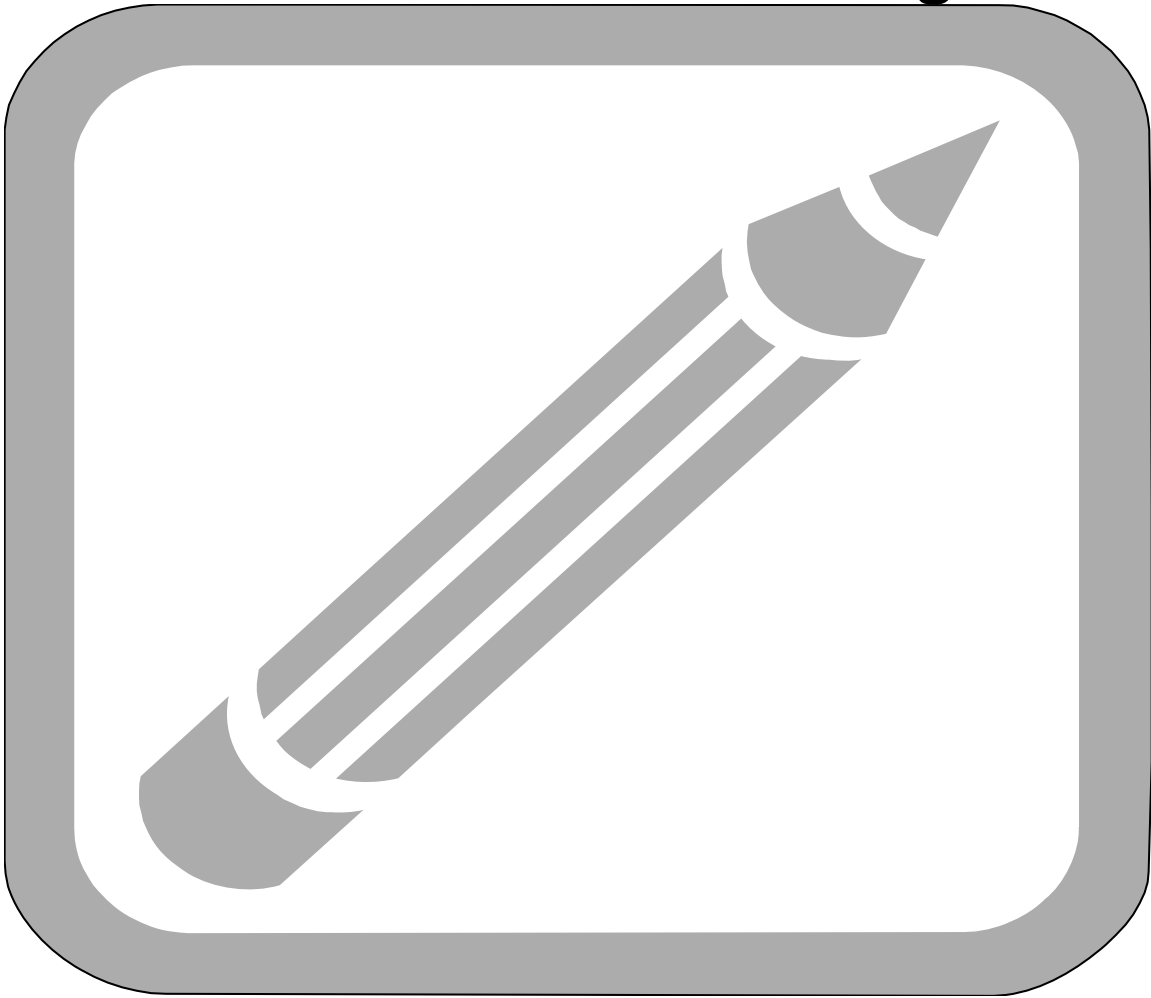
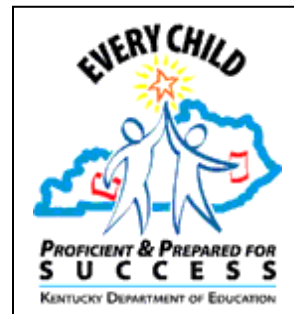


Sharpen Your Child's Writing Skills



A GUIDEBOOK FOR KENTUCKY PARENTS

The Kentucky Writing Program is a service of the
Kentucky Department of Education
Capital Plaza Tower
500 Mero Street
Frankfort, KY 40601



“As a parent, you are the most important influence in your child’s success in school and in life.”
- National Parent Teacher Association

Sharpen Your Child's Writing Skills

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A GUIDEBOOK FOR KENTUCKY PARENTS

This handbook may be reproduced for the purpose of distribution to parents and other groups interested in improving writing instruction in Kentucky.

Revised 2007

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Points for Parents

Is your refrigerator covered with your child's best schoolwork? Have you saved samples of your children's best efforts as they have grown? If so, you will understand many of the benefits of improved writing instruction in Kentucky schools.

Kentucky schools are emphasizing student writing to improve thinking and learning for all students. As you know from proudly displaying your children's work on the "fridge," examining student work is valuable to everyone involved in a child's education. Collections of student work, in this case the compilation of a writing portfolio at the 4th, 7th and 12th grades, show us student understanding, achievement and growth – as well as how curriculum and instruction are working.

The goal of instruction is to help students develop life-long learning skills and the confidence to make use of those skills. For many of us, writing in school was a limiting, and sometimes unpleasant, experience. As adults, we have come to realize that our previous writing instruction did not always prepare us for the types of real-world writing we are now required to do. With positive developmental writing instruction, our children will not experience the same frustration.

As we know, the ability to communicate is important. Kentucky teachers realize the importance of teaching effective communication skills for success in today's world. The support and involvement of parents like you are necessary to make sure children become effective thinkers and confident communicators – keys to a successful future for us all.

Regardless of their age, who better for children to communicate their thoughts to than their parents? **“As a parent you are the most important influence in your child's success in school and in life.”** This quote from the Website of the National Parent Teacher Association reinforces why the Kentucky Department of Education created this writing tool specifically for you – the parent.

In 1989 a committee of Kentucky teachers and other educators was asked to define the tasks of the state's writing portfolio. Their responsibility was to ensure that your child and all other students throughout the state receive the same rich, varied learning opportunities. As you read the following pages, we hope this guidebook will explain the necessity of teaching students how to communicate their thoughts through writing, and how you can help your children to do this well. We also hope you will find answers to your questions about the following:

- Kentucky's Writing Portfolio
- Kentucky's Writing Scoring Rubric
- the writing process, that leads to effective writing
- your role in the development of your child's writing skills

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Making the Point: The Writing Process

Community: this one word summarizes the force behind Kentucky's P-12 teachers as they forge ahead to create a diverse community of writers. This community is buzzing with students making their own choices about writing in a variety of content areas. Students are focusing on authentic audiences and purposes for their writing. Students help each other through peer conferencing. Teachers facilitate the writing process instruction for both individuals and whole classrooms. Ultimately, students see their finished work published in various ways.

In order for Kentucky to reach the goal of creating a community of effective writers, our students must be anchored in the writing process to achieve proficiently written and published pieces of work they are proud of. However, whether it is due to age or unrealistic ideals, students often tend to shortchange this process and the time it can consume. Therefore, from the very beginning, time management skills are essential tools you, along with teachers, can help your child attain. Secondly, but not of any less importance, is to help your child recall his/her life experiences. **While you don't want to choose topics or write papers for your children**, you serve as a living journal of their life stories that can provide reminders, feedback, and unconditional support.

STAGES	ACTIVITIES
FOCUSING	connect to content knowledge and experience
PREWRITING	get ready to write, generating ideas, planning
DRAFTING	put words on paper
REVISING	make it clear and complete
EDITING	correct, making it right
PUBLISHING	share with others

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Focusing

The first stage in the writing process is focusing. This step encompasses everything that happens before anything is put on paper. Students should focus on and identify what they might be interested in writing. To focus, the student may connect to content knowledge; connect with prior learning and experience; and think about a subject, an experience, a question, an issue or a problem to determine a meaningful reason to write.

How Can Parents Help?

- ✓ Provide opportunities for observation and critical thinking (cultural experiences, outdoor activities, trips, films, educational television programs and more).
- ✓ Help your child find a real reason to write
 - to inform (e.g., create a family letter to friends and relatives)
 - to persuade (e.g., convince parents to allow a privilege)
 - to entertain (e.g., create a play for others to perform)
- ✓ Discuss different forms of writing (letter, poem, article, story, play).
- ✓ Encourage your child to be curious about what is going on in the world.

Prewriting

The next stage in the writing process includes the activities, experiences and exercises that motivate writers to begin the first draft. During this time writers consider the **purpose** (real reason) for writing and the **audience** (the intended reader/listener) for whom they are writing. If prewriting is successful, writers will have a clear sense of direction for their writing and many ideas for supporting the purpose. This planning stage is vital for producing effective writing.

How Can Parents Help?

- ✓ Suggest possible audiences (relatives, other children, public officials, community leaders, school officials).
- ✓ Read with your child and provide access to books, newspapers and magazines (at home and/or in the community library).
- ✓ Help your child identify topics/subjects of interest.
- ✓ Invite discussion topics.
- ✓ Encourage listing, note taking, jotting down ideas, brainstorming.
- ✓ Be an active listener. Ask questions to clarify and make helpful comments.

Drafting

Drafting occurs when a writer puts ideas into sentences and paragraphs. During this step, the writer's main goal is to explain and support the purpose in full and begin to connect ideas. Editing concerns such as spelling and punctuation can be ignored at this stage and addressed at a later stage, after ideas have been fully developed.

How Can Parents Help?

Provide a quiet and clean place for your child to work. You also may want to create a "writer's tool box" that contains a constant supply of paper, sharp pencils, erasers, a dictionary and thesaurus.

✓ Ask your child the following questions regarding content:

- What is your purpose in writing this piece?
- Who are you writing this piece to (the audience)?
- Why are you writing this?
- What is the assignment?

Remember, even though as parents we want to "help" our children, resist the temptation to take over their projects and respect your children's abilities to make appropriate choices.

Q: What do you do when your child has writer's block? Here are some helpful suggestions to give your child:

- o **Cluster**-Choose key words and ideas; then write associated ideas and words in clusters around them. This process often forms new ideas.
- o **Move**-Physically move around, stretch or take a walk outside.
- o **Concentrate**-Focus on a different section or aspect of your paper. This sometimes leads to new insights in problem areas, while allowing you to get work done on another section.
- o **Take a break**-Get a snack or drink, talk to someone, or just relax for five minutes before starting to write again.

Q: What should my child include in his/her draft?

This chart gives a brief description of the purpose of each category of writing included in the portfolio and a list of descriptors that may be evident in a draft of that writing.

CATEGORIES OF WRITING	
<p>Reflective Writing:</p> <p>An analysis and evaluation of personal progress in writing through literacy</p> <p>The writing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contemplates the writer’s literacy experience • analyzes own strengths and areas of growth in writing • allows the content to determine the form and audience • analyzes and addresses needs of the intended audience • speaks directly to the audience • develops the connection between growth as a reader and skills as a writer 	<p>Personal Expressive Writing:</p> <p>Narrative-focuses on a significant single event Memoir-focuses on the significance of a relationship with an individual person, place, animal or thing Essay-focuses on a central idea about the writer or the writer’s life</p> <p>The writing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establishes the significance of one event, relationship or central idea • communicates the significance (impact) and/or leaves the reader with a single impression • develops ideas by using relevant/specific details from personal experiences • shows emotions, thoughts and/or insight through descriptions as appropriate • uses dialogue as appropriate
<p>Literary:</p> <p>Communication through authentic literary forms to make meaning of the human condition created from the imagination of the writer</p> <p>The writing (short story, play):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focuses on some aspect of human experience • contains elements that are characteristic of genre: plot (conflict, crisis, resolution), setting, character development, theme and point of view • uses thoughts, actions, descriptions to develop plot, setting, character and theme • develops the plot through conflict and resolution • manages literary techniques and effective organizational strategies to communicate ideas and feelings to reader • may use dialogue to enhance meaning 	<p>Transactional:</p> <p>Informative/persuasive/analytical writing that presents ideas and information in letters, speeches, editorials, articles, academic papers, other</p> <p>The writing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is from the perspective of an informed writer to a less informed reader (may even be a new perspective on the topic) • contains a specific purpose and makes it clear what the reader should know, do and/or believe as a result of reading the piece • is intended for an authentic audience and strives to meet the needs of the audience • employs a suitable tone for purpose and audience • presents ideas and information to accomplish the purpose • provides specific, relevant support (facts, examples, reasons, anecdotes, comparisons,

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<p>Literary Continued:</p> <p>The writing (poetry):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on the purpose (e.g., paints a picture, recreates a feeling, tells a story, captures a moment, evokes an image, shows an extraordinary perception of the ordinary based on human experience) • may use insight and reflection to show depth of idea development • uses sensory details and/or poetic devices to create a mood, scene and/or image • does not sacrifice meaning for rhyme • maintains coherence and unity • uses white space, line breaks and/or shape to enhance meaning • uses grammar and word choice that are appropriate for purpose and audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> quotes, charts, graphs) showing knowledge of the subject • reveals ability to think logically for the purpose and explain clearly/persuasively • organizes logically, effectively, using paragraphing, transitions, headings, etc. (text features) • uses grammar and word choice that are appropriate for purpose and audience • documents sources appropriately
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Revising

In this stage, writers allow others and themselves to take a fresh look at the writing. Too often, this important process is rushed or skipped. Revision is not typing a paper or recopying an assignment neatly in ink or even correcting grammar, punctuation and spelling. Instead, writers focus on strengthening content and meeting the needs of their audience.

How Can Parents Help?

(Keep in mind as your work with your child that you should not at any time do your child's writing or tell him/her what to add, delete or rearrange. It is important for student writers to make these decisions for themselves.)

Listen while your child reads the piece aloud and respond by telling your child the following about what you heard from the ' writing.

- ___ "The sentence or word that stands out for me is _____."
- ___ "The part that is most interesting to me is _____."
- ___ "I'd like to know more about _____."

Offer praise about the parts of the writing that work well. Ask questions about the purpose, meaning, content, ideas and organization.

- ___ "Does the writing say what you want it to say?"
 - ___ "What changes do you think you need to make?"
 - ___ "Can you tell me more about _____?"
 - ___ "Can you give me an example of _____?"
- ✓ Tell your child what you heard the piece of writing say.
 - ✓ Encourage talk about the changes and why these changes should be made (to make the purpose clearer or to further support ideas).
 - ✓ Ask questions about any part of the writing you find unclear, without sounding critical.
 - ✓ Make sure the following points are clear in the paper:
 - Does the introduction grab the audience's attention?
 - Is the purpose stated clearly?
 - Is the purpose supported by facts?
 - Are the ideas fully developed (enough details)?
 - Do the ideas flow smoothly from one sentence to the other?

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- Are all the main ideas in each paragraph connected to the purpose?
- Does the conclusion leave the audience with a firm understanding of the purpose?

*If possible, allow your child to share the writing with another adult, family member or peer, going over this same process. This can help strengthen your child's writing skills and boost confidence as well.

Make sure your child has the final say in all revisions of their writing.

Editing

Imagine editing as the process of cleaning, buffing and shining the writing to get rid of errors (mistakes in grammar, punctuation, word usage, capitalization and spelling). Writers may need assistance from others during this process to strengthen their writing skills. Correctness is important; however, editing is a growth process all writers must go through. For younger and/or inexperienced writers, it is best to do this process over several days if possible, since correcting every error can be overwhelming to the writer. But be encouraged; as your child's writing becomes more proficient, he or she will make fewer mistakes.

How Can Parents Help?

- ✓ Begin by asking your child to read the piece aloud while you both look at the writing. Focus attention on correctness of sentences, wording, spelling, punctuation and capitalization.
- ✓ When your child has finished reading the paper once, have them read it backwards, sentence by sentence. This helps the writer focus on the correctness of one sentence at a time.
- ✓ Concentrate on only one or two types of errors at a time.
- ✓ Encourage the use of a dictionary, thesaurus, spell checker and/or computer writing program.
- ✓ Be sure to allow your child to make the actual corrections on the writing.
- ✓ **Do not at any time actually do your child's writing or make direct corrections on the work.** You might decide to circle or place a check beside words or phrases that appear to be incorrect. Your child's job is to look up the word and make the final decision.

Publishing

Publishing is the process of making the writer's piece of writing ready for publication. Students need this aspect of the writing process to help them develop a sense of the importance of their writing, an understanding of why one must learn to write and a sense of their audiences. This is a critical stage—not one to be overlooked. There are a variety of ways students can participate in this process.

How Can Parents Help?

- ✓ Provide publishing opportunities.
 - Mail a letter.
 - Post your children's work on your Web page or help them create their own.
 - Post on a bulletin board or your refrigerator.
 - Email your child's writing to family and friends.
 - Submit to a magazine or newspaper.
 - Read aloud at family gatherings, like dinner time.
 - Create a family newsletter and mail to family members.
 - Create a writer's scrapbook to display for the span of your child's school years and beyond
- ✓ Encourage your child to make the writing neat and legible.
- ✓ Allow your child to decide when to share pieces with others.
- ✓ Let your child see you write and share your writing with your child.

Pointing It Out: Contents of the Writing Portfolio

WHAT IS REQUIRED IN ALL PORTFOLIOS?

All portfolios must contain the following:

- ✓ **Table of Contents**
- ✓ **Student Signature Sheet** - states ownership of the portfolio and may give permission to use the portfolio for training (optional)

Why is the Table of Contents Important?

The Table of Contents for the Writing Portfolio is required and has two purposes. The first purpose is to provide students with the experience of organizing their best work to present to an audience. The second purpose is to serve as a reference for the scorer/reader.

WHAT ARE THE REQUIRED PIECES IN THE 4TH- GRADE WRITING PORTFOLIO?

The student includes a total of **three** pieces of writing in the portfolio. Any of the following portfolio entries may come from study areas other than English/language arts (but not required).

- ✓ **Reflective Writing** in the form of a **letter or personal essay**
Evaluate personal progress in writing through the lens of literacy.
(*Student must include one.*)
- ✓ **Personal Expressive Writing** in the form of *personal expressive writing or literary writing*
(*Student must include one.*)
 - **Personal Narrative** — focusing on one significant event in the life of the writer
 - **Memoir** — focusing on the significant relationship of the writer with a particular person, place, animal, or thing

Literary Writing in the form of short story, poem or script

- ✓ **Transactional Writing** for a variety of authentic audiences and purposes in real-world forms (e.g., letter, article, editorial, proposal, review).
(Student must include one.)

WHAT ARE THE REQUIRED PIECES IN THE 7TH- GRADE WRITING PORTFOLIO?

The student includes a total of **three** pieces of writing in the portfolio. Any of the following portfolio entries may come from study areas other than English/language arts, but a minimum of one piece of writing must come from another subject area.

- ✓ **Reflective Writing** in the form of a **letter or personal essay**
Evaluate personal progress in writing through the lens of literacy.
(Student must include one.)
- ✓ **Personal Expressive Writing** in the form of *personal expressive writing* or literary writing
(Student must include one.)
 - **Personal Narrative** — focusing on one significant event in the life of the writer
 - **Memoir** — focusing on the significant relationship of the writer with a particular person, place, animal, or thing

Literary Writing in the form of short story, poem or script

- ✓ **Transactional Writing** for a variety of authentic audiences and purposes in real-world forms (e.g., letter, article, editorial, proposal, review).
(Student must include one.)

WHAT ARE THE REQUIRED PIECES IN THE 12TH- GRADE WRITING PORTFOLIO?

The student includes a total of **four** pieces of writing in the portfolio. Any of the following portfolio entries may come from study areas other than English/language arts, but a minimum one piece of writing must come from another subject area.

- ✓ **Reflective Writing** in the form of a **letter or personal essay**
Evaluate personal progress in writing through the lens of literacy.
(*Student must include one.*)

- ✓ **Personal Expressive Writing** in the form of *personal expressive writing*
Or literary writing
(*Student must include one.*)
 - **Personal Narrative** — focusing on one significant event in the life of the writer
 - **Memoir** — focusing on the significant relationship of the writer with a particular person, place, animal, or thing

Literary Writing in the form of short story, poem or script

- ✓ **Transactive Writing** for a variety of authentic audiences and purposes in real-world forms (e.g., letter, article, editorial, proposal, review).
(*Student must include one.*)

- ✓ **Transactive Writing with an Analytical or Technical Focus** for a variety of authentic audiences and purposes in real-world forms (e.g., letter, article, editorial, proposal, review).
(*Student must include one.*)

What Kinds of Writing Do Portfolio Pieces Represent?

The selections in the *Kentucky Writing Portfolio* reflect an emphasis on writing for a variety of purposes. At the heart of the experience is a variety of higher level thinking skills students must exercise. Students select from their writing collections (working folders) the pieces that show their best work.

In the real world, writers use information for a purpose. Some writing found in the *Kentucky Writing Portfolio* places emphasis on the kinds of writing people do in a working/communicating world, such as editorials, business letters, and articles. In fact, real world purposes and audiences provide the best motivation

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for students' writing. Students see a reason for the writing and have ownership in what they have to say.

Writers also use information to create. The thinking required for this kind of writing has produced advancements in our world such as electric lights, space travel and technology and should be promoted in schools. The *Kentucky Writing Portfolio* asks students to write poetry, short stories or other fictional pieces to extend creative thinking skills.

To develop meaning and understanding for themselves and others, writers reflect on their own experiences. All successful people in the world think reflectively about what they did, how they did it and what they have learned.

What are the Specific Pieces of Writing That Students May Include In Their Portfolios?

The **reflective writing** is writing that uses reflection—or careful consideration and serious contemplation of past events—as a means of idea development. Good reflective writing contains considerable analysis and insight. The Kentucky Writing Portfolio Assessment requires students to include a reflective piece that focuses on growth in writing through literacy experiences.

A **personal narrative** is writing about one significant incident experienced by the writer.

A **personal essay** focuses on a central idea supported by a variety of incidents in the writer's life.

A **memoir** reflects on the relationship of the writer and a particular person (usually older), animal, place or thing, supported by memories of specific experiences.

A **short story** is a piece of fiction that contains some, but maybe not all, of the following elements: plot, setting, character development, theme and point of view.

A **poem** is a composition of carefully arranged words and ideas that bring together imagination, emotion, sense impressions, sound and rhythm.

A **play or script** is written text of a stage/play, screenplay, radio or television broadcast, commercial or video.

A **transactive piece** is written to get something done in the real world and is written in a form that is seen in the real world.

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A **transactive piece with an analytical focus** is a written analysis as a major form of idea development.

What Is Transactive Writing and What Are Real-World Forms?

Transactive Writing is produced “to get something done” in the real world (e.g., to provide ideas and information for a variety of purposes, to persuade readers to support a point of view). These pieces are produced for authentic purposes and audiences beyond completing an assignment to demonstrate learning for the teacher. The idea of authentic purposes and audiences implies that students will actually use forms like those seen in the real world. This kind of writing helps to prepare students for the many kinds of writing they are expected to produce outside schools and, as adults, in the world of work.

Students may choose to write in a variety of **forms** and for various real readers:

- a letter for the local newspaper
- an editorial published in the school newspaper
- an article for a class or team magazine
- a speech or proposal for the school-based decision making council
- a letter to their parents
- a proposal for the student council
- a brochure for families new to the community
- a report written for a targeted audience and based on inquiry research in which a student analyzes a situation, draws a conclusion, advocates a position and/or solves a problem.

These forms, as well as other real-world forms written for various readers, are suitable for inclusion in Kentucky’s Writing Portfolio.

Points to Consider: The Scoring Rubric

Unlike a grade of A or B, your child's score on the Writing Portfolio can give you information about the characteristics most often observed in your child's writing. When you and your child know what to look for, you also know what needs improvement.

The Kentucky Scoring Rubric is divided into three subdomains: Content, Structure and Conventions. Each of the subdomains is divided into cells with a number assigned to each one.

Kentucky Writing Scoring Rubric

0	1	2	3	4
CONTENT				
Purpose and Audience; Idea Development and Support				
<p>The writing:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Lacks purpose	<p>The writing:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Attempts to establish a general purpose; lacks focus	<p>The writing:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Attempts to establish and maintain a narrowed purpose; some lapses in focus	<p>The writing:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Establishes and maintains an authentic focused purpose throughout	<p>The writing:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Establishes and maintains an authentic and insightful focused purpose throughout
<input type="checkbox"/> Lacks awareness of audience	<input type="checkbox"/> Indicates limited awareness of audience's needs	<input type="checkbox"/> Indicates some awareness of audience's needs; makes some attempt to communicate with an audience; may demonstrate some voice and/or tone	<input type="checkbox"/> Indicates an awareness of audience's needs; communicates adequately with audience; conveys voice and/or appropriate tone	<input type="checkbox"/> Indicates a strong awareness of audience's needs; communicates effectively with audience; sustains distinctive voice and/or appropriate tone
<input type="checkbox"/> Lacks idea development; may provide random details	<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates limited idea development with few details and/or weak support; may attempt to apply some characteristics of the genre	<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates some idea development with details/support; support may be unelaborated, irrelevant and/or repetitious; may apply some characteristics of the genre	<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates depth of idea development with specific, sufficient details/support; applies characteristics of the genre	<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates reflective, analytical and/or insightful idea development; provides specific, thorough support; skillfully applies characteristics of the genre

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0	1	2	3	4
STRUCTURE				
Organization: unity and coherence; Sentences: structure and length				
<p>The writing:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates random organization	<p>The writing:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates ineffective or weak organization	<p>The writing:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates logical organization with lapses in coherence	<p>The writing:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates logical, coherent organization	<p>The writing:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates careful and/or subtle organization that enhances the purpose
<input type="checkbox"/> Lacks transitional elements	<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates limited and/or ineffective transitional elements	<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates some effective transitional elements	<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates logical, effective transitional elements throughout	<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates varied and subtle transitional elements throughout
<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates incorrect sentence structure throughout	<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates some ineffective or incorrect sentence structure	<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates simple sentences; may attempt more complex sentences but lacks control of sentence structure	<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates control and variety in sentence structure	<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates control, variety and complexity in sentence structure to enhance meaning
0	1	2	3	4
CONVENTIONS				
Language: grammar and usage, word choice; Correctness: spelling, punctuation, capitalization, abbreviation and documentation				
	<p>The writing:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates lack of control in grammar and usage	<p>The writing:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates some control of grammar and usage with some errors that do not interfere with communication	<p>The writing:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates control of grammar and usage relative to length and complexity	<p>The writing:</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates control of grammar and usage to enhance meaning
	<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates incorrect or ineffective word choice	<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates simplistic and/or imprecise word choice	<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates acceptable word choice appropriate for audience and purpose	<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates accurate, rich and/or precise word choice appropriate for audience and purpose
	<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates lack of control in correctness	<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates some control of correctness with some errors that do not interfere with communication	<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates control of correctness relative to length and complexity	<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates control of correctness to enhance communication

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Since learning to write is as much a developmental process as learning to read, you can look for characteristics to determine if your child is growing as a writer. The *Kentucky Scoring Rubric* lists these growth indicators as you read **through the categories of 0, 1, 2, 3 and 4.**

For example, inexperienced writers may show a limited awareness of why and for whom they are writing. When they have more learning experiences and thus more growth as writers, “some evidence,” but perhaps with “some lapses,” may appear more frequently. Successful writers will remain “focused on a purpose” throughout the writing. Parents, students and teachers should understand these growth points toward becoming better writers.

How Can Parents Help?

The six criteria below are those considered when portfolio writings are scored. These are generally accepted characteristics of “effective writing.” The questions can be used to guide a conference with your child about a piece of writing. Keep in mind that a conference about a piece of writing provides a learning opportunity for your child, and good questions provoke thinking. If your child simply answers “yes” to any of the questions, ask him/her to find specific examples in the piece of writing. **(Please do not make direct corrections or do the writing or typing for your child, since this takes the responsibility for learning away from the child.)**

Ask questions about purpose/audience.

- ❖ What do you want to write about? Why?
- ❖ Who will want/need to read this?
- ❖ What do you want the audience/reader to know or do?
- ❖ How will you present it to the audience/reader?

Ask questions about idea development/support.

- ❖ What are the details and examples you have used? Do they help the audience understand completely?
- ❖ Are they the best details and examples for your audience/reader? For your purpose?
- ❖ Have you explained important ideas?
- ❖ Do your examples support the main ideas?
- ❖ Do your details make the ideas clearer?

Ask questions about organization.

- ❖ Did you stick with your plan throughout the piece of writing?
- ❖ Does the order of the ideas make sense?
- ❖ Does all of your information fit together?
- ❖ Do your ideas flow easily from one to another?
- ❖ Will your reader be able to follow all of your thinking?

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Ask questions about sentences.

- ❖ Do your sentences have different lengths? Different beginnings? Different structures? Or do they sound too much alike?
- ❖ Do your sentences express complete thoughts?

Ask questions about language.

- ❖ Have you used a variety of words to make your meaning clear?
- ❖ Do the words say what you mean?
- ❖ Are all of your words used correctly?

Ask questions about correctness.

- ❖ Have you made any mistakes in spelling?
- ❖ Do you see any punctuation problems?
- ❖ Have you used capital letters in the needed places?
- ❖ Do you need to document any of your sources?

****NOTE: If you focus on errors before the writing is completely developed in the areas above, you may keep your child from doing his or her best writing. However, these skills should receive attention before the writing is “published” for an audience.***

Examples of Kentucky students’ writing at grades 4, 7, and 12 are available for you to examine at your child’s school. These examples, called Anchor Papers, give a clearer picture of what the characteristics look like as children develop skills. Teachers use the examples for comparison when they score student writing. Students use the examples to learn about their own writing skills. You can use the examples to help your child become a better thinker and writer. These Anchor Papers also can be located on the Kentucky Department of Education Website. Visit the site at <http://www.education.ky.gov> and enter Kentucky Writing Handbook into the search box.

Another valuable resource that shows examples of student writings at different grade levels is the *Kentucky Marker Papers*. This document can also be found on the Kentucky Department of Education Website. Visit the site at <http://www.education.ky.gov> and enter “Kentucky Marker Papers” into the search box.

Points of Interest: The Most Frequently Asked Questions and Their Answers

Q: Who developed the Kentucky Writing Portfolio and the Kentucky Writing Scoring Rubric?

A: The Writing Advisory Committee, made up of Kentucky educators from all parts of the state.

Q: Is correctness important in portfolio pieces?

A: Yes. Students should learn and practice correct spelling, grammar, capitalization, and punctuation skills in the context of pieces of writing. This means they use the lessons taught to proofread and correct pieces of writing that they are preparing for publication. Research has shown that grammar taught by textbook drill not tied to daily use does little to improve children's speaking and writing. For more information see the editing section in "Making the Point: The Writing Process" and correctness in "Points to Consider: The Kentucky Writing Scoring Rubric."

Q: Who scores portfolios?

A: Any teacher or administrator who has been trained to score.

Q: Should my child be writing in all classes and at all grade levels?

A: Yes. Writing is a tool for learning. Students in all classes should be engaged in writing-to-learn activities, writing to demonstrate learning, and writing that goes through a process to produce pieces for a real audience and a real purpose.

Q: How will I know my child's portfolio score?

A: Official portfolio scores, along with other Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) data, are released to schools and made available to parents through the schools' counseling office. Teachers are encouraged to discuss scores and suggestions for improvement with students.

Q: What is the difference between a writing folder and a writing portfolio?

A: Student writing folders are holding bins for many pieces of writing in various stages. They show student progress and provide students with chances to review work and make changes. In contrast, Kentucky Writing Portfolios contain a purposeful student selection of **three** entries at the 4th grade and 7th grade levels and **four** entries at the 12th grade. They give reviewers an opportunity to determine student performance levels based upon "best works."

Q: Do the pieces for the portfolio have to be typed?

A: No. The writing should be neat and legible. Students may use many methods to produce published pieces (pen, pencil, word processors or typewriters), but whichever method is used, the student must do the writing, word processing or typing. However, schools or districts may determine that typed portfolios are preferred.

Q: Who besides the teacher will see my child's writing?

A: The primary intended audiences of individual pieces are portfolio scorers and any other person with whom the child chooses.

Q: Will I get a copy of my child's portfolio?

A: Your child's original portfolio must be kept at the school. However, you may request a copy of it.

Q: May my child work on the portfolio at home?

A: Yes. While the writing should have a direct connection to classroom instruction, parents may assist children during the writing learning process. Parents should adhere to the same guidelines provided to teachers in the "Kentucky Educational System's Code of Ethics for Appropriate Testing Practices for School and District Personnel." **Parents can ask questions and point out errors on writing that may be placed in the portfolio; however, they should not do the writing for their children nor make the corrections for them.** (See specific suggestions in "Making the Point: The Writing Process" and "How Can Parents Help?")

Q: How can I help my child become a better writer?

A: The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) makes the following suggestions:

- Build a climate of words at home. The basis of good writing is good talk. Encourage your child to talk about subjects of interest.
- Encourage your child to read, especially reading that is self-selected. Let your child see you read and invite discussions about what you are both reading.
- Praise your child's efforts at writing. Resist the tendency to focus on errors of spelling, punctuation and other mechanical parts of writing. Be primarily interested in content. Emphasize your child's successes. For every error your child makes, there are a dozen things done well.
- Encourage your child to write and ask for information, free samples, travel brochures or other items. For suggestions about where to write and how to write, purchase a copy of the U.S. Postal booklet *All About Letters*.
- Be alert to occasions when your child can be involved in writing. Writing for real purposes is rewarding, and the daily activities of families present many opportunities for purposeful writing (grocery lists, telephone messages, notes to family members).

- Ask to see your child's writing. Express interest but remember to allow your child to decide if and when to share.
(Selected comments from "How To Help Your Child Become A Better Writer," a brochure from NCTE)
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Q: Can I view my child's writing portfolio?

A: Yes, a parent can request to see his/her child's writing portfolio at parent-teacher conferences or schedule an appointment with the child's teacher. During the school year, students will have a working portfolio with drafts representing different stages of the writing process. The best time to view a completed writing portfolio that will be used for assessment is in the spring before the CATS assessment begins.

Extra Points: For Your Information

Children learn when they know we care. Parents and educators must work together to help students meet the challenges of the 21st century.

We welcome your participation, point-of-view, comments, suggestions and questions concerning writing. For more information, please contact us.

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“As a parent, you are the most important influence in your child’s success in school and in life.”

- National Parent Teacher Association