

## Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

### What features should I score?

First drafts and final drafts may be scored very differently. Scoring a **first draft** to learn how you can assist a student with their writing likely won't involve scoring *conventions*, *writing process*, *publishing* or *range of writing*, but these may be very important to you in a later or final draft. If you are scoring a first draft "**quick write** or brief write," and your purpose is to see if students can work through all of the phases of the writing process in one sitting, then scoring *conventions*, *writing process* and *range of writing* might be scored.

Some teachers score only **what they have taught** to see what else they will need to teach. Other teachers score **what they haven't taught** to see if they should offer more instruction on the features of writing.

Genre may also make a difference in what teachers score. When assessing an **argument or opinion piece** that you expect evidence to be presented, *content*, *structure*, and *research* may all be important. If the piece is a **final draft**, you may also want to assess any of the following: *voice/point of view*, *word choice*, *sentence structure*, *conventions*, *writing process*, *publishing* and *attitude/range of writing*.

For **informational pieces**, you will definitely want to assess *content*, *structure* and *research*. Again, if the piece is a final draft, you may assess any or all of the additional seven features.

For **narrative pieces**, you will want to assess *content*, *structure*, *voice* and *word choice/description*. You may want to assess *research*, especially in historical or science fiction. If the piece is a final draft, you may assess any or all of the additional features.

A **math teacher** may decide that *ideas & content* and/or *research & writing to learn* are the most suitable for a writing assignment that asks students to explain the process they

### What to Score?

# THE UNIVERSAL Writing CONTINUUM

used in solving a problem.

A **science teacher** may want to score students' science notebooks with *ideas & content, structure & organization, research & writing to learn* and *publishing*.

The important thing is that you, the teacher, can make these decisions based on your instructional goals and what you know about each student writer.

## What do you mean by a developmental continuum?

For each grade level, teachers have a range of 5 levels to assess each child's writing. The middle level is always the level that is considered proficient for that grade level and that month of the school year. Teachers asked us if we could break each level down even further. Teachers also asked us if we could add a level for Advanced Placement that may also be used for Senior Projects. These two suggestions resulted in the Continuum now having 14 levels and 42 progress points from early kindergarten or pre-school through Grade 12. The subscripts after the levels on the Continuum can be defined:

1 = minimal developed      2 = adequate developed      3 = thorough developed

Teachers have reported that this made their decision making easier because they could identify many of the bullets from the Continuum in the students' paper, but didn't feel they were well developed. One teacher described these subscripts as meaning "just barely in the level," "solidly in the level," and "ready to move to the next level." However you choose to think about these, they are a way for you to further identify student needs. Our suggestion is that if you can't decide between two subscript levels, always choose the lower one.

There is some teacher judgment required, but the more papers you assess, the easier these decisions will be. We highly recommend that you meet with other teachers at your grade level or representatives of different grade levels and practice scoring papers together. As you compare your

## What Do the Levels Mean?

# THE UNIVERSAL Writing CONTINUUM

responses, you will be able to better define each level. No two papers will be alike and not paper will like perfectly fit in all of the bullets related to any one features. This is always true of grading performance type tasks. We have tried to break the levels down to make the scoring more accurate.

## Why do the grade levels overlap in a level?

We noticed a trend since pacing guides came into existence that divided the curriculum for a year into the months of the school year to assure students meet the grade level standards by the end of the year. While we understand the need to assure that all skills are met, we believe that the best way to do this is to first target the skills that still need to be developed. We want students to be successful and make a year or more's worth of progress each school year. Because the average student has just met the previous grades standards by the end of the school year, we use the first third of the new school year to shore up those standards by overlapping the levels of proficiency. No student is ever held back. We encourage teachers to teach the weaker skills while continuing to move forward with stronger skills. On a scale such as the Universal Writing Continuum, there is always a next step for each student no matter how advanced or how far below level the student's skills may be.

## Why Do Grade Levels Overlap?

## How should high school teachers use level N or the 12+ level for dual credit, honors or AP classes?

High school teachers have told us that they would like an advanced level for advanced classes. We have correlated level N or 12+ to freshman college expectations for writing across the curriculum for dual credit and honors courses and for AP expectations. Not all students take their advanced placement courses at the end of their senior year. AP teachers may have to make adjustments in their expectations for students who haven't previously had an AP English Language Arts course. Level N is the level that AP teachers and students should strive for, but younger students may not

## What's Expected in Level N or 12+ of the Continuum?

## THE UNIVERSAL Writing CONTINUUM

have the “abstract mindedness,” as one AP U.S. history teacher stated, to achieve all of the goals of Level N. Students who have taken AP classes early should, however, be able to achieve Level N by the end of their 12<sup>th</sup> grade year in all of their courses.

### How can I convert the scores from the Universal Writing Continuum into grades?

Although we believe that formative assessment should, by definition, be used to formulate your instructional plan and inform the writer the areas that need to be improved, we know that realistically, some of the assignments you use for formative will be graded. Frequently, teachers want to know how to convert the levels into a letter grade. Reluctantly, we offer below our suggestion for how you might make this conversion:

Advanced to Advanced +	= A
Proficient <sub>2</sub> to Proficient <sub>3</sub>	= B
Basic <sub>2</sub> , Basic <sub>3</sub> and Proficient <sub>1</sub>	= C
Below Basic <sub>3</sub> to Basic <sub>1</sub>	= D
Below Basic <sub>1</sub> to Below Basic <sub>2</sub>	= F

Uni-Spire gives teachers lots of decision-making power, and assigning grades is no different. If you believe the suggested scale above doesn't fit your expectations, please feel free to adjust it to meet your needs.

### Can I substitute a benchmark paper during the benchmark period if a student writes a more effective paper?

Yes, the system will only allow one paper per student to be score for a benchmark period. If the student already has a paper scored for that benchmark, but writes a more effective paper several weeks later that you feel would better represent his/her ability level, then you score the new paper and indicate under the evaluation period that it is for the intended benchmark (red). The existing paper will remain in the student's portfolio. If the benchmark was for the beginning of the year, the older paper will default to August (green). If the benchmark is End of 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter (December),

**How Do  
Scores  
Convert to  
Grades?**

**Can I  
Substitute a  
Benchmark  
Paper for a  
Better One?**

# THE UNIVERSAL Writing CONTINUUM

the older paper being replaced will default to December (green).

## Why is uploading student papers important?

The Universal Writing Continuum can serve as an electronic portfolio for students accessible from anywhere on multiple devices. Not only will you be able to view your students' writing from the beginning of the year to the end of the year along with the scoring reports you constructed, but you will also be able to view your students' writing across years and even across schools in the district if the Continuum is being used district-wide. When meeting with parents or specialists, a student's writing and record of writing progress is just one click from your log in.

## Why upload papers?

## What is the best way to upload multiple-page handwritten papers such as science notebooks or a kindergartener's journal.

Teachers have found that using their smartphones to photograph multiple pages is much faster than scanning pages on a scanner. In the Help menu, we have included directions for how to make this process easier. The directions are very detailed but the suggestion is to use the free smartphone app, *GeniusScanner*.

## How Do I Upload Multiple Handwritten Pages?