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Writing Quality Scale (WQS) – HE version Stuart, N. & Barnett, A.L. (2024)

Administration and scoring guide

Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

Writing is an important skill that takes time to master. Berninger and Amtmann's (2003) 'Simple view of writing' is a useful framework for understanding the different skills; language, cognitive, and motor processes involved in writing and how they interact. In early childhood the focus is on mastering the 'transcription' skills of how to form the letters and words required to represent language in its written form. Once this essential skill is mastered, then the focus moves to 'text generation' and how to use written language effectively to convey information.

Writing skills are important throughout education with handwritten work continuing to be used as a method of assessment. However, for some students, writing continues to present challenges in higher education (HE), with difficulties experienced in the accuracy and fluency of writing letters or spelling words (transcription skills) and/or in the planning and composition of ideas and thoughts into written text (text generation skills). This includes students with specific learning difficulties (SpLDs) such as dyslexia and in 2021-22 students with SpLDs accounted for 6.15% of the higher education (HE) student population in the UK and for 33% of the student population with a known disability (Higher Education Statistics Authority, 2023).

Various tools are available to measure aspects of transcription. For example, the standardised Detailed Assessment of Speed of Handwriting (DASH, Barnett et al., 2007; DASH17+, Barnett et al., 2010) measures handwriting speed across a range of writing tasks. Handwriting legibility can be assessed with the criterion referenced Handwriting Legibility Scale (HLS; Barnett et al., 2018). However, tools for measuring writing quality are limited, particularly for use with students in HE. The development of the Writing Quality Scale (WQS; Stuart & Barnett, 2023) arose out of the needs of specialist teacher assessors working in HE. The aim was to develop a quick, simple, and practical criterion referenced tool to help in gathering information about the difficulties that a student may experience in writing in HE and to help inform decisions about the support that they may need. The WQS has been designed to be used with the free writing task from the DASH 17+ [1](Barnett et al., 2010).

The WQS uses an analytic scoring measure that provides an overall score for writing quality based on scores given for six individual criteria. The six criteria target areas known to predict writing quality in HE academic assignments (Crossley, 2020; Crossley et al., 2014) as well as the areas in which students with SpLDs (such as dyslexia) often have difficulty with when writing (Connelly et al., 2006; Galbraith et al., 2012; Sumner & Connelly, 2020). Within an overall score for writing quality (which can be categorised as: low, medium, high), the WQS indicates where areas of relative strength and difficultly lie and where support might best be targeted.

The WQS was designed for use by a range of professionals, including specialist teacher assessors and educational psychologists, to identity students whose writing quality may be a cause for concern and require appropriate support. The WQS does not require the need for specialised or subject specific language and/or knowledge to administer it.

The aim of the WQS is to help identify students (aged 17-25) in HE who have poor written expression or writing quality.

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1   At the time of writing the development of DASH-2 was underway. This also includes the same 'Free Writing' task and so the WQS can be applied equally well to this new edition (Barnett et al., 2024).

Using the WQS with the DASH17+ (Barnett et al., 2010)

The WQS has been designed for use with the free writing task which forms part of the Detailed Assessment of Speed of Handwriting (DASH17+, Barnett et al., 2010). The DASH17+ free writing task is a ten-minute task on the topic of 'My Life'. The respondent is asked to look at a spider diagram titled 'My Life', to help them think about what they could write about. Suggestions on the spider diagram include: their studies, family, friends, holidays, school/college/university, music, sports, dance etc. Respondents are told they can write about one topic, several topics or all of the topics but that **they should aim for continuous text rather than just producing a list**. They are also told that they do not have to write about things that have really happened or full truths.

Chapter 2: WQS Assessment Criteria

There are six criteria as follows in the WQS, each is given a score between one and four and these are then summed to yield a total score ranging from 6-24, with higher scores indicating poor writing quality:

1. Content and development
2. Structure and organisation
3. Vocabulary
4. Sentence structure (including grammar)
5. Punctuation (including capitalisation and apostrophes)
6. Spelling

A description of each of the criteria is given below with examples taken from student responses from the DASH17+ standardisation sample to provide illustrations of the application of criteria where appropriate.

1 Content and development

This criterion refers to the quality of the content; the development of ideas and how clear and easy these are for the reader to understand. The content can be developed by adding supporting details to the ideas via **extension** and **elaboration**. For example, extension can be used to develop an idea by adding specific information to a description or explanation. However, as the amount of specific information added to a description or explanation increases, the idea will move from being extended to being elaborated. Extension and elaboration can therefore be viewed on a continuum. For example, *I play musical instruments* can be extended with supporting detail as to which musical instruments are played, how long each instrument has been played and to what level. Elaboration would involve providing further specific detail about whether they play in an orchestra or band, their favourite piece of music, which is the preferred instrument etc.

Good vs. poor quality:

In a good quality script, ideas will be extended, elaborated, and related to each other to add to the overall **coherence** of the script. The way in which this is done will attract the interest and maintain the attention of the reader with information that may be informative and/or interesting. The writer may focus on one aspect in writing about 'My Life', for example, their course at university, their hobbies or a past holiday or holidays. Good quality writing will develop ideas with appropriate supporting detail and elaborate on this with additional detail. In the 'My Life' script this may include personal reflections and feelings.

In contrast, at the other end of the scale, weak or poor-quality writing may be 'list-like' (for e.g. *I like …, I live …, I study …*) with limited or no extension, and no elaboration. Several different prompts or ideas from the DASH 17+ spider diagram might be included, but with few additional details provided.

2 Organisation and structure

This criterion refers to how the ideas are presented and ordered in the script to make it easy for the reader to interpret and understand. The organisation and structure of a text should involve the use of **paragraphs** to help identify individual ideas and their development. (Note that in administering the DASH 17+ free writing task there is a discussion about the task between the assessor and student, and then one minute is allowed for planning and for the student to work on their own and make notes, if they wish, on the spider diagram).

Cohesion is important in contributing to the organisation and structure of the script and refers to the relation or connection of content, both within and between paragraphs. Relations between ideas can be indicated in sentences by repeating key words and phrases, for example by using **pronouns**, and between paragraphs by using **transitional** expressions such as *but, also, first, before, for example, therefore*, and *because*.

Good vs. poor quality:

Good quality writing will have a clear structure to it and will make use of cohesive devices to link the content, at phrase, clause, sentence, and paragraph level. The organisation will enhance the central idea and help the reader move through the script. Thoughtful transitions will show how ideas (paragraphs) connect to one another throughout the script and help to signpost the content of each paragraph. The structure will be logical and effective and make it easy for the reader to finish reading the script.

Paragraphs should be linked to ideas (topics), so a feature of weaker or poorer quality writing may be a single paragraph containing several different ideas. Poor quality writing will lack structure and coherence with little or no organisation and with confusing transitions between paragraphs. It may be difficult for the reader to see how everything fits together in these scripts.

3 Vocabulary

A wide vocabulary is important to enable precision in making word choices to ensure the intended meaning is conveyed. The words used will also allow the writer to adapt their writing for the intended audience and create variety in sentences and paragraphs to engage and retain the reader's interest.

Good versus poor quality:

Good quality writing will include a wide, varied and carefully chosen vocabulary as above.

In contrast, poor quality writing may contain vocabulary choices that compromise the overall meaning and clarity of what is written. The vocabulary used may be restricted, for example using a small number of common or frequently used words. It may also include slang, jargon, and clichés and judgment will be required as to whether their use is appropriate to the task.

4 Sentence structure

This criterion refers to whether the script is written using well-formed and meaningful sentences that conform to the grammatical 'rules' (or conventions) of standard English. For a sentence to be well formed it must contain a verb, express a complete idea, and make sense on its own i.e., not need any further information to clarify the meaning of what is being expressed. A useful way of testing whether the sentence is well-formed is to see if it can be easily read out loud.

Sentence Structure can be affected by errors in:

- **Word order:** In English most sentences will have a **subject** followed by a **verb** and then optionally an **object**:

    Incorrect: *I to the cinema **go** every week* (verb placement error)
    Correct: *I **go** to the cinema every week*

    In addition, there are rules for the placement of other parts of speech in sentences (e.g. adjectives, determiners)

    Incorrect: *The boy kicked blue ball **the** into the road* (determiner placement error)
    *The boy kicked the ball **blue** into the road* (adjective placement error)
    Correct: *The boy kicked **the blue** ball into the road*

- **Omitted words:** Omission of words can affect both the grammaticality of the sentence (i.e., omission of **function words**) and its meaning (i.e., omission of **content words**)

    Incorrect: *I go to **[ ]** cinema every week* (missing function word = determiner)
    *I **[ ]** to the cinema every week* (missing content word = verb)
    Correct: *I **go** to **the** cinema every week*

- **Punctuation** is a separate criterion in the WQS (see Criterion 5 Punctuation) but errors in punctuation that affect the meaning of a sentence are included under Sentence Structure. For example:

    Run-on sentences: These are caused by incorrect sentence structure and/or the incorrect use or omission of punctuation. The following are two examples of run-on sentences. In these examples, punctuation is used, but it is used incorrectly. This can result in long and convoluted sentences that lack structure and are difficult to read and understand.

    > *I am not a fan of sports but my Dad likes football I have a large family: my mum, dad, I have a half-brother and a half sister and many aunties, uncles and cousins.*

    > *Hello! My name is ▆▆▆▆, I am seventeen years of age and am currently attending ▆▆▆▆▆ College - but the days of this are drawing close and hopefully, if I finally manage to be on the receiving end of any luck, onto The University of ▆▆▆▆ to study international relations – and no I don't know why I chose this subject either!*

    Fragmented sentences: A sentence fragment is a phrase or clause that on its own does not make sense and cannot be a sentence. For example, '*Because of the rain*' cannot stand alone as a sentence but becomes a dependent clause when added to '*we packed up and left the campsite early*'.

    Incorrect: *Because of the rain. We packed up and left the campsite early.*
    Correct: *Because of the rain, we packed up and left the campsite early.*

- **Grammar** is used to refer to the degree to which writing conforms to certain 'rules' of standard English. The following are examples of grammatical errors which are generally accepted as being signs of non-standard English (errors in bold and underlined) and which may affect sentence structure:

Tense marking errors:

Incorrect: *My Mum __walk__ the dog every day.* (Third person singular error)
Correct: *My Mum **walks** the dog every day.*

Incorrect: *We **goed** there every summer.* (Over-regularisation error)
Correct: *We **went** there every summer.*

Subject-verb agreement errors:

Incorrect: *My friend **are** funny*
Correct: *My friend **is** funny*

Incorrect: *They __was__ ready to begin playing the game.*
Correct: *They **were** ready to begin playing the game.*

Omission of auxiliary (to be, to have, to do) verbs:

Incorrect: *He [   ] smart.*
Correct: *He **is** smart.*

Verb contraction errors:

Incorrect: *I am **gonna** do it one day.*
Correct: *I am **going to** do it one day.*

Pronoun errors:

Incorrect: *My friends and __me__ are going to the cinema.*
Correct: *My friends and **I** are going to the cinema.*

Incorrect: *I am not like __them__ people.*
Correct: *I am not like **those** people.*

Negation errors:

Incorrect: *I haven't got __no__ siblings.*
Correct: *I haven't got **any** siblings.*

Good quality vs. poor quality:

Good quality writing will utilise correctly constructed sentences to express ideas, themes, and topics clearly and to retain the reader's interest and engagement. Sentences will show variety, with some balance in the use of sentence types (e.g. simple, complex, compound). The sentences may reflect the content and development, as well as the structure and organisation of the script, with more complex and varied sentence structures used where ideas are elaborated. The correct use of grammar will contribute to the clarity and style of the writing and ensure the meaning is clear.

Poor writing quality may be characterised by simple sentences with little variety, and which do not contribute in any way to engaging or holding the reader's interest. Where long sentences are used, these may be convoluted and difficult to understand. Errors in grammar will be frequent and noticeable and make what is written difficult to follow and understand.

5 Punctuation including capitalisation and apostrophes

The correct use of capital letters and apostrophes are included with punctuation in this criterion. Punctuation errors that affect the meaning of a sentence and result in long or incomplete sentences are included under the *Sentence Structure* criterion. Punctuation errors, such as incorrect use of apostrophes, that do *not* affect the overall meaning of a sentence or result in an awkward sentence structure are included under the *Punctuation* criterion.

Examples of errors included in this criterion:

- **Punctuation:** Punctuation marks are used to signal the structure of a text, showing where each idea begins and ends and how they relate to one another. Errors may be made in the incorrect placement of, or in the omission of punctuation marks. For example:

  Incorrect: *The exam will be hard so I will have to do lots of revision.*
  Correct: *The exam will be hard, so I will have to do lots of revision.*

- **Capitalisation:** A capital letter is used for the first word of a sentence and for all proper nouns (words that name a specific person, place, organisation, or thing). Capitals can be used for a whole word, when done so for emphasis for example, 'I LOVE IT!'. Examples of incorrect use of punctuation and capitalisation:

  Incorrect: *I live in London. **m**y best friend is called Sarah.*
  Correct: *I live in London. **M**y best friend is called Sarah.*

  Incorrect: ***i** live in **l**ondon and my best **F**riend is called **s**arah.*
  Correct: ***I** live in **L**ondon and my best **f**riend is called **S**arah.*

- **Apostrophes:** The incorrect use, or omission of apostrophes is included in this criterion. For example:

  Possession:

  Incorrect: *I found my **<u>Dads</u>** old football*
  Correct: *I found my **Dad's** old football*

  Contraction: *do not - don't; I am - I'm; I will - I'll; it is - it's.*

  Incorrect: *I **<u>dont</u>** really need anything else.*
  Correct: *I **don't** really need anything else.*

  Incorrect: *When **<u>Im</u>** in the shower I like to sing.*
  Correct: *When **I'm** in the shower I like to sing.*

  Incorrect: *… so **<u>thats</u>** what I wish to do when I am older.*
  Correct: *… so **that's** what I wish to do when I am older.*

  Note: this criterion includes a failure to distinguish between the possessive pronoun (its) and the contraction of it is (it's) although typically this would be considered a grammatical error.

Good quality vs. poor quality:

In good quality writing, the correct use of punctuation and consistency in the use of capitalisation will enhance the readability of the text.

In poor quality writing, punctuation will often be missing. Sentence end punctuation (e.g. full stop/period, question mark, exclamation mark) may be present and correct but internal punctuation (e.g. commas, apostrophes, semicolons, colons, dashes, parentheses) may be incorrect or missing. Poor quality writing will often feature inconsistent or random use of capitalisation, sometimes not even at the beginning of a sentence or for proper nouns.

6 Spelling

Words must be spelled correctly but the number and seriousness of the errors must be judged in terms of the type of errors made, for example whether the error is in a less frequent word (e.g. *amoebic dysentery*) or a more common word (e.g. *friend, accidentally, university, hobby/hobbies*).

Some examples of spelling errors:

- **Commonly misspelled words:** *separate, definitely, embarrass, unnecessary*
- **Homophone errors:** *there/their, weak/week*
- **Misspelling of less common/frequent words:** *choir, anomalous*

Note: judgment can be exercised on the extent to which overall meaning is impacted by an error in spelling a proper name or place.

Good quality vs. poor quality:

In a good quality script, spelling will be correct, even for more difficult or less frequently used words. In a poor-quality script, the spelling errors will be frequent, even for more common words and impact on the meaning.

WQS Analytic Scoring Scale

Criteria	Score
1. Content and Development	
• Ideas are fully **extended** and **elaborated**, using descriptive detail that results in a coherent text that engages the reader.	1
• Ideas are extended, and most ideas are also elaborated with the use of descriptive detail to provide a coherent text.	2
• Ideas are extended but not elaborated. The text may appear 'list-like' and lack coherence.	3
• Ideas are not extended or elaborated and/or contain only minimal descriptive detail. May contain just a list of ideas with no extension of detail and/or be incoherent.	4
2. Structure and Organisation	
• Text has a very good structure. Ideas and appropriate content are organised into **paragraphs** with **connectives** used to link sentences. Content is presented in a logical order, with smooth **transitions** between paragraphs that contribute to the **cohesion** of the text.	1
• Text is structured. Ideas are organised into paragraphs, with some use of connectives within paragraphs and transitions between paragraphs so that there is an identifiable progression and cohesion to the text.	2
• A small amount of structure is evident in the text, with ideas organised into paragraphs but these may be slightly fragmented with no logical connection or progression of the ideas within or between paragraphs, which impacts on the overall cohesion of the text OR the text is structured but it is a continuous piece of text with no paragraphs used or minimal use of paragraphs.	3
• Text is disorganised and lacks structure with no paragraphs or multiple short paragraphs consisting of one or two sentences OR may consist of just a list of statements/points with no connection or overall cohesion.	4
3. Vocabulary	
• Precise, well-chosen words are used that accurately convey the intended meaning and show variety for retaining the reader's interest and engagement.	1
• A good choice of words is used, appropriate for conveying the intended meaning.	2
• An appropriate choice of words is used to convey meaning but may rely on the repeated use of a limited number of words and/or contain some inaccurate or inappropriate word choices that may impact on the intended meaning.	3
• Choice of words may be inaccurate or inappropriate for context and impact on the intended meaning.	4

Criteria	Score
4. Sentence Structure • Text contains a variety of well-formed, grammatically correct, and meaningful **sentences**, which contribute to the overall **coherence** and **cohesion** of the text.	1
• Text contains well-formed, meaningful sentences. Some errors may be present in more complex sentence structures (where used), but these do not interfere with the overall meaning of the text.	2
• Text may contain well-formed simple sentences but lack variety in the sentence types used and grammatical errors, omitted words and/or incorrect punctuation may result in **sentence fragments**. Errors make the text less clear and may interfere with the overall meaning of the text.	3
• Sentence structure may be simple, consist of sentence fragments or long convoluted sentences may be used that are very difficult to follow. Errors are frequent and/or serious enough to interfere with the overall meaning of the text.	4
5. Punctuation including capitalisation and apostrophes • Correct use of punctuation, capitalisation, and apostrophes in the text.	1
• Some errors present, but these errors do not interfere with overall meaning of the text.	2
• Some errors present that may interfere with the meaning of the text.	3
• Frequent and/or serious errors that interfere with the overall meaning of the text.	4
6. Spelling • Words spelled correctly, including correct spelling of less common/frequent or difficult to spell words.	1
• Good spelling of common/frequent words, some errors on less common/frequent words or difficult to spell words and/or commonly misspelled words but these errors do not interfere with the overall meaning of the text.	2
• Some errors in spelling of both common/frequent words and less common/frequent words that may interfere with the overall meaning of the text.	3
• Frequent and/or serious spelling errors that interfere with the overall meaning of the text.	4

Chapter 3: Guidance on applying the WQS Criteria

- **Understand/Familiarise yourself with the WQS Criteria**

Reliable scoring of any task in an assessment tool requires practice, so before applying the WQS criteria, make sure that you fully understand them. Read through the description of each of the criteria, referring to the **Glossary of terms** if you are not familiar with the terminology, and look at the two scored example scripts in Chapter 5. Additional example scripts are provided in the Appendix to allow for further practice. The criteria will become clearer through practice and experience in scoring scripts.

- **Topic Choice**

The WQS criteria are not too specific, allowing for variation in the responses to the 'My Life' prompt. The topics chosen in response to the 'My Life' prompt can vary with students writing about just one topic or more than one topic relating to their life. In each case the script can still be scored using WQS criteria and can provide useful information about the quality of the written composition.

- **Length of script**

Students are given ten minutes (and encouraged to fully use this time) to complete the DASH17+ free writing task. However, the 'My Life' scripts may vary in length and brief scripts can still be scored, although this is likely to affect the ability to extend and elaborate the idea(s)/topic(s) and therefore affect the overall score.

- **Time Marks, illegible words, and corrections to words**

When reading the handwritten script, the following should be noted:

Time Marks - For the purposes of scoring the script for the WQS, the two-minute time marks (//) should be ignored.

Legibility - In scripts where some letters and words may be poorly formed, if they can still be read and the meaning understood, then the script can still be scored for writing quality. However, if reading the script is difficult due to the legibility, then the assessor may wish to consider scoring the script for legibility using the Handwriting Legibility Scale (HLS; Barnett et al., 2018). It may be useful to note the number of illegible words if it is difficult to read the script.

Crossed out words - These should be ignored in scoring the script for compositional quality.

Corrections to words - If a word or letter(s) within a word have been corrected, then the corrected word should be included when scoring the script for quality.

- **Applying the WQS criteria**

Before applying each of the WQS criterion, read the full 'My Life' script. The elements of writing quality that are included in the six criteria in the WQS will impact on each other, but it is important to consider each criterion individually. Before applying each of the scoring criteria, read through the script again before choosing the appropriate point on the scale (1-4). This will help to ensure for example, that when assessing sentence structure errors to determine the score for *Sentence Structure*, you do not also consider punctuation errors. This is so that the student does not receive a double penalty for an error on both criteria. For example, when considering the Sentence Structure criterion, if a run-on sentence (i.e., caused through a lack of punctuation) is identified, then the punctuation errors that caused this should not be penalised again when applying the *Punctuation* criteria. (It is helpful to note on the WQS score sheet where punctuation has been penalised in this instance).

- **Accept your 'first impression'**

When scoring the scripts for the six WQS criteria it should not take too long to arrive at a decision as to where on the scale of 1-4, performance lies. However, there will be a subjective element to scoring the WQS, unlike scoring performance on a spelling or reading assessment. Rather than dwelling on the scoring for each criterion, we advise making a quick decision and accept your first impression. Your speed and confidence in making decisions will increase with greater familiarity and experience of using and applying the WQS criteria.

Chapter 4: Calculating the WQS score and assigning a category

Carefully read and study the **WQS Assessment Criteria**, the **Glossary of terms** and the two scored example scripts in Chapter 5. Additional example scripts are also provided in the Appendix.

The WQS comprises of two sheets for scoring. The form includes:

- The six criteria for scoring the script; and
- A total score, which is the sum of all six criteria.

For each of the six criteria, the appropriate score for the student should be shown by circling the appropriate numeral on the 4-point scale, where 1 = good and 4 = poor. As you score the student's response for each criterion, space is also provided on the form for any notes that you may wish to make. The total score is obtained by adding up the scores given for each of the six criteria.

The WQS total score and assigning a category

Once the script has been scored for each of the six WQS criteria, a total score can be calculated, with higher scores reflecting poorer writing quality. The final (total) score indicates the category into which the students' writing quality falls:

- 6-12 (= low score)
- 13-16 (= medium score)
- 17-24 (= high score)

A higher score indicates poor writing quality. The above categories were established to help the assessor in identifying poor writing quality performance and were based on the sample group mean plus one standard deviation (see Stuart & Barnett, 2023). This is considered an appropriate method for establishing a cut-off for a screening tool (Cascio et al., 1988). This then allowed for the identification of whether a script fell into the high (indicating poor writing quality), medium or low category.

Chapter 5 contains two example scripts, one low scoring (good writing quality) and one high scoring (poor writing quality). The score for each of the criteria is noted on the form together with some notes to explain performance.

Chapter 5: Interpreting the WQS scores

The analytic scoring scale used in the WQS allows for both an overall score and category from high to low to be calculated, and the ability to see which of the criteria represent areas where support may be needed. In interpreting the WQS scores, remember that the scoring judgments will be subjective and should be used alongside other information collected as part of a wider assessment to help inform decisions about whether further assessment of the student's writing is required and/or what support would be recommended for the student.

1 Content and development

In interpreting scores, it is helpful to consider how the student approached the task, did they discuss their choice of topic in the time allowed for planning, did they formulate a plan and then stick to it? Some scripts will focus on just one idea or topic for example, a particular hobby, university course, or travel, whereas other scripts may include multiple topics. However, in assignments in HE, students will be required to reflect and analyse. Selecting and focusing on one or a smaller number of topics will show better preparation for the type of task expected in HE.

In addition, the 'My Life' topic will typically result in a script in which the student uses the **first person** and a more informal writing style. Consideration will need to be given as to whether the student would be able to use the more formal writing style that is typically used in academic writing, and which will for example, make more use of the third person and passive **voice**.

2 Structure and organisation

Unlike an academic assignment in HE, which will be longer and should consist of multiple paragraphs, the 'My Life' task is short, and some scripts may consist of just one paragraph. Credit can be given when there is some organisation within the paragraph but an important skill in academic writing is being able to structure and organise thoughts and ideas. An inability to do this may mean that students will struggle with presenting their ideas and arguments in a structured and logical manner as required for assessment in HE.

3 Vocabulary

The 'My Life' task will differ to coursework assignments in HE where, for many disciplines the use of subject specific vocabulary will be required. Consideration needs to be given as to whether the idea(s) / topic(s) chosen for the 'My Life' task do provide the opportunity to use more sophisticated vocabulary or, whether the student has chosen simpler vocabulary, perhaps because of ease of spelling. In addition, whilst the repetition of key words is important for coherence, it needs to be distinguished from overuse of a limited number of words. The latter may be because of difficulties with spelling, word finding or a limited vocabulary. Together with information from other tasks completed as part of the wider assessment and the assessor's observations, a judgment will be needed as to whether the student shows signs of having a restricted vocabulary that would mean that they may find the demands of academic writing in HE difficult.

4 Sentence structure

The 'My Life' topic prompt and the 10-minute time limit may not always provide the opportunity for the student to present more complex ideas. However, the script could be compared to assessor observations and other tasks completed in the wider assessment, and a judgment made as to whether the student would be able to construct grammatically correct sentences that convey more complex ideas. However, whilst more complex sentences are typically linked with better writing, the sentences must not be so complex that they are difficult to read and understand.

5 Punctuation including capitalisation and apostrophes

Consider whether the student would be able to cope with the punctuation demands of more complex sentence structures.

6 Spelling

Within a wider assessment of writing skills, spelling should be formally assessed via a standardised spelling test and the score for the WQS spelling criterion can be considered in the light of this. In interpreting the score for the WQS *Spelling* criterion, reference should be made to the *Vocabulary* criterion and the word choices made. For example, did the student choose to use simpler and easier to spell words or did they make more sophisticated vocabulary choices, that included less frequent words with irregular spelling patterns? The latter might have led to some spelling errors, whereas a student who chose to use only words they knew how to spell may not have made any spelling errors.

Example script 1	Age: 18

My hobbies are playing musical instruments, I play the saxophone, piano and clarinet. I used to go dancing at a / young age at a ballet club but now I only dance when I go out with my friends. I am / not a fan of sports but my dad likes football // I have a large family: My mum, dad, I have a half brother and a half sister and many aunties /, uncles and cousins. I have one nephew ~~that is very f~~ who is very funny. I go to some music clubs / back home // ~~but~~ but since being at university I haven't joined any clubs. I like watching television, I like the soaps and / reality T.V shows such as big brother. I am currently at ████████ university studying occupational therapy which 3 / am enjoying very much. I have recently been on holiday // to egypt with my boyfriend. It was one of the best holidays I have had as we saw the / pyramids, the sphynx and went on the river nile. The weather was very hot and I enjoyed the whole time / (sic). I have no pets but I used to have 2 goldfish when I was little // and we had a dog called ████ who was the main family pet. I am very enthusiastic about fashion as / I like buying new clothes and going shopping. However I like a bargain ~~as~~ as well as getting nice clothes. / I have many friends at university and home.

TEXT MARK-UP

Note: some words have been redacted to anonymise the writing.

Scoring example 1		Age: 18 years

Criteria		Score
1	**Content and development**	3
	The text contains lots of ideas but has a 'list-like' quality and lacks coherence. There is only a minimal attempt at extension and one attempt at elaboration (when talking about the holiday to Egypt).	
2	**Structure and organisation**	4
	The text lacks structure with little organisation of the material. Different ideas are presented in a 'list-like' manner with no logical connection or progression of ideas.	
3	**Vocabulary**	3
	The vocabulary used is appropriate for conveying meaning, but the range of words used is limited, repetitive and lacks variety. For example, repeated use of 'I like' and 'I have'.	
4	**Sentence structure**	3
	The structure of most of the sentences is simple and there is little variety. Most start with 'I am …', 'I have …', 'I like ...'. There is some variety in length, but this is caused by omission of punctuation (see *Punctuation* criterion) causing run-on sentences (e.g. in lines 4-8).	
5	**Punctuation including capitalisation and apostrophes**	2
	Some errors in use of full-stops and commas causing run-on sentences and fragments (see *Sentence structure* criterion) but these do not seriously interfere with meaning. Place names are not capitalised (e.g. Egypt, Nile).	
6	**Spelling**	2
	Although vocabulary (see Criterion 3) is limited, spelling is accurate.	
Total Score:		17
Category:		High

Observations/notes:

The score falls in the bottom end of the high category indicating that the student's writing might be slightly underdeveloped and suggesting that they may struggle with presenting complex ideas.

The main area of difficulty appears to be in planning and structuring the content: presenting ideas in a logical order and developing and supporting ideas as appropriate.

The vocabulary used is correct but is limited in its range and is repetitive. Sentence structures are simple and lack variety.

Errors in punctuation do not interfere with the meaning of what is written but this may change if attempting to express more complex ideas.

WQS Scoring example 2

Example script 2	Age: 19 years

1	My family consists of my mum, ▬▬, ~~and~~ my dad, ▬▬, and my brother, ▬▬. My mum used to teach special educational needs, and then went onto primary teaching. Now she is not working. My dad works for a company called ▬▬ and has been
5	posted abroad a lot, ~~meant~~ meaning we have lived in many countries. Right now they are in ▬▬, but will be moving in a m//onth to Spain. My brother is 21, and is studying at ▬▬ University. He will graduate this year and maybe do some travelling before starting a serious career. I have one dog called
10	▬▬, an Old English Sheepdog. She is living with my parents at the moment. We used to have another dog called ▬▬, also an Old English Sheepdog, who unfortunately died over summer. I // am studying at ▬▬ University on a 3 year course called Childhood Education and Culture. I am not sure what I will do
15	in the future, but I might be a teacher or work for an NGO. I will definitely work abroad, as I have enjoyed my experiences internationally so far. This christmas I am travelling to the states. I am going to visit my boyfriend who lives in ▬▬. Closer to Christmas we
20	will travel together to ▬▬ to spend ~~this~~ Christmas and New Year with his cousin and aunt. I will then return to the UK to hand in some university assignments, and then go to Spain to visit my parents for a few weeks. A lot of my friends live internationally, as I did not meet
25	them in // the UK. I have some in Bolivia, Norway, and the States. I do not get to see them all that often but take opportunities, such as holidays, to try to meet up. I also have made friends in the UK since starting Uni. They are very friendly, and we all enjoy living together. They are all British, although
30	one is half german,

TEXT MARK-UP

Note: some words have been redacted to anonymise the writing.

Scoring example 2	Age: 19 years

	Criteria	Score
1	**Content and development**	2
	Provides extension and elaboration but a higher score could have been achieved through more elaboration (for e.g. specific information on international experiences in line 16) to make the overall script more coherent.	
2	**Structure and organisation**	2
	The script has a good structure: paragraphs have a clear topic and connectives are used within paragraphs to link ideas. However, there is no explicit linkage or transition between the paragraphs. To get a score of 1, more explicit signposting of transitions is needed so that the progression between paragraphs adds to the overall cohesion.	
3	**Vocabulary**	2
	Vocabulary is accurate for conveying intended meaning but for a score of 1, it needed to have more variety to fully engage the reader's interest.	
4	**Sentence structure**	1
	Sentences are generally well-formed, grammatical and meaningful with some variety. But see 'Punctuation' below.	
5	**Punctuation including capitalisation and apostrophes**	2
	Generally accurate capitalisation, with some exceptions. For example, 'christmas' and 'states' in line 18 and 'german' in line 30. Accurate use of full stops, although inconsistent use of commas resulting in some awkward sentences (e.g. lines 5-7).	
6	**Spelling**	2
	Spelling generally accurate with some occasional errors e.g. 'definitely' (line 16)	
Total WQS Score:		11
WQS Category:		Low

Observations/notes:

Score falls in the low category indicating that the student does not have a difficulty with written compositional quality and should be able to cope with the demands of writing in HE. Focusing on fewer topics might have allowed the student to demonstrate their ability to organise, develop, and link ideas more fully.

Chapter 6: Reliability and Validity

In this section the data on the reliability and validity of the WQS, previously presented in Stuart and Barnett (2023) is reported. This involved a main sample of 120 students (60 male) aged 17-25 years and a smaller group of 28 students with dyslexia, taken from the DASH17+ standardisation sample.

Reliability

The following areas of reliability are reported here: internal consistency, inter-rater reliability, and test-retest reliability. Usually, reliability coefficients of 0.70 and above are considered acceptable, although on tasks requiring subjective judgements lower values are often more typically reported.

Internal consistency

Cronbach's (1951) coefficient alpha was used to establish whether the six criteria in the WQS were all measuring writing quality. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the sample was 0.70 (n = 120) for the WQS and is at the recommended level for the overall internal consistency of the scale.

Inter-rater reliability

Inter-rater reliability for the total WQS score, following categorisation of the scores into: low; medium and high was 83.33% and inter-rater reliability using Cohen's kappa was good: k = .669 (95% CI, .375 to 0.963) p = < .001. Scoring scripts for writing quality does require subjective judgments unlike, for example, an assessment of spelling. Brown et al. (2004) noted in a review of studies of writing assessment tools, that exact agreement between raters is typically between 40% and 60% with Kappa's of between .70 and .80 typically reported. These are consistent with those reported for the WQS, with a Kappa of .70, although exact agreement on the WQS categories was higher at 83%.

Test-retest reliability

Some preliminary work has been undertaken to examine the consistency of scores on the WQS on different occasions. A small sample of 12 students were tested twice, at an interval of one to two weeks. A positive Pearson's r correlation of r (10) = .62, p = .033 (Cohen's d = .38) was found, indicating a strong relationship between scores on the two testing occasions. However, as this does not quite reach the usual level for acceptable reliability, further work is needed.

Validity

The following areas of validity are reported here: construct validity and differential validity.

Construct validity

A Principal Component Analysis (PCA) of the six component scores was undertaken to establish whether using the WQS assessed one or more components of writing quality. A PCA was run on the six criteria in the WQS for 120 participants. The PCA revealed two components that had eigenvalues greater than one and which explained 42.13%, and 19.61% of the total variance, respectively. The two-component solution explained 61.73% of the total variance. A Varimax orthogonal rotation was employed to aid interpretability with *Spelling, Punctuation and Sentence Structure* in the first component, and *Content & Development, Structure & Organisation* and *Vocabulary* in the second component. These findings support the different dimensions of writing quality; the rule-based conventions that need to be followed (such as sentence structure, punctuation, spelling) and the 'authorial' dimension relating to the cohesion and coherence of the writing. However, for practical purposes we retain a single total score on the WQS.

Differential validity

Further evidence for validity was sought by comparing WQS scores from a group of students with a reported diagnosis of dyslexia, with scores from age and gender matched peers without dyslexia taken from the main sample.

Half of the 28 scripts (11 male) for the group with dyslexia fell into the high (indicating poor writing quality) category, with 36% falling in the medium category and 14% falling in the low category. This compares with 18% of the age and gender matched scripts falling in the high category and 54% and 28% in the medium and low categories respectively. A Chi-square test of independence revealed a significant difference in the distribution across the categories for the group with dyslexia compared to the age and gender matched group ($\chi2$ (2, N = 56) = 6.60, p = .04).

The total WQS score (mean = 16.89, SD = 3.48) for the group with dyslexia was significantly higher than for the age and gender matched control group (mean = 14.43, SD = 2.52). This indicates poorer performance in writing quality (t (54) = 3.04, p = .01) with a large effect size (Cohen's d = .81), indicating that the magnitude of difference between the total WQS score for the two groups was meaningful. Performance on the individual WQS criteria for the individuals with dyslexia and their age and gender matched groups are shown in Table 1. The group with dyslexia had higher scores (poorer performance) than the age and gender matched group on all six criteria. However, only *Structure and Organisation* was close to being statistically significant when a Bonferroni significance level of p < .01 for multiple comparisons was used.

Table 1 Means (SD) scores for the WQS criteria for the group with dyslexia and the age and gender match group.

	Dyslexia n = 28	Age & Gender Match n = 28	p*	Cohen's d
Content & Development	2.57 (0.92)	2.14 (0.80)	.07	.30
Structure & Organisation	3.11 (0.63)	2.54 (0.69)	.01	.41
Vocabulary	2.64 (0.68)	2.29 (0.53)	.03	.30
Sentence Structure	3.11 (0.69)	2.71 (0.71)	.04	.30
Punctuation	3.00 (0.77)	2.71 (0.66)	.16	.20
Spelling	2.46 (1.11)	2.04 (0.88)	.13	.23
Total	**16.89 (3.48)**	**14.43 (2.52)**	**.01**	**.81**

*Bonferroni significance level for multiple comparisons = p <.01.

(Stuart & Barnett, 2023, page 264)

25

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Appendix: Example scripts for scoring

The following 'My Life' free writing samples are from the DASH17+ standardisation sample and have been transcribed for ease of presentation and to show how the WQS criteria have been applied to each of the scripts. However, in scoring handwritten scripts, assessors will need to be aware that scoring can be influenced by the style and legibility of the handwriting (see Chapter 3)

The score for each criterion and a brief explanation of how it is has been interpreted are included. (Please refer to the **WQS Analytic Scoring Scale** for the full performance descriptions). It is recommended that you try scoring these scripts yourself before looking at the scoring notes for each script.

The following notation has been used <---> to indicate text that was illegible and where it was not possible to read what was written. Some words have been redacted to anonymise the writing.

WQS Scoring example 3

Example script 3	Age: 22 years

1	*My name is* ▇▇▇ *and I am a student at the unviersity of* ▇▇▇. *I undertook an under- graduate degree in* ▇▇ + ▇▇▇▇ *at the same, and am now completing a Masters by Research into* ▇▇ ▇▇▇. *My research is focussed on investigating the effect of different types of* ▇▇▇ *on* ▇▇*
5	*joint stress + pain in women over* ▇▇. *Next l thursday I am travelling with my two university supervisors to* ▇▇ ▇▇ *in* ▇▇ ▇▇ *to attend the Internation Society of* ▇▇▇▇ *conference. I will be presenting my research so far in the form of a poster presentation there. I am very nervous + very unprepared.*
10	
	Outside of university I lead a hectic but enjoyable social life. I have many hobbies, the most time demanding of which is the local football team I play for. We train once a week and have matches once a week, but we often also socialise as a team in an evening. Excluding football I also spend a lot of time
15	*socialising with other friends + seem to single handedley be saving Starbucks, Costa + Café Nero from the recession. Unfortunately this is having a negative impact on both my bank balance + my waistline.*
	Other interests include going to the cinema + reading. I spend much of my free
20	*time watching films + reading books, although I am not ashamed to say that they are not usually of any literary or cultural note. Pretty Woman will always be my favourite film.*
	I am also very family orientated + come from a large family. My parents are
25	*both on second marriages + as such I have a significant number of siblings + step-siblings. There are nine of us in total.*
30	

Scoring example 3	Age: 22 years

	Criteria	Score
1	**Content and development**	1
	Ideas are extended and elaborated. For example, in addition to the course name, detailed information about the research topic is provided. The content is both informative and entertaining and contributes to engaging the reader's interest.	
2	**Structure and organisation**	1
	The script is structured and organised, with paragraphs used to group topics. There are good transitions both between paragraphs and within paragraphs with a range of connectives used.	
3	**Vocabulary**	1
	Precise and well-chosen words to convey intended meaning (e.g. 'hectic', 'recession'), add variety and retain the reader's interest. 'as such' and 'significant' (in lines 25) are perhaps the only words where a more precise word could have been used but this is not enough to change the score.	
4	**Sentence structure**	1
	Well-formed and with variety in structure and length, such as on line 19, 'I spend much of my free time...'	
5	**Punctuation including capitalisation and apostrophes**	2
	Commas missing in lines 13 and 15. Incorrect use of the '+/&' symbol in place of the word 'and'.	
	One capitalisation error on 'Thursday' in line 5.	
6	**Spelling**	2
	Overall spelling is good but errors on 'univiersity' (line 1), 'Internation[al]' (line 7) and 'handedley' (line 15). These errors do not interfere with meaning but are surprising given the overall quality of the writing.	
Total Score:		8
Category:		Low

Observations/notes:

Note: This student is 22 years old and studying for a Master's degree. Some minor errors are present, but the score falls in the low category indicating that the student does not have a difficulty in written compositional quality and would be able to cope with the demands of writing in HE.

WQS Scoring example 4

	Example script 4	Age: 18 years

1	I love my life. I thinks it's quite wonderful. I live in ▇▇▇ ▇▇▇ with my
	grandparents but for three nights out of the week I stay at my mothers house
	to 'keep in touch' with the family.
5	My grandad is from ▇▇▇ and my grandmother (although we all call her
	nanny) is from ▇▇. I think <---> benefit significantly from living with them
	because they can offer so much wisdom and guideance without trying to
	impose any rules on me. They give me freedom which is the most important
	essential to life I think. They also accept me as I am. <--->
10	
	I love piercings and tattoos. I think that God gave us our bodies to design as
	we see fit and if we wern't meant to have tattoo's they would not have been
	created. I have a ▇▇▇ of a ▇▇ on my ▇▇ ▇▇, I got it when I was still
	in school and to me it just reminds me that my life is as I make it. I also have
15	a red and black butterfly on my ▇▇ that I got done one day when I just
	decided I HAD to have another tattoo. I have three dog pawprints that are
	coloured in on my leg that represent <---> my brother, sister and I. I have a
	star on my sholder that I had done on my <---> 18th birthday to symbolise
	its significance of my first legal tattoo. Its not a typical star though its a
20	scribbled patch of skin where the untattooed skin in the middle of it makes
	up the star (I was trying to be original). And finally I have an ambigram on my
	wrist. An ambigram is a word that when you turn it upside
25	
30	

TEXT MARK-UP

<--->: text where the handwriting cannot be read.

Example script 4	Age: 18 years

Criteria		Score
1	**Content and development**	1
	Good evidence of elaboration. Detailed factual information provided, in addition to interpersonal relationships and feelings that are appropriate for the topic.	
2	**Structure and organisation**	2
	Paragraphs are used with ideas grouped together and structure provided within paragraphs with the use of connectives. More connection needed between paragraphs for a higher score.	
3	**Vocabulary**	1
	Variety of vocabulary used.	
4	**Sentence structure**	2
	Use of complex sentences of varying length. Some very short sentences (e.g. line 1), and some slightly convoluted sentences (lines 8-9) that would be improved by better punctuation. Errors in subject-verb agreement, 'I thinks' (line 1).	
5	**Punctuation including capitalisation and apostrophes**	3
	Some proper nouns were not capitalised. Several apostrophe errors, e.g. 'mothers house' (line 2), 'its' (line 19), and 'tattoo's' (line 12).	
6	**Spelling**	2
	Errors include: 'guideance', 'wern't', 'sholder'. However, some 'tricky' words were spelled correctly, e.g. 'piercings', 'symbolise' and 'untattoed'.	
Total Score:		11
Category:		Low

Observations/notes:

This script falls at the top end of the low category. In terms of its content and the development of ideas, this an example of an engaging script, that imparts something of the writer's personality and is written in a way to capture the reader's attention. However, the overall quality of the script would be improved with greater attention to the correct use of punctuation and sentence structure. The student may need some support on following the conventions or rules of standard English, particularly if required to write more formal academic assignments in HE.

WQS Scoring example 5

Example script 5	Age: 18 years

1	*My hobbies consist of Drumming Parkour and recently mountain biking. The*
	drumming I enjoy alot seeing as it gives me time to let out some anger and
	also play good music. I enjoy playing them in front of a live audience it makes
	my adrenaline pump. Parkour is my favourite sport it is classed as the extreme
5	*sport along with mountain biking. I enjoy parkour because it keeps me fit and*
	health and is also a sort of art <---> <---> a few people tend to grasp this fact
	and the others just tend to think its people jumping over stuff <---> the thrill of
	jumping of tall things and being able to get over most obstacles is immense.
	<---> <---> <---> You somtimes start to feel the flow and just improvise what
10	*you are about to do. <---> <---> I have only recently started mountain biking I*
	go round the black route in ▉▉▉▉ forest it is one of the best tracks in
	<---> england I think. it feels good to get the breeze of biking and even doing
	jumps and maybe fall off, luckily that hasn't happened yet. I like most music
	can't say much about classical cause I don't really listen to it in most songs I
15	*can hear the drumbeat clearer than the rest which helps me learn them*
	from ear rather than using notations.
20	
25	
30	

TEXT MARK-UP

<--->: text where the handwriting cannot be read.

Scoring example 5		Age: 18 years

Criteria		Score
1	**Content and development**	1
	Three hobbies, each reasonably well supported with factual details and personal perspectives that provide some elaboration and extension.	
2	**Structure and organisation**	3
	No paragraphs but topics are grouped together. However, little use of connectives, leading to a lack of cohesion.	
3	**Vocabulary**	2
	Appropriate but simple, with a few exceptions, e.g.: 'adrenaline', 'thrill', 'obstacles', 'immense', 'improvise' and 'notations'.	
4	**Sentence structure**	3
	Sentences are poorly constructed and convoluted due to lack of, or incorrect punctuation, e.g. lines 10-12 and 13-16.	
5	**Punctuation including capitalisation and apostrophes**	3
	Omission of commas (see Sentence structure criterion). Incorrect use of capitalisation for common nouns, e.g. 'Drumming' and 'Parkour'. Missing capital letters for proper nouns, e.g. 'england'.	
6	**Spelling**	2
	Generally good, including: 'adrenaline' but errors on 'alot' (line 2), 'of' (line 8), and 'somtimes' (line 9).	
Total Score:		14
Category:		**Medium**

Observations/notes:

This script falls into the medium category. The script is written in a conversational style, and the student's passion for sport and music comes across. A higher score would have been obtained with more organisation of ideas using paragraphs and a greater use of connectives. The student may need some support on following the conventions or rules of standard English (sentence structure and punctuation), particularly if required to write more formal academic assignments.

The script included word deletions that could not be read, and which meant the intended meaning was not always clear.

WQS Scoring example 6

Example script 6	Age: 18 years

1	*In my every day-to-day live I get up in the morning and the first thing I will do is*
	put on my make-up. After that I will straighten my <---> hair and get dressed.
	then I will brush my teeth prepare my bag and usually go out either into town or
	university. Around lunch me and my friends will meet up to get food. In the
5	*evening we will go back to our flats and maybe clean or watch tv. then at*
	night we'll get dressed and go out to some bars or night clubs. <--->
	On the weekends my boyfriend will come up to visit. A typical weekend maybe,
	going out into town, go for walks, occasionally we go to the cinema. Usually we
10	*will cook meals together and play games or watch tv in the evening.*
	Next we are going on holiday together. However this summer I will be going to
	▮▮▮▮▮ to visit my dad, my two sisters and my step-mum. I haven't seen them
	for nearly a year and will be there for two weeks.
15	
	I have one pet, a gol
20	
25	
30	

TEXT MARK-UP

<--- >: text where the handwriting cannot be read.

Example script 6	Age: 18 years

Criteria		Score
1	**Content and development**	3
	Evidence of some extension, but no elaboration. For example, what food do they buy? What sort of television programmes do they watch? What sort of films do they watch?	
2	**Structure and organisation**	3
	Includes paragraphs that are aligned to ideas, but the second and third paragraphs are short. Connectives are used to add cohesion within and between paragraphs. For example, 'Around lunch...' (line 4), 'In the evening...' (line 4), and 'On the weekends...' (line 8).	
3	**Vocabulary**	3
	Limited vocabulary used.	
4	**Sentence structure**	3
	Short sentences with little variety. Some awkward sentences caused by grammatical errors. For example, verb tense errors in: 'A typical weekend maybe, going out into town, go for walks, occasionally we go to the cinema' (lines 8-9).	
5	**Punctuation including capitalisation and apostrophes**	2
	Omission of capitalisation at start of a sentence (e.g. lines 3 and 5). Omission of commas (see line 4)	
6	**Spelling**	2
	Generally good, except for 'live' in the first sentence.	
Total WQS Score:		16
WQS Category:		Medium

This script falls at the top end of the medium category and is on the border of being in the high category. The script does have structure and organisation and shows some development of ideas but is lacking in detail. It relies on the use of a fairly limited vocabulary and fairly basic sentence structures to convey intended meaning. Further investigation may be required to see if the student would be able to present more complex ideas in sufficient detail.

WQS Scoring example 7

Example script 7	Age: 18 years

1	*I've got a passion for fashion. I love going out shopping; buying clothes and shoes. This is mostly done with my friend who I enjoys the most being around. We have time or moments that will not be forgetten. During my spare time I enjoy listen to music I like all kinds of music such as r'n'b,*
5	*hip-hop and slow jams.*
	The other things I like doing is keeping active which would be by playing games, sports or even dancing.
10	*I was in the sports teams at secondary school but that all changed when I came to college. I am not very active anymore, but would like to keep fit.*
	My favourite sport is Netball as well as hockey. They are very competitive sporting games that why its enjoyable.
15	
	I love going away on holiday to places with different cultures and people to experience there way of life compared to yourself. I have travelled alot of places and intend to carry on visiting new places. I love the hot weather and atmosphere where the majority of people are happy and friendly.
20	
	I wish to persue my
25	
30	

Scoring example 7		Age: 18 years

Criteria		Score
1	**Content and development**	3
	Includes three ideas that are extended but not elaborated with a 'list-like' presentation. We know, for instance, that the student likes netball and hockey because it's competitive, but not what position they played, to what level and whether they follow a particular netball or hockey team.	
2	**Structure and organisation**	3
	Paragraphs are used, some are too short (paragraphs 2, 3 and 4) and would have been better combined as they are on a similar topic. However, little use is made of connectives leading to a lack of cohesion.	
3	**Vocabulary**	3
	Appropriate but limited. For e.g., repetition of 'I' and verbs 'like', 'love'. More interesting verbs could have been chosen.	
4	**Sentence structure**	4
	There is some variety but awkward structures e.g. 'We have time or moments that will not be forgotten' (line 3), and grammatical errors e.g. 'my friend who I enjoys' (line 2) and 'They are very competitive sporting games that why its enjoyable' (line 13-14).	
5	**Punctuation including capitalisation and apostrophes**	3
	Lack of punctuation within sentences which contributes to some of the awkward sentence structures identified in Criterion 4. Capitalisation of 'Netball' (line 13)	
6	**Spelling**	3
	Some errors: 'forgetten' (line 3), 'alot' (line 17), 'there' (line 17) 'persue' (line 21), but generally correct and reflective of a less sophisticated vocabulary.	
Total Score:		19
Category:		High

Observations/notes:

Falls into the high category indicating that the student's writing is underdeveloped and suggesting that they may struggle with presenting more complex ideas. There is some structure, but a lack of detail contributes to the script being 'list-like' with little connection between the topics. The vocabulary is appropriate but limited in its range and the sentence structures are awkward and ungrammatical.

WQS Scoring example 8

	Example script 8	Age: 20 years

1	I study theology which is very difficut and requres lots of reading. the main
	diffrence Bettween theology and <---> religies studys is that theology is the
	study of god from the inside of a religion whilst religies studys is the
	outward / looking inward. I personaly find all the reading and note taking
5	quite hard But hopefully it will get me a good job which will allow me to
	go <---> on holoday with my baby. My baby is ████ somtimes referd to as
	████ She is my girl friend for almost one year she wants to see the world
	so hopefully I ccan take her. We do lots of things together. last night we
	watched "the dead poet socity" which was long and slighty depressing. We
10	do other thing as well for exemple cook, but that said my tummy does hurt
	quite alot today. another thing we like To do is visit zoo's my favorate animal
	is a hippo which we spent a long time looking at which tunred out not to be
	all that fun but what the hey. Ive also practise revisng to <---> which was
	quite difficut because I tend to get disstracted by her buitifull eyes which make
15	it hard to focus. we get along really well and hopfully will see the world
	together if I pass my degree. We met at work I was a ██ █████ and she
	worked in the cafe But we didnt get together for a little while after that.
	We where in a club called ti
20	
25	
30	

TEXT MARK-UP

<--- >: text where the handwriting cannot be read.

Scoring example 8	Age: 20 years

Criteria		Score
1	**Content and development**	3
	Several ideas are included and extended but the text lacks coherence.	
2	**Structure and organisation**	4
	Very disorganised, no structure or use of paragraphs and no logical progression between the ideas presented.	
3	**Vocabulary**	3
	Word choice is appropriate, but vocabulary is limited.	
4	**Sentence structure**	4
	Long and somewhat awkward sentences due to lack of punctuation (see also Criterion 5). This contributes to making the script difficult to read and follow.	
5	**Punctuation including capitalisation and apostrophes**	4
	Capitalisation not used at start of sentences (e.g. line 1) and used incorrectly within a sentence (e.g. line 5 and line 11). Errors in use of apostrophes (e.g. 'zoo's' in line 11; 'Ive' in line 13; 'didnt' in line 17). The incorrect use of punctuation contributes to the overlong sentences produced (see Criterion 4)	
6	**Spelling**	4
	Multiple spelling errors e.g. 'religies' (line 2) and 'buitfull' in (line 14)	
Total Score:		22
Category:		High

Observations/notes:

The score falls into the high category and indicates that the student struggles with writing. The script lacks cohesion in terms of the development of ideas and coherence. It is disorganised with no structure or connection between ideas. The sentences ramble due to poor punctuation and lack of focus. The script contains multiple spelling errors. The student is likely to struggle with the demands of academic writing in HE and would probably need some targeted support to help develop their writing skills and spelling.

Glossary of terms

Term	Description
Clause	A **clause** is a group of words that express a single event or situation. A clause will usually contain both a subject and a verb. A **main** (independent) **clause** is complete on its own and can form a complete sentence. A **subordinate** (dependent) **clause** complements the main clause by providing more information, but it is not a complete sentence on its own. In the following examples the **main clause is in bold**, and the *subordinate clause in italics*: • *Because the essay was late*, **he lost marks**. • **He lost marks** *because the essay was late*.
Coherence	Coherence refers to the underlying logic and consistency of a text. For example, how the ideas are developed both at sentence level within paragraphs and between paragraphs in the text as a whole. The ideas expressed should be relevant to one another so that the reader can follow the meaning.
Cohesion	Cohesion refers to the structure and organisation of ideas and the connection of ideas at the phrase, clause, sentence, and paragraph levels. Cohesion in a text is achieved through following grammatical rules and by manipulating language. This can be done in several ways, for example through the use of **connectives** such as **conjunctions**, prepositions and adverbs. (e.g. *Half-way through the race I started to increase my speed. **After a while**, I managed to overtake my friend.* The adverbial phrase '*after a while*' links these events in time). Cohesion is also achieved using words (such as **pronouns**) that refer back to other parts of the text (e.g. *I haven't got a car. I used to have **one**, but I sold **it** before I started college*).
Conjunction	A word used to link clauses within a sentence. Co-ordinating conjunctions (*and, but, or* and *so*) join (and are placed between) two main clauses of equal weight. Subordinating conjunctions (e.g. *when, while, before, after, until, if, because, although, that*) are placed at the beginning of a subordinate clause.
Connectives	Connectives are used to link sentences to each other and contribute towards the coverall **cohesion** of the paragraph and the text. **Transitions** between paragraph topics (for e.g. ideas, themes) help to establish clarity and cohesion. Examples of different types of connectives: logical (e.g. *and, or*), causal (e.g. *because*), additive (e.g. *or*), adversative/contrastive (e.g. *although, whereas*), temporal (e.g. *first, until*), additive (e.g. *and, moreover*), positive (e.g. *also, moreover, furthermore*) and negative (e.g. *however, but*).
Content words	Content (or lexical words) are words that are used to give meaning to the sentences in which they occur and include nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs.

Term	Description
Elaboration	A way in which an idea can be developed by adding specific information to a description or explanation. **Extension** and elaboration can be viewed on a continuum: as more information is provided about the idea then it moves from being extended to being elaborated. For example, *I play musical instruments* can be extended with the supporting detail as to which musical instruments are played and some information about how long the instrument has been played and to what level. Elaboration would involve providing further specific detail about whether they play in an orchestra or band, favourite piece of music, which is the preferred instrument etc.
Extension	A way in which an idea can be developed by adding specific information to a description or explanation. However, as the amount of information that is provided increases, the idea will move from being extended to being **elaborated**.
Figurative language	Figurative language includes the use of metaphor or simile to create a particular impression or mood.
First person	Using the first person refers to the use of personal pronouns (such as *I, my, we*) in writing. Traditionally, in academic writing the use of the third person (*he, she, it*) rather than the first person is preferred, unless a personal opinion has been specifically requested.
Fragment	An incomplete sentence that is either missing a subject or verb in its main (independent) clause or is incomplete: • Incorrect: *Watched a film last night*. • Correct: ***John*** *watched a film last night*. • Incorrect: *Some boys at college*. • Correct: *Some boys at college **play** football*. • Incorrect: *After the film ended*. • Correct: *After the film ended, **we had coffee***.
Function words	Function words do not denote objects or ideas but are important for providing grammatical information and structure. They include determiners (e.g. *the, a, some, all*); auxiliary and modal verbs (e.g. *be, do, have, can, may, will, shall, could, should*), prepositions (e.g. *in, on, of, under*); **pronouns** and **conjunctions**.
Main clause	A main (independent) clause is a group of words that contains a subject and verb and expresses a complete thought about an event or a situation. A main clause can stand alone as a sentence.
Object	The object identifies who or what has been directly affected by the action of the verb: • *John ate **the apple***.

Term	Description
Paragraph	A group of sentences about a particular topic. A paragraph will begin on a new line, to help separate it from the previous paragraph. Each paragraph must contain a topic sentence and supporting sentences that all relate closely to the topic sentence and end with a concluding sentence. The concluding sentence may also be followed by a transition sentence that provides the link to the next paragraph. The use of paragraphs contributes to the organisation and structure of the text.
Pronouns	A pronoun is a word that replaces a noun in a sentence and is used to avoid repetition of nouns. For example: • *John likes apples but **he** doesn't like pears*. Common pronouns include *I, me, mine, she, he, it, we, and us*.
Relative clause	A type of **subordinate clause** that defines or gives information about a noun (somebody or something). It has a subject and verb but can't stand alone as a sentence. Relative clauses typically begin with a **relative pronoun**: • I watched the man ***who** was cleaning the windows*. • I like the bike ***that** John gave me*. • John moved the box, ***which** was blocking the path*.
Relative pronouns	Relative pronouns (*that; which/what; whichever/whatever; who/whom/whose; whoever/whomever/whosoever*) join two parts of a sentence together (i.e. they join a **main clause** to a **relative** clause).
Run-on sentence	Run-on sentences are caused by incorrect sentence structure and/or incorrect use of punctuation. A run-on sentence can occur when two or more main (independent) clauses are not joined using punctuation and a coordinating conjunction: • Incorrect: *John was hungry he ate an apple*. • Correct: *John was hungry. He ate an apple*. • Correct: *John was hungry; he ate an apple*. A run-on sentence can also be caused by the incorrect use of a comma (comma splice) and no coordinating conjunction to join two main (independent) clauses: • Incorrect: *The flowers are beautiful, they brighten the room*. • Correct: *The flowers are beautiful. They brighten the room*. • Correct: *The flowers are beautiful; they brighten the room*. • Correct: *The flowers are beautiful, and they brighten the room*. • Correct: *The flowers are beautiful because they brighten the room*.

Term	Description
Sentence	Sentences are made up of **clauses** and can be simple, compound or complex. A simple sentence consists of just one clause. A compound sentence has two or more clauses joined by *and*, *or*, *but* or *so*. In a compound sentence the clauses will be of equal weight (they are both main clauses). A complex sentence consists of a main clause and one or more subordinate clauses.

Sentence type	Number and types(s) of clauses
Simple	One main clause; no subordinate clauses *John drank a cup of tea.*
Compound	Two or more main clauses; no subordinate clauses *John drank a cup of tea and ate a biscuit.*
Complex	One main clause; one or more subordinate clauses *John ate the dinner, which Mary had cooked.*

Term	Description
Subject	The subject is typically the first element in a sentence. The subject will usually identify the person or thing responsible for the action or event described by the verb: • ***John*** ate the apple.
Subordinate clause	Also called a dependent clause, a subordinate clause is part of a **main** clause but cannot stand alone as a complete sentence because it does not express a complete thought. Like all clauses, a subordinate clause (see below in italics) will typically have a subject and verb: • Mary will not cook dinner ***unless*** *John helps*. • John decided to cook dinner ***rather*** *than order a take-away meal*.
Transitions	A transition is a word or phrase that signals a connection between ideas. It can include addition, enumeration, example, comparison, summary or conclusion, indication of time, indication of place or direction, or the indication of logical relationships, Transition words and phrases can be used to ensure that ideas flow smoothly between sentences and between paragraphs. Some common transitional phrases and words include *but, also, first, before, for example, therefore,* and *because*.

Term	Description
Voice	The 'voice' that the writer uses helps to establish the connection between the writer and the reader. Voice can be used to help in retaining the reader's interest. For example, the choice of voice can change the number of participants that are described in an event. For example, when using an 'active' voice: *John ate the apple,* the subject of the sentence (John) is identified as performing the action of eating the object (the apple). When the 'passive' voice is used: *The apple was eaten* [*by John*], the subject (the apple) is the recipient of the action of eating. When using the passive voice, the person who performed the action of eating the apple (John) does not need to be mentioned. Using the active voice for sentences helps to make the meaning clear for the reader and keeps the sentences from becoming too complicated or long. The passive voice can be used for emphasis, to keep the focus on the subject and to help create an authoritative tone. The passive voice is often used in academic writing, where an objective writing style is required. However, the overuse of the passive voice can make text difficult to read.

Acknowledgements

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WQS Analytic Scoring Scale Form (Photocopiable sheet)

Name/ID: _____   **Age:** _____

Name of assessor: _____   **Date of Testing:** _____

Criteria	Score
1. Content and Development	
• Ideas are fully extended and elaborated, using descriptive detail that results in a coherent text that engages the reader.	1
• Ideas are extended, and most ideas are also elaborated with the use of descriptive detail to provide a coherent text.	2
• Ideas are extended but not elaborated. The text may appear 'list-like' and lack coherence.	3
• Ideas are not extended or elaborated and/or contain only minimal descriptive detail. May contain just a list of ideas with no extension of detail and/or be incoherent.	4
2. Structure and Organisation	
• Text has a very good structure. Ideas and appropriate content are organised into paragraphs with connectives used to link sentences. Content is presented in a logical order, with smooth transitions between paragraphs that contribute to the cohesion of the text.	1
• Text is structured. Ideas are organised into paragraphs, with some use of connectives within paragraphs and transitions between paragraphs so that there is an identifiable progression and cohesion to the text.	2
• A small amount of structure is evident in the text, with ideas organised into paragraphs but these may be slightly fragmented with no logical connection or progression of the ideas within or between paragraphs, which impacts on the overall cohesion of the text OR the text is structured but it is a continuous piece of text with no paragraphs used or minimal use of paragraphs.	3
• Text is disorganised and lacks structure with no paragraphs or multiple short paragraphs consisting of one or two sentences OR may consist of just a list of statements/points with no connection or overall cohesion.	4
3. Vocabulary	
• Precise, well-chosen words are used that accurately convey the intended meaning and show variety for retaining the reader's interest and engagement.	1
• A good choice of words is used, appropriate for conveying the intended meaning.	2
• An appropriate choice of words is used to convey meaning but may rely on the repeated use of a limited number of words and/or contain some inaccurate or inappropriate word choices that may impact on the intended meaning.	3
• Choice of words may be inaccurate or inappropriate for context and impact on the intended meaning.	4

Criteria	Score
4. Sentence Structure	
• Text contains a variety of well-formed, grammatically correct, and meaningful sentences, which contribute to the overall coherence and cohesion of the text.	1
• Text contains well-formed, meaningful sentences. Some errors may be present in more complex sentence structures (where used), but these do not interfere with the overall meaning of the text.	2
• Text may contain well-formed simple sentences but lack variety in the sentence types used and grammatical errors, omitted words and/or incorrect punctuation may result in sentence fragments. Errors make the text less clear and may interfere with the overall meaning of the text.	3
• Sentence structure may be simple, consist of sentence fragments or long convoluted sentences may be used that are very difficult to follow. Errors are frequent and/or serious enough to interfere with the overall meaning of the text.	4
5. Punctuation including capitalisation and apostrophes	
• Correct use of punctuation, capitalisation, and apostrophes in the text.	1
• Some errors present, but these errors do not interfere with overall meaning of the text.	2
• Some errors present that may interfere with the meaning of the text.	3
• Frequent and/or serious errors that interfere with the overall meaning of the text.	4
6. Spelling	
• Words spelled correctly, including correct spelling of less common/frequent or difficult to spell words.	1
• Good spelling of common/frequent words, some errors on less common/frequent words or difficult to spell words and/or commonly misspelled words but these errors do not interfere with the overall meaning of the text.	2
• Some errors in spelling of both common/frequent words and less common/frequent words that may interfere with the overall meaning of the text.	3
• Frequent and/or serious spelling errors that interfere with the overall meaning of the text.	4
Total Score	

Category:	**Low** (6-12) =good writing quality	**Medium** (13-16)	**High** (17-24) =poor writing quality

Observations/notes:

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