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## Written Communication, Critical Thinking, Information Literacy Integrated Rubric Guide

California State University, Monterey Bay

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## Written Communication, Critical Thinking, Information Literacy Integrated Rubric Guide

California State University, Monterey Bay

Faculty who have worked with these rubrics at CSUMB have developed this guide to help you apply the rubric. Although there are often multiple descriptors within any level for a criterion, we suggest that you choose the level based on the balance of evidence rather than grading “down” for weak performance on any of the particular descriptors. To quote from materials developed by Stanford University for scoring teaching samples, “The description requires professional judgment to apply to the evidence; it is not in the form of an item whose presence or absence is readily apparent to noneducators, and perhaps even to nonspecialists.”

The structure of this document follows a consistent pattern. 1) Each criterion is discussed in terms of its big ideas and the progression of those ideas across the levels in fairly broad terms. 2) For each criterion, there is a description of what distinguishes a level 3 (proficient) performance from a level 2 (developing) performance. *(The structure that follows is based on a document created for the Performance Assessment of California Teachers [PACT].)*

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### Issue/Problem (CT)

#### 1) Big ideas and their progression

Definition of issue--Writers both respond to and create an urgency for the response in writing. They do so by defining a problem or situation and highlighting what is *at issue* about that situation. In the physical sciences, issues are widely agreed upon, and the definition of the issue may be abbreviated or elliptical. In the humanities and social sciences, a great deal of rhetorical work may go into defining a situation and establishing that some situation is problematic and requires resolution. In applied physical scientific research, considerable rhetorical work similar to that required in social sciences may be needed. Across the rubric, this idea progresses from a vague or general definition of the issue to a precise, narrowly bounded definition.

Key Terms--In defining an issue, writers must often negotiate ambiguities of terms used to describe the issue. Often, the terms have various meanings (for instance in popular versus academic contexts or among disciplinary contexts or even within a single discipline). Levels of performance vary according to the proportion of ambiguous terms clarified and the quality of that clarification.

Background information--In order for readers to understand both the situation that is problematic and what is problematic about that situation, writers must provide some background information. In physical sciences, often very little background information is needed; whereas in applied sciences and disciplines in the humanities, often a great deal of background information is needed to ensure clear communication of the issue. The levels vary in terms of this idea by the sufficiency of the information provided in order for readers to have a full and rich understanding of the issue addressed.

#### 2) Level differences

**At level 2**, A paper can score a 2 on this criterion by framing the issue too broadly or by addressing too many different possible focuses. Or a paper may score a 2 because the author may not define the issue and associated terms clearly for the reader or explain the background enough for the

reader. A level 2 paper may simply expect the reader to fill in a lot of information regarding the issue, leaving the reader confused as to the problem or issue being presented.

**At level 3**, the narrow and focused definition of the issue makes a paper a 3 on this criterion. Terms such as *complexity* or *difficulty* need to be unpacked both in terms of their meaning and the criteria used to determine them in order for a paper to score as proficient in light of this criterion. At level 3, a writer also contextualizes the issue, providing enough background information for readers to understand the issue and why it matters.

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## Supporting Materials (IL)

### 1) Big ideas and their progression

Variety of information sources--Different contexts call for different kinds of information sources--primary, personal, journalistic, academic. Depending on the discipline and task, the quantity and range of information sources selected may matter for the quality of the support writers marshal. Some disciplines and tasks require writers to use a variety of sources; others call for solely academic or primary sources. Across the rubric, this element progresses from too few sources to be convincing to appropriately various sources.

Criteria for source selection--In order to ensure a deep engagement with the issue they address, writers select the sources after carefully considering such issues as topic, discipline, authorship, currency, audience, and point of view. More experienced writers consider a greater number of these concerns in selecting their sources. Some areas additionally require engagement with certain foundational sources. This element may be difficult to assess unless a reference list (works cited, bibliography) is present.

### 2) Level differences

This criterion is concerned with both quantity and quality of sources, and recognizes that the expectations for these will vary by discipline and assignment. For this reason, much of the determination of what is “appropriate” is based on the scorer’s understanding of the assignment and what the student is trying to accomplish with each source. Because of this, a scorer would not be able to accurately evaluate the supporting materials of a paper based on a decontextualized bibliography. Even within a single assignment, the same type of source would be appropriate support for some purposes but not others. For example, the website of a nonprofit organization may **not** be an appropriate source of statistics on domestic violence, but it could be appropriately cited as an example of how nonprofits target their outreach to specific communities.

The difference between level 2 and level 3 is mostly a matter of degree, with level 3 having a greater proportion of sources considered appropriate with regard to authority, relevance, and currency. The quantity of sources may be insufficient to support the writer’s communication goals at a level 2, while the quantity will usually be sufficient at level 3.

**Level 2:** Multiple sources are used, but the quantity of sources may not allow the student to fully support their claims and offer multiple perspectives, or is otherwise insufficient to meet the goals of the assignment. Some of the sources have appropriate authority, currency, and relevance, and others do not.

**Level 3:** In order to score a 3 on this criterion, it must be clear that the writer has considered the authority of the sources, in addition to currency and relevance. The sources are of a quantity and quality that are, for the most part, appropriate to the discipline and the assignment, though the scorer sees some room for improvement. For example, for a research assignment requiring primarily scholarly sources, some information may be drawn from sources that are credible but not entirely appropriate (e.g. an irrelevant discipline, a trade journal, Smithsonian magazine, etc.). Overall, the selection of sources has a positive impact on establishing the credibility of the writer.

**N/A:** The nature of the paper does not require the use of information beyond the student's personal experiences or creative work.

**Unscorable:** If the scorer is not able to evaluate the citations, either because the student does not provide them or because they are missing from the document provided, this criterion is unscorable.

**Zero (0)--** A zero is given if the quality and quantity of information sources is so poor as to not meet the description of level 1.

Shorter assignments may not allow students to demonstrate proficiency (reach a level 3) for this criterion.

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## Use of support (IL)

### 1) Big ideas and their progression

Organization of information from sources--Once writers have chosen the information they will use, they must structure that information in ways that suit the genre and purpose of their task. Only in the lowest level of proficiency is organization of that information addressed as problematic in the rubric.

Interpretation/Analysis of information from sources--The job of writers in expository or argumentative writing is to narrow readers' possible interpretations, to lead readers to see information in the same ways that authors see it. Depending on the context, writers may make certain assumptions about how readers will interpret information. In situations in which readers might reasonably interpret the information in different ways, writers must explicitly analyze or interpret the information for readers in a convincing manner. The quality of that explanation and its appropriateness to the writer's purpose defines the movement across the levels for this element.

Synthesis of information from sources--In order to create new knowledge, writers must set sources into conversation with each other, identifying patterns of agreement, disagreement, and nuance among the sources. Across the rubric, this idea progresses from little or no synthesis to synthesis that fully realizes the writer's apparent purpose.

### 2) Level differences

**At level 2,** the author organizes, interprets, and analyzes information from sources. Information is provided in a structured and organized manner. However, a clear connection of how these pieces of information are related and used to achieve the intended purpose of the paper is lacking. In other words, synthesis of the information is either not present or unclear. For example, students may summarize individual sources in separate paragraphs (i.e. utilizing individual summaries from an

annotated bibliography without combining the summaries to show similarities and differences between cited work).

**To reach a level 3**, the writer must synthesize the information from sources. Beyond presenting relevant information related to the topic, setting the sources into conversation with each other and using the resulting understanding to support the writer's purpose is expected. A paper that scores a three identifies connections and relationships among the sources and draws warranted influences from those patterns.

**Not applicable (N/A)**--The nature of the paper does not require the use of information beyond the student's personal experiences or creative work.

**Zero (0)**--A zero is given if the organization, analysis, and synthesis of information from sources is so poor as to not meet the description of level 1.

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## Position (CT)

### 1) Big ideas and their progression

Position--When writers enter an academic conversation, they establish their own position among the many voices they have cited either by establishing themselves with respect to those positions or by adding new findings to the ongoing investigation. Ideally, such a position accounts for the variety of perspectives represented in the conversation, not only acknowledging those alternate perspectives but recognizing the limits of the author's own position and developing nuance through the engagement with other ideas. It is the clarity of this position and how well it reflects the complexity of the problem that distinguishes the levels in this element of the criterion.

Assumptions--The various perspectives engaged by writers, both their own and others', are based on both empirical and value assumptions about knowledge and the world--whether they are disciplinary or experience based. Depending on the task, writers acknowledge those assumptions in various ways--by identifying limitations in analysis of information, by setting sources with contrasting perspectives into conversation, by explicitly marking those assumptions. Writers at the beginning stages of development are more likely to recognize those assumptions in others' writing than in their own. Writers performing at the more experienced levels of the rubric demonstrate attention to the context, their own assumptions, and those of others.

### 2) Level differences

**At level 2**, student may acknowledge different sides of the issue or problem and relevant contexts but may not develop position clearly or in any depth, or may focus solely on a limited number of "sides," perhaps positioning their work with regard to what they think the "instructor wants" rather than looking more deeply at the issue they are addressing. Students may still make assumptions which need to be unpacked for the reader.

An extract from Dalton's (1995) *Racial Healing* clearly illustrates what it looks like to acknowledge others' assumptions but not one's own.

It is often easier for White people to "get" the fact that disadvantage shapes the perspective of people of color than to get the ways in which advantage shapes their own take on the world.~ last summer, Jill invited her younger brother and his family to join us at our

vacation spot in Rhode Island. At our suggestion, Dan and his son decided to try their hand at canoeing in the pond across the street. As I began to describe how to get to the "put in" point about a block away, Jill cut in to suggest that Dan and Lynn just portage the canoe across the neighbors' lawn. "Sure, we can ask them," I said with a notable lack of enthusiasm, "but what if they are not home?" "It doesn't matter. I'll leave a message on their answering machine. I'm sure it's no big deal." I winced, but decided it wasn't worth causing a scene.

After the adventurers set off, Jill sought to assure me that she understood why I was troubled by the idea of traipsing across the neighbors' lawn without permission. She alluded to an earlier conversation in which I had explained my reluctance to go explore private beaches or peer into empty beach houses. I feared that, as a Black man, I fit the image of "perpetrator" more than that of curious beachcomber.

I appreciate the fact that Jill was sensitive to my frame of reference, but I am not confident that she fully understood that she had one too. Her view of the risks associated with trespassing was not just neutral. It reflected a certain sense of entitlement, a belief that she has the right to go wherever she wants, and a confidence that she is welcome there. In other words, Jill's assessment of the situation was every bit as much shaped by her WASP upbringing as mine was by growing up Black and male. (p. 114-115)

**At level 3**, author must demonstrate awareness of own assumptions (both epistemological and value) as well as those of others; taking into account the complexities of the issues or problem and acknowledge the relevance of context, recognizing that there are many perspectives on an issue and that different perspectives may share some dimensions as well as differing on other dimensions .

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## Genre and Disciplinary Conventions (WC)

### 1) Big ideas and their progression

Organization, Presentation, Formatting--Genres arise as responses to recurring rhetorical situations. Because those rhetorical situations involve similar audiences and purposes, the responses develop common features. While writers may certainly choose to violate audience expectations about organization, presentation, and formatting, they will more commonly follow those expectations. Doing so helps readers to find the information they expect where they expect it. Development of this idea across the levels relates to the extent to which the elements are successful and whether they are basic and formulaic or appropriate to the specific discipline and context for which they are intended.

Voice, tone, and use of person--When writers address different audiences for different purposes, they adjust the formality of diction and syntax, include humor or irony, use first-person or third-person pronouns, generally adapt the writing to match the occasion, audience and purpose. Development of this idea across the rubric depends on the appropriateness and consistency of the writer's choices in this regard.

Vocabulary--Academic disciplines (and all social groups) often develop specialized language used in very particular ways. Depending on the audience and context, the use of such language can be jargonistic and interfere with communication or can be appropriate and facilitate communication, assuming the language is used accurately. Development of this element reflects

the writer's command of the disciplinary vocabulary and appropriate use of it to communicate with the particular audience.

Transitions--Skillful use of transitions helps readers follow logical nuances in a writer's prose, building not only connection from one point to the next but also an overall sense of coherence in the work. A focus on transitions includes not only the conventional "transitional words and phrases" but other strategies for coherence such as repetition, reference, and parallelism. The skill with which writers lead their readers through their reasoning distinguishes the levels in this element of the criterion.

## 2) Level differences

At **level two**, the writing appropriately reflects the surface features of the genre (e.g., headings, labeled sections, layout, overall pattern of organization). However, some content may appear in unexpected sections or out of order, and transitions may not serve to lead readers through the logic of the genre. For example, content may be placed in sections, formulaically for the "instructor" audience to piece genre together, rather than providing an audience with the language necessary which flows, section by section, to follow the logic of the genre.

At **level three**, this criterion displays attentiveness to the logic of the organization and the stylistic expectations of the discipline and genre. Examples of important conventions include but are not limited to appropriate development of abstracts; executive summaries; providing background; literature review; as well as expectations of the genre with regard to explanations of methods and methodology as relates to humanities, social, and physical sciences, distinguishing methods from results from conclusions in scientific papers.

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## Conclusions and outcomes (CT)

### 1) Big ideas and their progression

Related outcomes--Writers not only take positions within ongoing conversations but make claims about the implications of those positions. The more experienced the writer, the more logical and sophisticated are those claims.

Relationship to evidence and perspectives--Just as the positions writers take should be grounded in thoughtful evaluation of evidence and multiple perspectives, so should their claims about the implications of those positions. Levels related to this element of the criterion differ in terms of how comprehensively and thoughtfully the writer appears to have considered the evidence and perspectives.

### 2) Level differences

At **level 2**, the presenter(s) or speaker(s) provides a conclusion which is supported by information provided during the presentation and is relevant to the type of presentation being performed. However, the conclusion provided lacks either a comprehensive review of information relevant to the topic being presented or uses information in such a way as to only support one's own argument or intended purpose. Similarly, the outcomes provided help to illuminate the audience about potential implications or consequences related to the topic, but other potential outcomes are either missing or purposefully not included.



**At level 3**, the presenter(s) or speaker(s) provides a conclusion which is tied directly to a wider range of potential information sources, showing a comprehensive review of viewpoints on a given subject. The conclusion highlights weaknesses and strengths in one's own position by critically reviewing prior information provided in the presentation. Identified outcomes relate directly back to the conclusion and are realistic given the data and other relevant information provided in the presentation.

Conclusions for a level three paper explicitly consider multiple perspectives (rather than, for a two, selectively chosen information). In order to achieve a three, the writer must consider the full scope of information represented in the essay.

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## Academic Integrity (IL)

### 1) Big ideas and their progression

Distinctions in levels for this criterion relate to the degree of consistency with which the writer does each of the following:

Attributes information to sources--While disciplines vary in the conventions they use to do so, all academic disciplines in the U.S. call upon writers to distinguish between their own ideas and the ideas of others and to enable readers to trace information to its source.

Appropriately chooses to paraphrase, summarize, or quote--This element varies significantly across contexts. In some disciplines--such as the social sciences and physical sciences--directly quoting from sources is less common; in humanistic disciplines quotations are central to the academic endeavor.

Uses information in ways that are true to original context--Student writers include information and state positions for a variety of purposes, not always because they represent the perspective of the source's author. This element refers to the student writer's selection of information from sources and their ability to distinguish the purpose for which that information was used in its original context.

Distinguishes between common knowledge and ideas requiring attribution--While sources can be found for almost any information, some knowledge is so widespread as to require no attribution. This element refers to the student writer's ability to distinguish that information from information that is specific to particular sources.

Acquires information ethically and legally--This element is difficult to assess in finished products, as it relates to the *process* of knowledge collection, but in instances in which that process is evident in the writing, standards of conduct regarding research--both primary and secondary--should be applied.

### 2) Level differences

**At level 2**, students may show an over-reliance on direct quotation and/or inconsistency in attribution and citation. Additionally, students may use information in ways that misrepresent the original context. They may provide citations for ideas that are common knowledge or fail to cite ideas requiring attribution. The reader may have occasional difficulty distinguishing between the writer's own ideas and the ideas of others.



**In a level 3**, sources are consistently cited and there is a greater balance (appropriate to the discipline) between direct quotation and paraphrase or summary. Student attributes information to sources appropriately, and chooses to paraphrase, summarize, or quote in ways that are true to the original context. Student distinguishes between common knowledge and ideas requiring attribution.

**Not applicable (N/A)**--The nature of the paper does not require the use of information beyond the student's personal experiences or creative work.

**Zero (0)**-- A zero is given if the student makes no attempt to follow the practices listed.

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## **Grammar and Mechanics (WC)**

### **1) Big ideas and their progression**

Accuracy--Skillful writing in an academic context follows the conventions of academic English in terms of sentence structure, punctuation, spelling, and capitalization. Distinctions among levels according to this element relate to whether or not errors interfere with meaning and how carefully the writing has been proofread.

Fluency--While the absence of errors is important for communication, a long essay comprised entirely of short declarative sentences might be technically correct but tedious to read. Fluent writing uses a variety of sentences lengths and structures. The progression of this idea is tacit in the rubric, relating to the skill with which the writer applies writing conventions.

### **2) Level differences**

**At a level 2**, errors rarely impede meaning. However, students may overlook sentence boundaries, producing some fragments, comma splices, or other inappropriately punctuated writing, which lacks polish. There may be some inappropriately used apostrophes, missing suffixes, or misused capitalization, which reflect that the student has not carefully proofread work.

**At a level 3**, errors don't impede meaning and writing has been carefully polished, demonstrating that student has carefully revised work. Sentence boundaries are clear and thoughtfully articulated. There is an attention to detail such that apostrophes show appropriate attribution, suffixes and capitalization are generally appropriately constructed.