



Professional Development Webinar #2: Writing and Grading Tests

Principles

1. We should be testing the processes of observation, deduction, and explanation rather than the outcomes of these processes. Our tests should not ask, “What conclusions have you drawn?” but rather “How have you drawn conclusions?”
2. Lit tests should therefore focus first on identifying the structural elements of fiction toward which Socratic discussions are always aimed.
3. Secondly, lit tests should ask students to relate these details to the themes of the stories.
4. Title-specific material should come primarily from the student, not the teacher.
5. Lit tests should be graded on plausibility, reference to the text, and clean mechanics.

Practices

1. Grammar stage: factual recall plus a smattering of ID (on finals, for example)
2. Logic stage: ID plus a smattering of essay (on finals, for example)
3. Rhetoric stage: ID and essay

Factual recall tests:

Always include the following ten questions, to be answered in a complete sentence and worth two parts credit – one for the correct (or plausible) details, and one for grammar/punctuation/spelling.

1. Where does this story happen?
2. When does this story happen?
3. What is the protagonist’s name?
4. Describe protagonist of this story by writing a sentence like this: “The protagonist of this story is a [blank] who [blank].”
5. What does the protagonist want most in this story?
6. What can’t the protagonist have what he wants?
7. What type of conflict does this story present?
8. Describe the climax of this story by writing a sentence that begins like this: “The conflict of this story is resolved when...”

9. What is the main idea of this story?
10. What is the author's name?

Quote or term IDs:

Three to five sentences about a number of quotations or terms chosen from a list compiled by the teacher. The original list is distributed before the test as a study guide, and the identical list is redistributed as the test form. Students choose a prescribed number of quotes (a subset of the list) and write an ID on each of them. Each ID must accomplish TWO things:

- **Identify and situate the term or quotation** within the title's *plot*, *setting*, *character* and *conflict*. Answer the question, "Which quotation is this?" The more detail, the better, and the best sentences deal with all four elements of fiction.
- **State/argue for the thematic significance of the term or quotation** based on the above. Answer the question, "What themes does this quotation emphasize?" What ideas does it represent? How does its presence in the story help the text deliver its payload? The best sentences link an argument to the details given in the first sentence or two.

Grading rubric: score one point (or one part credit) for each of the following

- Situation: Are all structural elements considered in the ID?
- Detail: Does the ID provide sufficient detail?
- Theme: Is a plausible theme clearly stated?
- Argument: Is there a link between the theme and the preceding details?
- Grammar: Is the ID free of egregious errors of grammar, spelling and punctuation?

Note the absence, in the grading rubric, of concern for correct interpretations or "right answers."

Essays:

Once the principle of "process over outcomes" is established, there is great power in habituating students to a single essay prompt for testing purposes. If students know what question will be asked on the test (provided that this prompt is not title specific), their preparation and review will be directed and efficient and will furthermore reinforce good reading habits.

Some version of the following essay prompt is most useful:

"What is the specific theme of this story, and how does the author's use of [structural or stylistic element] help him to emphasize it?"

Grading rubric: score one point (or one part credit) for each of the following:

- Arguable thesis statement
- Textual support
- Logical structure
- Clean mechanics

- Readable style

More information about grading essays can be found on the *5-fold Grading Rubric* hosted at www.centerforlitschools.com