u>Academic and domain-specific</u> <i>vocabulary</i> <u>clearly</u> appropriate for the audience and purpose</li> <li>• <u>Varied</u> <i>sentence structure</i>, demonstrating language facility</li> </ul>	<p>The response provides <u>adequate</u> <i>support</i>, <u>citing</u> <i>evidence</i> for the controlling idea or main idea that <u>includes</u> the <i>use of sources</i>, facts, and details. The response includes most of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Generally</u> <i>integrated</i> and <u>relevant</u> <i>evidence</i> from sources, though <i>references</i> may <u>be general or imprecise</u></li> <li>• <u>Adequate</u> use of <u>some</u> <i>elaborative techniques</i></li> <li>• <u>Adequate</u> <i>expression of ideas</i>, employing a <u>mix</u> of precise and general <i>language</i></li> <li>• <u>Domain-specific</u> <i>vocabulary</i> <u>generally</u> appropriate for the audience and purpose</li> <li>• <u>Some variation</u> in <i>sentence structure</i></li> </ul>

This table might help display these differences between the two score points better.

Elements	Score Point 4	Score Point 3
Support/Evidence	thorough and convincing <i>support/citing evidence</i>	<u>adequate</u> support, <u>citing</u> evidence
Use of sources	effective use of <i>sources</i>	<u>includes</u> the use of sources
Evidence integration	Smoothly <i>integrated</i> , thorough, and relevant <i>evidence</i>	<u>Generally</u> integrated and <u>relevant</u> evidence
Reference to sources	precise <i>references to sources</i>	references may <u>be general or imprecise</u>
Elaborative techniques	Effective use of a variety of <i>elaborative techniques</i>	<u>Adequate</u> use of <u>some</u> elaborative techniques
Expression of ideas	Clear and effective <i>expression of ideas</i>	<u>Adequate</u> expression of ideas
Language	precise <i>language</i>	a <u>mix</u> of precise and general language
Vocabulary	Academic and domain-specific <i>vocabulary</i> clearly appropriate for the audience and purpose	<u>Domain-specific</u> vocabulary <u>generally</u> appropriate
Sentence structure	Varied <i>sentence structure</i>	<u>Some variation</u> in sentence structure

In the Conventions domain the highest score point is 2 points. This domain is driven by the standards too but it is presented more holistically. The key question is, “Do the errors in conventions obscure the meaning?”.

Here is how errors impact the meaning of the paper at each score point level in Conventions.

Errors do not obscure meaning

Errors may obscure meaning

Errors “often” obscure meaning

2	1	0
<p>The response demonstrates an adequate command of basic conventions. The response may include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some minor errors in usage but no patterns of errors</li> <li>• Adequate use of punctuation, capitalization, sentence formation, and spelling</li> </ul>	<p>The response demonstrates a partial command of basic conventions. The response may include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Various errors in usage</li> <li>• Inconsistent use of correct punctuation, capitalization, sentence formation, and spelling</li> </ul>	<p>The response demonstrates a lack of command of conventions, with frequent and severe errors often obscuring meaning.</p>

{ Focusing on grade-level standards for writing and ensuring student responses do not have a pattern of errors which impact the meaning of the response will allow students to achieve the top score points in the Conventions domain. }

Using the process outlined in this document, educators can identify the key elements of the AzMERIT Writing Rubric and begin to analyze the different aspects of a student response.

As a reminder, the best prep for AzMERIT is always teaching the Standards. Classroom instruction which focuses on the Arizona English Language Arts Standards will always align with the goals of AzMERIT.

This document is the second in a series on AzMERIT Writing.

To see the first document and other resources visit [www.azed.gov/assessment/azmerit/](http://www.azed.gov/assessment/azmerit/) and click on “Resources for Teachers and Students”

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