

The AzMERIT Writing Rubric

Grades 3-5 Opinion



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 3-5 Opinion rubric](#). This information can easily be applied to the Grade 3-5 Informative 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.

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 seven 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 clearly stated <i>opinion</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"> • Strongly <i>maintained opinion</i> with little or no loosely related material • Skillful use of a variety of <i>transitional strategies</i> to clarify the relationships between and among ideas • Logical <i>progression of ideas</i> from beginning to end with a satisfying <i>introduction and conclusion</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Focus within purpose, audience, and task 2. Opinion 3. Organizational structure 4. Maintained opinion (loose material) 5. Transitional strategies 6. Progression of ideas 7. Introduction and conclusion

Key Elements	Score Point 4
Focus within purpose, audience, and task	Fully sustained and consistently focused within the purpose, audience, and task
Opinion	Clearly stated opinion
Organizational structure	Effective organizational structure creating coherence and completeness
Maintained opinion (loose material)	Strongly maintained opinion
Transitional Strategies	Skillful use of a variety of transitional strategies
Progression of ideas	Logical progression of ideas
Introduction and conclusion	Satisfying introduction and conclusion

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
Focus within purpose, audience, and task	3.W.1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, using reasons to support one's point of view.
Opinion	3.W.1 a Introduce the topic or text, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure that lists reasons.
Organizational structure	3.W.1 a Introduce the topic or text, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure that lists reasons.
Maintained opinion (loose material)	3.W.1 b Provide reasons that support the opinion.
Transitional Strategies	3.W.1 c Use linking words and phrases (e.g. because, therefore, since, for example) to connect opinion and reasons.
Progression of ideas	3.W.1 c Use linking words and phrases (e.g. because, therefore, since, for example) to connect opinion and reasons.
Introduction and conclusion	3.W.1 d Provide a concluding statement or section.

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 underlined. The differentiation occurs with the words in *red italics* 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
Purpose, Focus, and Organization	<p>The response is fully sustained and <i>consistently</i> <u>focused within the purpose, audience, and task</u>; and it has a <i>clearly stated</i> <u>opinion</u> and <i>effective</i> <u>organizational structure</u> creating coherence and completeness. The response includes most of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Strongly</i> <u>maintained opinion</u> with <i>little or no</i> loosely related material • <i>Skillful</i> use of a <i>variety</i> of <u>transitional strategies</u> to clarify the relationships between and among ideas • <i>Logical</i> <u>progression of ideas</u> from beginning to end with a <i>satisfying</i> <u>introduction and conclusion</u> 	<p>The response is adequately sustained and <i>generally</i> <u>focused within the purpose, audience, and task</u>; and it <i>has</i> an <u>opinion</u> and <i>evident</i> <u>organizational structure</u> with a sense of completeness. The response includes most of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A</i> <u>maintained opinion</u>, though <i>some</i> <i>loosely</i> related material may be present • <i>Adequate</i> use of <u>transitional strategies</u> with some variety to clarify the relationships between and among ideas • <i>Adequate</i> <u>progression of ideas</u> from beginning to end with a <i>sufficient</i> <u>introduction and conclusion</u>

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

Elements	Score Point 4	Score Point 3
Focus within purpose, audience and task	Fully sustained and consistently focused within the purpose, audience, and task	Adequately sustained and generally focused within the purpose, audience, and task
Opinion.	Clearly stated opinion	It has an opinion
Organizational structure	Effective organizational structure creating coherence and completeness	Evident organizational structure with a sense of completeness.
Maintained opinion (loose material)	Strongly maintained opinion	A maintained opinion,
Transitional Strategies	Skillful use of a variety of transitional strategies	Adequate use of transitional strategies
Progression of ideas	Logical progression of ideas	Adequate progression of ideas
Introduction and conclusion	Satisfying introduction and conclusion	Sufficient introduction and conclusion

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/evidence</i> for the writer's opinion that includes the effective <i>use of sources, facts, and details</i>. The response includes most of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant <i>evidence integrated</i> smoothly and thoroughly with <i>references to sources</i> • Effective use of a variety of <i>elaborative techniques</i>, demonstrating understanding of the topic and text • Clear and effective <i>expression of ideas</i>, using precise <i>language</i> • Academic and domain-specific <i>vocabulary</i> clearly appropriate for the audience and purpose • Varied <i>sentence structure</i>, demonstrating language facility 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support/Evidence 2. Use of sources 3. Evidence integration 4. Reference to sources 5. Elaborative techniques 6. Expression of ideas 7. Language 8. Vocabulary 9. Sentence structure

Key Elements	Score Point 4
Support/Evidence	provides thorough and convincing support/evidence
Use of sources	effective use of sources, facts, and details
Evidence integration	relevant evidence integrated smoothly and thoroughly
Reference to sources	with 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	5.RI.9 Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.
Use of sources	5.RI.1 Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
Evidence integration	5.RI.1
Reference to sources	5.RI.1
Elaborative techniques	5.L.1 f Write and organize one or more paragraphs that contain: a topic sentence, supporting details, and a conclusion that is appropriate to the writing task.
Expression of ideas	5.L.1 f
Language	5.L.3 Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening. a. Expand, combine, and reduce sentences for meaning, reader/listener interest and style.
Vocabulary	5.L.6 Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, including those that signal contrast, addition, and other logical relationships (e.g. however, although, nevertheless, similarly, moreover, in addition).
Sentence structure	5.L.1 Demonstrate command of the conventions of Standard English grammar and usage when writing and speaking.
All	5.W.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research. a. Apply grade 5 Reading standards to literature. b. Apply grade 4 Reading standards to informational texts.

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 underlined. The differentiation occurs with the words in *red italics* 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 <i>thorough and convincing</i> <u>support/evidence</u> for the writer's opinion that includes the <i>effective use of sources</i>, facts, and details. The response includes most of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Relevant</i> <u>evidence integrated smoothly and thoroughly</u> with <u>references to sources</u> • <i>Effective use of a variety</i> of <u>elaborative techniques</u>, demonstrating understanding of the topic and text • <i>Clear and effective</i> <u>expression of ideas</u>, using <i>precise</i> <u>language</u> • <i>Academic and domain-specific</i> <u>vocabulary</u> <i>clearly appropriate</i> for the audience and purpose • <i>Varied</i> <u>sentence structure</u>, demonstrating language facility 	<p>The response provides <i>adequate</i> <u>support/evidence</u> for the writer's opinion that includes <i>the use of sources</i>, facts, and details. The response includes most of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Generally</i> <u>integrated evidence</u> from sources, though <u>references</u> may be <i>general, imprecise, or inconsistent</i> • <i>Adequate use of some</i> <u>elaborative techniques</u> • <i>Adequate</i> <u>expression of ideas</u>, employing a <i>mix of precise and general</i> <u>language</u> • Domain-specific <u>vocabulary</u> <i>generally appropriate</i> for the audience and purpose • <i>Some variation</i> in <u>sentence structure</u>

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

Elements	Score Point 4	Score Point 3
Support/Evidence	provides thorough and convincing support/evidence	provides adequate support/evidence
Use of sources	effective use of sources, facts, and details	includes the use of sources
Evidence integration	relevant evidence integrated smoothly and thoroughly	Generally integrated evidence
Reference to sources	with references to sources	references may be general, imprecise, or inconsistent
Elaborative techniques	effective use of a variety of elaborative techniques	Adequate use of some elaborative techniques
Expression of ideas	clear and effective expression of ideas	Adequate expression of ideas
Language	precise language	mix of precise and general language
Vocabulary	Academic and domain-specific vocabulary clearly appropriate for the audience and purpose.	Domain-specific vocabulary generally appropriate for the audience and purpose
Sentence structure	varied sentence structure	Some variation 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

Score	2	1	0
Conventions	<p>The response demonstrates an adequate command of basic conventions. The response may include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some minor errors in usage but no patterns of errors • Adequate use of punctuation, capitalization, sentence formation, and spelling 	<p>The response demonstrates a partial command of basic conventions. The response may include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various errors in usage • Inconsistent use of correct punctuation, capitalization, sentence formation, and spelling 	<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/ and click on “Resources for Teachers and Students”.

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