

ILLINOIS CRITICAL THINKING ESSAY TEST  
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Illinois Critical Thinking Essay Test, Form A3-- Directions for Teachers  
by Marguerite Finken and Robert H. Ennis Version of 10/12/93

The day before the test: In order to give the students a preview of the essay test, read them the test question the day before the test is given. Allow about ten minutes to read and discuss the test question. Ask them to think about the question overnight and to talk to their friends and parents about the topic. Refrain from giving them hints other than those listed below. Tell them that their audience will be the readership of the local newspaper and that they should imagine that their essays will appear as guest editorials. Indicate the attached IGAP-like criteria. Here is the question:

Music videos (both rock and rap) are currently a subject of controversy. Some people, including parents and legislators in Washington, argue that videos presenting strong suggestions of sex or violence, for example, should be prohibited, or at least regulated by being labelled. Others, including some performers, argue that only parents should control the choices made by young viewers. Others argue that music videos should not be regulated at all.

Should the viewing of music videos by young people be regulated? If so, in what way? Write an essay in which you state and defend your position.

Ask your students to be sure to take into account how various groups of people would feel about this question. How might, for instance, parents, teens, interest groups, the video industry, musicians, and the government feel about it? Encourage student questions, views, and reasons on this day.

The day of the test: Pass out the test question and two sheets of paper (the first and second lined pages), all stapled together. Also pass out a sheet of scratch paper for planning. Have extra sheets of lined paper available. Go over the question and instructions together. Ask the students to fill out the top of the first lined page, and then to take ten minutes to plan their essays on the scratch paper. Tell them to jot down their position briefly and their reasons for holding this position. In other words, tell them to use the ten minutes to come up with a written plan for their response. Finally, tell them that their essays should include four parts, as stated in their directions: 1) a statement of their position, including its clarification; 2) their reasons for taking the position, taking into account opposing points of view; 3) a summary of their position; and 4) a title. Remind them of their audience.

After ten more minutes, tell them to start writing their responses. They should be given the rest of the period (about thirty minutes).

TEST QUESTION

Version of 10/12/93

Illinois Critical Thinking Essay Test, Form A3

by Marguerite Finken and Robert H. Ennis

Directions for Students

Please read the following question and consider it carefully. Imagine that you are writing a guest editorial for your local newspaper on this topic. Many adults will be reading it.

**Music videos (both rock and rap) are currently a subject of controversy. Some people, including parents and legislators in Washington, argue that videos presenting strong suggestions of sex or violence, for example, should be prohibited, or at least regulated by being labelled. Others, including some performers, argue that only parents should control the choices made by young viewers. Others argue that music videos should not be regulated at all.**

**Should the viewing of music videos by young people be regulated? If so, in what way? Write an essay in which you state and defend your position.**

The first ten minutes:

Spend about ten minutes reading and thinking about this question. On scratch paper, jot down your position and your reasons for taking this position. In other words, decide how you will organize your essay. Please plan to do these things:

- 1) state and clarify your position in the first paragraph;
- 2) give your reasons for taking this position in the following paragraphs, taking into account opposing points of view;
- 3) summarize your position in the concluding paragraph; and
- 4) give your essay a title.

After the ten minutes are up:

Begin writing your essay. Please do the things for which you were just asked to plan. You will have the rest of the period (about thirty minutes) to finish your essay. Write on one side of the page only. If you need extra paper, ask for it.

## Page One

Birth: (Mo)\_\_\_\_\_Yr)\_\_\_\_\_

TITLE:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines, typical of notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

5

# **GUIDELINES FOR SCORING ILLINOIS CRITICAL THINKING ESSAY TESTS**

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July 23, 1992

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## GUIDELINES FOR SCORING ILLINOIS CRITICAL THINKING ESSAY TESTS

### Types of Writing Assignments

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The assignments are of two types: the position paper in which students develop one side of an argument while considering all of the arguments and the proposal paper in which students discuss a problem and develop and defend a solution. The prospective audience should be identified.  
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### Features of the Guide

#### Text-Level Features:

**\*Focus** - the clarity with which a paper presents and maintains a clear main idea, point of view, theme, or unifying event.

**\*Supporting Reasons** - the degree to which the supporting reasons and subpoints are specific, accurate, and credible.

**\*Reasoning** - the degree to which the conclusion is supported by the reasons and the degree to which alternative viewpoints are argued against.

**\*Organization** - the clarity of the logical flow of ideas and the explicitness of the test structure or plan.

#### Sentence-Level Feature:

**\*Conventions** - use of standard written English.

#### Holistic Feature:

**\*Integration** - the evaluation of the paper based on a focused, global judgment of how effectively the paper as a whole uses basic features to address the assignment.

### ----- Scoring Procedure

Each of the six features is rated on a six-point scale. (Total scores can range anywhere from 6 to 36 points.) The numbers indicate the level of the paper's development. In general, the scores may be interpreted as follows:

1-3 indicates that the feature is absent or in the "developing" stages.

4-6 signals that feature is basically or well-developed.

Each feature is rated independently with the exception of the Integration score. Many essays will not fit exactly the listed criteria for each number score. In this event, choose the number that best characterizes the essay on that particular feature.  
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## FOCUS

The focus is more than a thesis statement and/or listing of subordinate points. This feature examines whether the subject/issue of the paper is clear and the position/opinion is explicitly announced in the opening and **maintained** throughout the paper. Multiple positions are focused only if there is an umbrella statement. In the opening of the paper, the writer must indicate the intent to support one or more position(s)/opinion(s) and preview major points of support. The paper will close with an effective conclusion. This assumes at least a forty-minute writing period. (Ignore titles on papers. They are not to be considered as a part of any feature.)

- 6
  - \*The subject/issue is clear.
  - \*The position(s)/opinion(s) are explicitly announced in the opening and maintained throughout the paper.
  - \*Major points of support are specifically previewed in the opening.
  - \*Paper must have a closing.
  - \*Opening and closing statements are related and express the focus clearly.
- 5
  - \*The subject/issue is clear.
  - \*The position(s)/opinion(s) are explicitly announced in the opening and maintained throughout the paper.
  - \*Major points of support are not explicitly previewed in the opening; rather they are announced through general statements, i.e., "for many reasons," "for three reasons."
  - \*Paper must have a closing.
  - \*Opening and closing statements are consistent with each other.
- 4
  - \*The subject/issue is clear.
  - \*The position(s)/opinion(s) are announced somewhere in the paper.
  - \*May be prompt-dependent (rely upon the reader's familiarity with the prompt, i.e., "I agree/disagree." "They should/should not.").
  - \*The announced position(s)/opinion(s) are maintained throughout the paper.
  - \*No attempt is made to delineate major points of support in the opening.
  - \*Opening and closing statements may or may not relate, but they must not contradict each other.
  - \*The paper may end abruptly, i.e., mid-sentence or without a closing statement.
- 3
  - \*The subject/issue is clear, but the position is not.
  - \*the position(s)/opinion(s) are not announced in the opening, may be prompt-dependent (rely upon the reader's familiarity with the prompt), and may rely upon reader's inference to identify position/opinion.
  - \*An attempt may be made in the opening to delineate major points of support; however, the writer may "overpromise and underdeliver" or underpromise and overdeliver."
  - \*Beginning and end may or may not relate and may contradict each other. The paper may end abruptly, i.e. mid-sentence or without a closing statement.
  - \*May have more than one position without a unifying statement (pros and cons).
- 2
  - \*The subject/issue is unclear/vague. More than one subject/issue may be addressed.
  - \*Position(s)/opinion(s) are very difficult to identify. The writer may include several position(s)/opinion(s) which are not explicitly connected with a unifying statement.
  - \*Opening and closing may contradict each other.
  - \*Random scattering of ideas; brainstorming.
- 1
  - \*Neither the subject/issue nor the position(s)/opinion(s) is clear.
  - \*No subject/issue is maintained.
  - \*There is insufficient writing to maintain a focus (one or two sentences).



## SUPPORTING REASONS

This feature focuses on the quality and detail of the reasons or subpoints. Supporting reasons are usually more specific than conclusions. The quality of support depends on its specificity, depth, accuracy and credibility.

**Specificity** is usually achieved through the use of concrete details, examples, and reasons. Hypothetical examples may also be employed.

**Accuracy or credibility** of support is judged by deciding whether sources are credible and whether the reasons, examples, and details are factual or plausible.

- 6     \*All supporting reasons are accurate and developed by specific detail at or beyond second order.  
       \*All sources are credible.
- 5     \*Most supporting reasons are accurate and developed by specific detail at or beyond second order.  
       \*Most sources are credible.
- 4     \*Some supporting reasons are accurate and developed by specific detail at or beyond second order; some may be general.  
       \*Some sources are credible.
- 3     \*Many of the supporting reasons are general.  
       \*Some of the supporting reasons may be questionable, not be credible/plausible.
- 2     \*Supporting reasons are attempted but undeveloped.  
       \*Supporting reasons may be ambiguous, inaccurate, redundant.
- 1     \*Little or no supporting reasons are attempted.  
       \*Supporting reasons are very confusing.  
       \*Supporting reasons are a series of restated generalizations.  
       \*There is insufficient writing to demonstrate supporting reasons.

## REASONING

This feature incorporates the strength of three different types of reasoning, the recognition of alternative viewpoints, and the degree of clarity.

The three types of reasoning are generalizing, best-explanation inferring, and value judging, often interdependent in the same paper.

Generalizations are inferred from the supporting examples or evidence. When papers draw inferences beyond the data, the small group or sample must be typical of a larger group. Personal examples and anecdotes are acceptable provided they represent the widespread experience of others. Good warranted generalizations are usually agreed upon by experts and promoted as acceptable interpretations of supporting reasons or fact.

Best-explanation inferring is solid if it is plausible and consistent with the facts. The conclusions should help to account for the facts or reasons, and they should be better than alternative explanations of the same facts or reasons. If a best-explanation conclusion is asserted, alternative explanations must be refuted.

Value statements are statements that place value on the way something was, is, or could be. We might, for example, judge that "X was wrong for killing Y." Here we evaluate a past action. This judgment is deduced from the acceptable principle that it is wrong to kill another human being. Another way in which value judgments can be supported is by specific examples and situations. The judgment that drugs are bad might be supported by precise and vivid personal examples of a family member's deterioration because of drugs.

In this section, we also judge the **sufficiency of supporting reasons**. The sufficiency of supporting reasons depends upon its amount, significance and thoroughness. Support scores for longer papers will depend on the proportion of reasons or subpoints developed by more specific detail and reasons and evenness or balance of support for key points. Obviously, shorter papers will have fewer opportunities to develop reasons or to support points.

We must also evaluate whether the meanings of words used in generalizations, best explanation conclusions, and value judgments are clear. For example, are generalizations misleading in their use of "frequently" or "usually"? Are key terms precisely defined?

Finally, does the paper recognize alternative viewpoints and address obvious challenges to its own argument.

### 6 Reasoning:

#### \*Generalizations receive strong support:

- \*They are reasonable, warranted, and clearly qualified, where needed.
- \*Personal examples and anecdotes are typical.
- \*Small samples are typical of larger populations.

#### \*Best explanation conclusions receive strong support:

- \*The explanation offered is plausible and accounts for the facts.
- \*Other explanations are refuted.

#### \*Value judgments receive strong support:

- \*They are derived from broader, acceptable principles, and/or;
- \*they rest on specific situations and examples.

\*The strength of conclusion matches strength of argument.

\*The conclusion is based on a compelling range and number of reasons.

\*The reasons are significant, thorough, relevant, and well-related, i.e., sufficient

**Alternative viewpoints are thoroughly recognized:**

\*The paper recognizes and responsibly deals with alternative viewpoints and apparent counterexamples.

\*The paper is sensitive and fair to the audience.

\*The paper shows an awareness of its own assumptions.

**Clarity:**

\*Equivocation is avoided.

\*Unnecessary vagueness is avoided.

**5 Reasoning:**

**\*Generalizations receive good support:**

\*They are reasonable, warranted, and clearly qualified, where needed.

**\*Best explanation conclusions receive good support:**

\*They are plausible and account more fully for the facts than other explanations.

**\*Value judgments receive good support:**

\*They are either derived from broader principles or specific situations and examples.

\*The conclusion is based on a sufficient range and number of supporting reasons.

\*Conclusion is fairly well supported.

**Alternative viewpoints are well recognized:**

\*The paper recognizes and deals with alternative viewpoints.

\*The paper shows an awareness of its own assumption.

**Clarity:**

\*Equivocation is avoided.

\*Vagueness is avoided.

**4 Reasoning:**

**\*Generalizations receive moderate support:**

\*They are reasonable and warranted, but only moderately supported. They may not be appropriately qualified.

\*Personal examples and anecdotes may not be wholly typical.

**\*Best explanation conclusions receive moderate support:**

\*The conclusion accounts for the facts and is consistent with them, although the paper may not rule out all other explanations.

**\*Value judgments receive moderate support:**

\*They may not be derived from acceptable principles.

\*They may rest on examples and situations that aren't specific or typical enough.

\*Supporting reasons are fairly sufficient.

\*Conclusions follow from the facts

**Alternative viewpoints are fairly mentioned:**

\*The paper merely mentions alternative viewpoints, but it does not deal with them thoroughly.

\*The paper may show only a vague awareness of its own assumptions.

**Clarity:**

\*Equivocation is avoided.

\*Terms may be a little vague.

**3 Reasoning:**

\*Reasoning is attempted, but questionable.

**\*Generalizations receive a little support:**

\*They may be unreasonable and unqualified.

\*They may not be agreed upon by experts.

\*They may be hyperbolic or include popular myth.

\*Personal examples may not be typical.

**\*Best explanation conclusions receive a little support:**

\*Plausible alternative explanations of the facts exist.

**\*Value judgments receive a little support:**

\*They may be derived from narrowly accepted principles.

\*They may rest on odd or atypical situations and examples.

\*Conclusion may follow from the facts, but the reader has to work hard to make the connection.

\*Supporting reasons are may be trivial, irrelevant, or unrelated.

**Alternative viewpoints are prejudicially mentioned:**

\*The paper mentions alternative viewpoints, but is hostile toward them or does not take their challenge seriously.

\*The paper shows no awareness of its own assumptions.

**Clarity:**

\*The paper may equivocate on major terms.

\*Key terms are not defined.

**2 Reasoning:**

\*Little reasoning is attempted, or reasoning is shallow and empty.

**\*Generalizations receive barely any support:**

\*They are gross and exaggerated.

\*They are dogmatic or mythical.

\*Personal examples are atypical.

**\*Best explanation conclusions receive barely any support:**

\*Explanations are implausible and do not account for the facts.

\*Better explanations exist.

**\*Value judgments receive barely any support:**

\*They are absolutist and may reveal prejudice.

\*It is not clear at all how the conclusion follows from the supporting reasons.

**Alternative viewpoints are not mentioned at all**

\*The paper is hostile or rude to the audience.

\*The paper is clearly not aware of its own assumptions.

**Clarity:**

\*The paper equivocates on major terms.

\*Key terms are vague and undefined.

**1 \*No reasoning is attempted.**

**\*Generalizations, best explanation conclusions, and value judgments receive no support.**

\*There is insufficient writing to demonstrate reasoning.

## ORGANIZATION

This feature examines whether the composition exhibits a clear structure or plan of development (beginning, middle, end) and whether the points are logically related to each other. Organization has a "vertical" dimension (coherence) indicated by the use of paragraphing and transitions to signal the relation of the support to the position. Organization also has a "horizontal" dimension (cohesion) evidenced by the connection of one sentence to the next. The writer may employ varied methods to achieve coherence and cohesion, e.g. repetition, pronouns, synonyms, parallel structure, connectives and transitions.

Fully developed papers will use paragraphs and transitions to signal the plan or text structure. Less developed papers will fail to use paragraphing or will use it inappropriately. These papers may also use few cohesive ties or transitions to cue the logical relationships. Some less developed papers may have digressions, or the train of thought may resemble free associations or stream of consciousness.

Position papers may be organized by announcing the subject/issue and the position(s) in the paper's opening followed by the presentation of support and its elaboration. The methods of development may include simple enumeration, cause to effect, part to whole, and most important to least important. The most developed papers will end with summary/concluding statements.

Note that a well-developed, one-paragraph paper could receive a "4," "5," or "6." Students may indent or use block style for paragraphs. Inconsistency of paragraph format would be considered a conventions error.

- 6     \*The structure of the paper is evident.  
       \*For multiparagraph papers, the opening, closing, and all major points of support and elaboration are appropriately paragraphed.  
       \*Coherence and cohesion are demonstrated by the use of transitional devices; coherence can be effected by developing the pattern announced in the beginning.  
       \*All points are logically presented and interrelated with no digressions.  
       \*For multiparagraph papers, opening and closing paragraphs must contain more than one sentence.
- 5     \*The structure of the paper is evident.  
       \*Most of the major points of support and elaboration are appropriately paragraphed. A one-sentence opening and/or closing paragraph is acceptable.  
       \*Coherence may depend upon a holistic structure e.g., topic sentences of each paragraph relate to the subject without specific connections or other methods.  
       \*Cohesion is demonstrated by the use of various devices (repetition, pronouns, parallel structure, etc.).  
       \*All points are logically presented and interrelated.  
       \*The paper may include minor digressions.
- 4     \*The structure of the paper is evident.  
       \***Some** of the major points of support and elaboration are appropriately paragraphed. A one-sentence opening and/or closing paragraph is acceptable.  
       \*Coherence is dependent upon a holistic structure (all points relate to subject without specific connections).  
       \*Cohesion relies upon the subject/issue without specific devices to connect.  
       \***Some** points are presented and interrelated.  
       \*The paper may include minor digressions.

- 3      \*The structure is noticeable, but the reader must infer it.  
         \*The paper may evidence inappropriate paragraphing, i.e., a one-sentence paragraph that does not function as an opening or closing paragraph, paragraphs that do not state and  
         \*Some points are presented, but may not be interrelated.  
         \*The paper may include major digressions.
- 2      \*A structure is attempted, but the reader must struggle hard to infer it.  
         \*Confusion may prevail.  
         \*There is little evidence of a cohesive plan in the attempted structure.
- 1      \*There is no evidence that the writer understands paragraphing (e.g. a shopping list with each item forming a separate paragraph).  
         \*The points are not logically related, or the reader has to make all the connections.  
         \*There is insufficient writing to ascertain if a plan exists.



## CONVENTIONS

Evaluations of the paper's use of conventions should take into account the following: how seriously the errors interfere with communication; the number of errors in relation to how much was written (Three errors in three sentences is a lot different from three errors in three paragraphs.); and the kinds of errors, particularly major errors in sentence construction. The types and descriptions of errors are listed following the scale.

The evaluation of conventions takes into account the papers proximity to a final draft in the writing process. For example, if a student has had three weeks to do the assignment with multiple drafts, more stringent criteria may be used in assigning a convention score than for an in-class writing assignment.

- 6 \*There are **few or no** minor errors. There are **no** major errors.
- 5 \*There may be a **few** minor errors, but **no more than one** major error.
- 4 \*There are **some** minor errors, a **few** major errors.
- 3 \*There are **numerous** minor errors and **some** major errors. Sentence construction is below mastery.
- 2 \*There are **many** major errors, causing some confusion.
- 1 \*Errors are so numerous and serious that they interfere with communication. Insufficient to ascertain whether mastery of conventions exists.

### Convention Errors

#### Major Errors:

##### Sentence Construction

Subject/Verb Agreement

Run-on

Fragment

Omitted words that interfere

##### Usage

Incorrect pronoun reference

Confusing tense shifts

##### Spelling

Misspelled common words

Same word misspelled

##### Punctuation/Capitalization

Initial caps (not to include run-ons)\*

Common proper nouns

Ending punctuation

Apostrophes

##### Paragraph Format

Inconsistency of separation between paragraphs (Block style of paragraphing is acceptable.)

#### Minor Errors

##### Sentence Construction

Incorrect use of construction connectors between clauses

Omitted words that do not interfere

##### Usage

Awkward or odd use of words

Incorrect use of common words or phrases, but meaning is still clear, e.g., of/have;

Homonyms:its/it's; their/there;to/two/too

##### Spelling

Unusual, less frequently used words

is counted only once

##### Punctuation/Capitalization

Periods for abbreviations

Missing commas in a series or for opening phrases

## INTEGRATION

The purpose of this rating is to provide a general evaluation of how clearly the paper achieves the assigned task. The holistic rating assumes that the effectiveness of the paper depends upon the skill with which the student orchestrates the fundamental features to complete the assignment. The judgment is limited to the combination of the features and does not include contributions of other factors such as humor or originality. It reflects the view that the paper is a total work, that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

This "focused," holistic judgment is not the reader's reaction to the work as art; it is the reader's reaction to the work as craft -- how adequately the work achieves the purpose. To arrive at the judgment, raters read the paper through from beginning to end thinking, "Does this paper develop the assignment clearly and coherently and in standard English?"

- 6      \*A very well-reasoned argument with good supporting reasons.  
        \*Each feature is evident.  
        \*There is a clear position; lines of reasoning are identified  
            and coherently developed by logical reasons throughout the  
            paper.
- 5      \*A well-formed argument paper, but not all the features are equally well-developed  
            throughout the paper.
- 4      \*Basically an adequately formed argument.  
        \*The paper is simple, informative, and clear, presenting nothing more than essentials.
- 3      \*The argument is partially developed.  
        \*Some (or one) of the features are not sufficiently formed,  
            but all are present.  
        \*The reader is often required to infer.  
        \*Papers rated at "3" or below on any feature are considered  
            partially developed and are scored "3" or below on  
            integration.
- 2      \*The paper attempts to address the assignment, but only the rudiments of techniques for  
            forming focus, organization, supporting reasons, and reasoning can be detected.  
        \*There is often some confusion or disjointedness.
- 1      \*The paper does not fulfill the assignment because it barely deals with the topic, uses an  
            inappropriate text structure, or does not present most or all of the features.  
        \*Insufficient due to length.



**APPENDIX F: IGAP-LIKE SCORING SHEET FOR CRITICAL THINKING ESSAY TESTS**, prepared by Marguerite Finken and Robert Ennis, Illinois Alliance for Essential Schools and Illinois Critical Thinking Project (6/1/93)

**FEATURES**

FOCUS	1	2	3	4	5	6
Degree to which main idea/theme or point of view is clear and maintained	Unclear; absent; insufficient length to ascertain maintenance	Confusing; attempted; main point unclear or shifts	Underpromise, overdeliver; overpromise, underdeliver; infer; two/+ positions w/o unifying statement	Bare bones; position clear; main point previewed	Position clear; generally previewed	All main points are specified and maintained
SUPPORTING REASONS	1	2	3	4	5	6
Degree to which supporting reasons and evidence are clear, believable, and from credible sources	No support; no credible sources; unbelievable vague; confusing	Attempted; dubious sources; inaccurate; vague	Some sources and/or reasons/evidence dubious; some vagueness	Some sources credible; reasons/evidence generally believable, sometimes second level; specific (where appropriate); clear	Most sources credible; most reasons/evidence believable, often at second level; specific (where approp); clear	All sources credible; all reasons/evidence believable, second level/beyond spec.(where approp; clear
REASONING	1	2	3	4	5	6
Degree to which conclusion supported by reasons/evidence; alternatives addressed; and argument clear	Conclusions unsupported; no reasoning attempted; insufficient	Conclusions minimally supported; alternatives unmentioned; muddled; confused	Some insufficient support; alternatives prejudicially mentioned; key terms undefined	Moderate support; alternatives mentioned fairly; some vagueness	Conclusions well supported; alternatives well recognized; clear	Strong support; alternatives thoroughly addressed; clear
ORGANIZATION	1	2	3	4	5	6
Degree to which logical flow of ideas and explicitness of the plan are clear and connected	No plan; insufficient length to ascertain maintenance	Attempted; plan is noticeable	Not knowledgeable in paragraphing	Some cohesion and coherence from relating to topic; plan is clear	Most points connected; coherent; cohesive, using various methods	All points connected, signaled with transitions/ other cohesive devices
CONVENTIONS	1	2	3	4	5	6
Use of conventions of standard English	Many errors; unreadable, confused meaning; problems with sentence construction; insufficient length to ascertain maintenance	Many major errors; confusion	Some major errors, many minor; sentence construction below mastery	Developed; few major errors, some minor, meaning unimpaired; mastery of sentence construction	A few minor errors, but no more than one major error	No major errors; one or two minor errors
INTEGRATION	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Doesn't present most features; insuff. length	Attempts to address assignment; confusion	Partly developed; one/> features not developed	Essentials present	Features present, but not all equal	All features evident and equally well developed