

Grading Written Papers and Reports

Contributed by Abby Hines

Grading a written assignment, such as a book report or research paper, requires that the parent evaluate for two broad categories of performance: 1) grammar and 2) content/organization. If the parent has a good understanding of English grammar, evaluating this area is fairly objective and easily done. However, grading for content/organization can be highly subjective, thus quite daunting for many homeschool parents. We are often torn between not wanting to grade too harshly and not wanting to be too lenient; this balance is something that takes time and practice to develop.

When I first started homeschooling, I had no idea how to approach this, so I did what I always do — I asked someone who had a very good idea of what he or she was doing! I offer this method, which was shared with me by a friend, who is also a 12th grade English teacher; it makes the task much more manageable for me.

Procedure

When I assign a paper, I give the requirements, which include the things that I expect to see discussed content-wise. I also attach a form similar to the one below, outlining exactly what I expect to see structurally. Each element of the paper has certain points or percentages assigned to it.

When the paper is completed and turned in, I begin by reading the paper through, just looking for grammatical integrity. I look for capitalization, punctuation, spelling, word usage, subject/verb/number agreement, etc. I try to keep in mind what we have covered in grammar lessons and hold the student accountable for those things, which we have covered. For each error, I deduct one point from a possible 100. If it is a very long paper, such as a research report, I might adjust the number of points I take off for each error. The paper receives one grade for this area. Then, I grade according to the following model for the content/organization and the paper receives another grade for this area. When I finish, I average the two grades, and that gives the paper its overall grade.

Grading for Content/Organization

Requirements

The requirements will depend on what type of paper your student is writing. For a book report, you might require an introductory paragraph, three or more supporting paragraphs, and a conclusion. However, for a more extended report, you might require an

introductory section, several supporting sections, and a summary section. Each section should follow the paragraph structure outlined above.

Assigning Possible Points

The possible point values for each paragraph will be determined by how many paragraphs you are requiring. For a short paper, such as a book report, divide 100 by the number of paragraphs your student must write. Thus, in a five-paragraph paper, each paragraph will be worth a possible 20 points. If, however, you are assigning a longer paper, such as a research report, you may want to weigh the introductory and summary paragraphs or sections more heavily. In this case, rather than assigning point values to each paragraph, you might assign a percentage value to the introduction and the conclusion, and divide the leftover percentage value by the number of supporting paragraphs the paper contains.

The possible point value for each element of the paragraph is determined by how many details, examples, or reasons the paragraph contains. Divide the point value for the total paragraph by the number of details, examples, or reasons, + 2 for the introductory and conclusion sentences. (For example: in a paragraph that is worth 20 points and has an introductory sentence, three supporting elements, and a summary sentence, each of these elements would be worth five points.)

Assigning a Content/Organizational Grade

The number of points the student actually earns is determined not only by the presence of the required element but also how well the student met the stated criteria. For example, if the paragraph contains details that don't support the topic sentence, then points may be partially or totally lost depending on how severe the error is. Another example would be the case of a supporting paragraph that has a topic sentence that does not support the topic sentence of the introductory paragraph (which should contain the theme of the paper). This is a fairly serious problem since such an error may cause the entire paper to lack clarity and unity. (If you are helping your student by reviewing rough drafts, huge errors will be caught before the final copy is written.)

Grading Written Papers and Reports

Contributed by Abby Hines

Additional Criteria for Grading Written Work

- 1) Did the student follow the assignment? In other words, did they ignore what they were instructed to write about and replace it with an easier assignment?
- 2) Is the construction correct and of an appropriate length? (i.e., title, introduction, one main topic per paragraph, conclusion, footnotes, bibliography)
- 3) Are the spelling, grammar, and punctuation correct?
- 4) Is the sentence structure interesting and active, using a variety of sentence types?
- 5) Does the writing illustrate critical or creative thinking? Is it original?
- 6) Are the main points stated clearly and supported, using logic, quotations, examples, or statistics?
- 7) Is there improvement compared to the last writing assignment?
- 8) Is it obvious that the appropriate amount of thought or research went into the writing?
- 9) Is the writing legible?
- 10) Are the reasons for your conclusion clear?

Basic five-paragraph essay model

- I. Introduction _____
 - a. Attention grabber (question, quote) or background information _____
 - b. Brief synopsis _____
 - c. Thesis statement with three main points (theme of the essay) _____
- II. Topic sentence (point one of thesis statement) _____
 - a. Support for topic sentence _____
 - b. Support for topic sentence _____
 - c. Support for topic sentence _____
 - d. Clincher (reflects the topic sentence) _____
- III. Topic sentence (point two of thesis statement) _____
 - a. Support for topic sentence _____
 - b. Support for topic sentence _____
 - c. Support for topic sentence _____
 - d. Clincher (reflects the topic sentence) _____
- IV. Topic sentence (point three of thesis statement) _____
 - a. Support for topic sentence _____
 - b. Support for topic sentence _____
 - c. Support for topic sentence _____
 - d. Clincher (reflects the topic sentence) _____
- V. Conclusion _____
 - a. Restate the thesis with the three supporting points _____
 - b. What was the most significant, valuable, or useful point? _____
 - c. Why? _____
 - d. Relevance or how this can call one to action _____

Paper Total: 100

_____ Total Points