THE CRITERION® RESOURCE GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION
Welcome to the **Criterion® Online Writing Evaluation Service**, a web-based service that evaluates a student’s essays and provides instant score reporting and diagnostic feedback to both the instructor and student.

The **Criterion®** service utilizes automated scoring technologies to provide students with instant score and writing analysis feedback on writing samples they submit. The **Criterion** user interface enables quick access to numerous features, including detailed diagnostic feedback provided in an annotated version of the student’s writing sample and a holistic score based on nationally recognized standards.

Students can access a password-protected website, submit essays on topics assigned by their instructor, and then receive an overall holistic score from the **e-rater®** engine, a proprietary automated scoring engine developed by Educational Testing Service. Students receive extensive online diagnostic feedback to analyze traits of grammar, usage, mechanics, style, and organization & development. Potential errors and comments from these categories are identified within the essay itself, and targeted feedback is offered for each identified error.

The **Criterion** feedback captures and identifies actual errors in student writing, including fragments, run-on sentences, agreement errors, misspellings, commonly confused words, and sentences missing initial capitalization and final punctuation. Heuristic-based diagnostic feedback helps students focus on their errors and features as they revise their essays, while a work-in-progress revision capability allows them to make revisions on a split screen as they review each category of feedback. Students can ask instructors for advice about an error or comment by writing questions and messages and attaching them to a particular essay on a private message board.

Instructors can also insert their own comments about the essay both within the essay and on the private message board. Students are provided with online access to a comprehensive Writer’s Handbook with reference materials on how to improve their writing. All of this feedback is designed so that the student can utilize it along with the revision capability.

All of the student’s essays, scores, annotated feedback, and instructor comments are saved to a secure virtual portfolio that both the instructor and student can access.

The **Criterion** library of topics spans elementary school, middle school, high school, and college levels. In addition, instructors can create and assign their own writing tasks utilizing a Scored Instructor Topic function. Students can use the Text Editor function (which does not provide a score) to submit any writing sample even if it is not an essay and receive complete feedback in all categories but organization & development. Since the Text Editor function does not provide a score, instructors may use this feature to provide for open-ended assignments which do not refer to a specific topic.

The **Resource Guide for Supporting Writing Instruction** is an online tool which provides a context for understanding how the different components of the **Criterion** service can be used to support the teaching of writing and revising an essay. In addition to explaining the **Criterion** holistic score and diagnostic feedback capabilities, the following resources are available to assist...
clients in using the *Criterion* Online Writing Evaluation service. All of these resources can be accessed from the Resources tab within the instructor’s own site.

- The **Criterion User Manual** is an online document with an electronically linked table of contents. Though the electronic links are not available if printed, the Manual can be printed if clients wish to do so. It describes all *Criterion* functionality for both instructors and students. The User Manual contains a step-by-step overview of all essential functions and is illustrated with screen captures to help users to navigate through the application. The Administrator Supplement contains only those tasks reserved specifically to administrators.

- The **Administrator Supplement** is an online document intended to support district and school administrators who will utilize the *Criterion* management and reporting tools to create district- or school-wide assignments, receive reports on them, and monitor usage and productivity. The manual contains a step-by-step overview of all administrator functions illustrated with screen capture to help Administrators navigate through the application. It can be printed if desired.

- The **Instructor Quick Access Guide** provides abridged instructions to help instructors use the *Criterion* service to create classes and assignments, add students, work with student portfolios, and view and use the *Criterion* reports. The Guide can be easily printed on two sides of an 8½x11 page and folded to form a four-page leaflet. More detailed instructions are found in the *User Manual*.

- The **Student Quick Access Guide** provides step-by-step instructions to help students choose and complete assignments, view performance summaries with scores and annotate diagnostic feedback, and revise their work using the features built into the system to help them. The Guide easily prints on two sides of an 8½x11 page and folds to form a four-page leaflet.

- The **Resources Tab** at the upper right corner of any instructor screen gives direct access to various resources available to you as a *Criterion* user. There are separate resource sites with different content for student, instructor, and administrator. Resources include (as appropriate): *Criterion* training Refresher Videos, suggestions for using the *Criterion* service in the classroom, and links to the *Criterion* Web site, the Topics Library, *Criterion* Support information, Quick Access Guides, and other helpful links.

### The *Criterion* Welcome Screen Announcements/News Tab

- **General announcements** are posted above the *Criterion* User site links to inform users of planned outages, product reminders, and other announcements as needed.

- The **Criterion News link** below the user site links contains links and PDF documents referenced in the announcements. Also there is information for those considering becoming *Criterion* Users including a link to an 8-minute *Criterion* Tour. You may wish to use the *Criterion* Tour to show colleagues or parents this narrated overview of *Criterion* features and functions.

- **www.ets.org/criterion** Website contains a wealth of information about the *Criterion* service from the Higher Education and English Language Learner perspectives.
SUPPORTING WRITING INSTRUCTION WITH THE CRITERION® ONLINE WRITING EVALUATION SERVICE

1. How the Criterion Service Supports the Writing Process

The Criterion service supports all of the stages of the writing process – planning, writing, and revision. Eight planning templates are available to help students organize their thoughts before beginning the actual writing process. Instructors, however, need to be clear in their purpose if they want to derive the maximum benefit from the application. When instructors chart a clear course for their use of the Criterion service, students have the benefit of better planning and more feedback on their writing than they could receive from an instructor working without the application.

2. Holistic Scoring

Instructors can use the holistic scoring capability in the Criterion service to ascertain their students’ general level of writing, and the students themselves can compare the quality their essay with other essays at the same grade/level.

The holistic evaluation capability of the Criterion service provides students with rubric-based feedback about their writing. Automated, grade level specific scoring models are built using essays scored by a large number of trained readers using a scoring rubric. The Criterion holistic scoring works by comparing a student’s writing to thousands of essays written and evaluated by writing instructors. It is also important to remember that the scored essays used to build models were written by students under timed testing conditions; therefore, the writers had no opportunity to revise, use spell check, or reflect on what they had written. So, when students write on the Criterion library topics in a regular class, working under more relaxed conditions, instructors and students alike should recognize that their scores may not precisely compare to those of the models.

The Criterion library spans topics from grade four through upper division college. Instructors have an ever increasing number of prompts from which to choose. At each level, there are many topics on different writing modes, such as descriptive, narrative, persuasive, expository, compare and contrast, cause and effect. The topics and modes are compatible with many state curriculum standards, and may be aligned to any writing curriculum.

A word of caution: it is important for both students and instructors to recognize that the technology that enables the Criterion service to do holistic scoring is not immune from making errors. The Criterion engine, after all, does not actually “read” the essays – it is not a human being! Instead, it uses highly sophisticated technology (natural language processing techniques) to analyze student writing and compare it with thousands of scored essays. This technology is what gives holistic scoring both its power and its limitations. Because of its sophistication, the technology can score student essays very rapidly – in under 20 seconds! But because the Criterion score is computer-generated, the scores provided by the Criterion system should be used as one piece of evidence about a student’s writing. While the level of agreement between the Criterion holistic score and trained professional readers is very high – 98% – it is not perfect.
3. Advisories

Advisories are given for a student essay when there is concern about the reliability of the score. This can be for a number of reasons (see table below) but always signal to both the student and the instructor that the essay may be problematical in some way and that any score information should be carefully reviewed by the instructor. Among the more common advisories are those given when the essay is too brief for a reliable score, too long to be scored accurately, or written in a way that does not resemble the essays used as scoring models. Some advisories actually prevent a score from being assigned. Others will yield a score but teachers can choose to leave the default assignment setting which turns off the holistic score from the student’s view whenever an advisory is present.

Click here to see the Advisories Table which lists the advisory name, the text displayed, and applicable notes.

4. Diagnostic Feedback

Once submitted, student essays are evaluated and feedback is received in less than 20 seconds. The Criterion Performance Summary report for the essay includes a holistic score of either from 1-4 or 1-6 points, along with individual roll-over messages which describe errors in the trait areas of Grammar, Usage and Mechanics, and provide comments for the traits of Style and Organization & Development. Rollover feedback messages explain each error/comment and link students directly to the appropriate sections in the online Writer’s Handbook for instructional information and suggestions with examples to help them improve their essay.

Click here to see the Table of Diagnostic Feedback with complete list of the trait categories and the 43 subcategories that the Criterion service identifies.

The student view of the different feedback categories may be switched on and off allowing instructors to structure the experience of revising, editing, and proofreading for their students. Full diagnostic feedback is provided for any and all writing samples on any subject and of any length.

Depending on students’ skills in typing and spelling, some “errors” made by the Criterion service in scoring a student essay may simply reflect the fact that the application could not determine accurately what word the student intended to use. Using the spell checker can alleviate some of these errors.

When instructors choose to allow students to view specific types of feedback, they help students walk through the steps of the writing process, those of revising, editing, and proofreading. Of course, instructors may activate all the diagnostic feedback categories simultaneously (the default setting when creating an assignment). However, if the student’s writing has lots of errors, the amount of feedback may be daunting to the student. The capability of viewing the different categories, on the same piece of writing, sends a powerful signal to the student regarding the revision and editing process.

The diagnostic feedback students receive on their writing identifies the error or comment and gives students suggestions as to how they might correct the problem. In addition, as noted previously, students are able to access the Writer’s Handbook.
Examples:

- If the Criterion scoring engine has located a statement that it identifies as an introduction, the feedback reads, “Is this part of your *Introduction?* An introduction attracts the reader’s interest and provides background information. It also contains your *thesis statement.* Look in the Writer’s Handbook for ways to improve your introduction.”

- If the Criterion scoring engine cannot locate a statement that it identifies as an introduction, the feedback reads: “Criterion has not identified an introduction in your essay. Good writers use an introduction to tell what the essay is about and to set their essays in motion. Look in the Writer’s Handbook for some advice about writing an introduction.”

Other feedback comments are similar; they frequently direct students to the Writer’s Handbook for additional guidance. Students may also seek additional help from their writing instructor. Rollover feedback messages are vocabulary level appropriate.

[Click here to see a *Comparison* between the Elementary, Middle School and High School Rollover Feedback Messages.]

The ELL feedback messages are only altered slightly from the middle school feedback messages. The Descriptive Feedback Messages are structured so that the messages do not prescribe what to correct, but rather describe the error to allow the student determine the corrective measure.

- Example of **descriptive** feedback: *You have used either an imprecise word or an incorrect word.*

- Example of **prescriptive** feedback: *You have used there in this sentence. You may need to use their instead.*

5. *Writer’s Handbooks*

A signature feature of the Criterion service is the *Writer’s Handbook.* Its topics include all those of interest to students seeking to improve their writing, such as grammar, usage, mechanics, style, and organization & development. Furthermore, when students receive diagnostic feedback from the Criterion program related to any of these aspects of their writing, a link is provided which opens the Writer’s Handbook to that specific section so the students can consult it if they so choose. The Writer’s Handbook is available from every feedback screen and the student’s portfolio.

Instructors select a handbook when editing or creating a class. However, the instructor may override the class handbook selection on a student-by-student basis. Separate writer’s handbooks with associated feedback messages are provided to accommodate the various Criterion student audiences. Nine versions of the Writer’s Handbook are available for student users.

- Elementary
- Middle School
- High School/College
- English Language Learners (ELL) – for Grades 7 – Adult
- Spanish/English – bilingual version of the Middle School handbook
- Simplified Chinese/English – bilingual version of the Middle School handbook
• Japanese/English – bilingual version of the Middle School handbook  
• Korean/English – bilingual version of the Middle School handbook  
• Descriptive Feedback Messages – uses the Middle School handbook with altered rollover feedback messages

These writer’s handbooks have been constructed with appropriate vocabulary levels and examples for each audience. Feedback messages presented to students also correspond to the level of the Writer’s Handbook selected. The feedback text is the text that pops up when the user rolls over the highlighted portions in the essay.

Click here to see a Comparison between the Elementary, Middle School and High School Writer’s Handbooks.

6. Incorporating the Criterion System in Your Writing Instruction

The Criterion system can be applied in a variety of instructional settings and for a variety of uses to support the writing and revision process.

Click here to view a document that details ways the Criterion service may be integrated into your writing program.

Helping students improve their writing. This is the primary purpose of writing instruction, and the use to which most instructors and students will put the Criterion service. As was described above, the capabilities of the Criterion program mirror the steps of the writing process, an approach that most writing instructors use with their students.

Supporting writing instruction in the resource or tutorial center. Some schools and universities have writing labs or centers where students may go to work on their writing, with intermittent help from an instructor. For motivated students, the Criterion system can strengthen those approaches, by enabling students to write and submit essays for feedback, with assistance, when needed, from an instructor.

Helping students prepare for writing assessments. There are situations when students must produce high-quality writing on demand. This may be a testing environment, by which students qualify to enter, or exit, a program (for example, a high school proficiency test). Alternatively, students, when they are candidates for a job, may be asked to submit a writing sample. The Criterion service is ideally suited to help students prepare for such situations; they can write an essay on one of the Criterion topics in an amount of time the instructor establishes, then submit it for a score. This lets them see how they are doing in the development of their writing skills, and where they need to improve.

Placing students in writing classes. When many students are enrolled in a school or a university, instructors may find that their work can be more effective if they cluster students of the same general level of writing together. The holistic scoring capability is suited to this purpose.

The Criterion service is an instructional tool that can be used successfully with any writing program.

For suggestions in using the Criterion tool with the Northwest Regional Education Laboratory’s 6+1 Trait® Writing Model, click here.
Keep these tips in mind as you plan to use the Criterion service.

- Because Criterion is an online program, students and instructors can use it at home or any other location where the Internet is available.
- If using a computer lab, set up the schedule and assignments so your students have enough time to write and submit an essay and view the diagnostic feedback.
- Preplan your lesson plans so that instruction takes place in the classroom and actual writing occurs in the lab.
- Handwritten/typed or cut/paste – students can handwrite their essays and then type them into the Criterion application or they can type offline in a word processing program and then cut and paste their essays into the Criterion text entry box.

7. Using Topics from the Topics Library

The Criterion library of topics contains an ever-increasing number of prompts on many subjects taken from a variety of sources. These topics are available beginning with grade four and continuing through upper division college level writing. Instructors can select topics that are geared to their students’ writing levels and interests.

Click here for a list of all topics in the topics library.

A complete list of the topics with prompt text and associated scoring rubrics can be found in the Criterion system on the Create Assignments page at the <View All Topics> link. The same information can also be found on the Criterion Web site.

8. Grade/Level Scoring

If you want your students to receive an accurate holistic score, then the instructors should make sure to use the students’ corresponding grade level with a selected topic. Remember that the holistic score is based on thousands of essays written by other students at that grade level. For example, if your tenth-grade class were to write on a twelfth-grade topic, be sure that the assignment grade level is Grade 10 so that your students’ efforts are compared to those of tenth graders and not twelfth graders and their scores reflect an accurate evaluation of their writing ability. Interest-level appropriate topics in other grade levels may be used at your grade level by using the Scored Instructor Topic option as described below.

9. Using the Grade “n” Scored Instructor Topic Option

In addition to using the topics available in the Topics Library at grade level, by using the <Grade “n” Scored Instructor Topic> option instructors can also create their own topics, choose topics from anywhere in the topics library to be scored at a chosen grade/level, choose public domain topics from any source, or change the grade level of a previously created assignment. More complete directions for these options are found in the Criterion User Manual.

To create your own Scored Instructor Topic, go to the Create Assignments screen, choose your desired grade/level. Choose <Grade “n” Scored Instructor Topic>, either expository or persuasive and for either a four- or six-point holistic score.

Click here for instructions on how to create an effective prompt for your Scored Instructor Topic.
To choose a topic from anywhere in the Topics Library and have it scored at the grade/level you wish, choose <Grade “n” Scored Instructor Topic> as above. Open the Topics Library at <View All Topics> and copy a chosen prompt onto the clipboard. Then paste it into the text box on the Create Assignment screen. Using this option allows you to edit the text of the prompt if you wish to make it more suitable for your students. You may also wish to review the prompt construction guidelines found by clicking the button <View Instructor’s Topic Guidelines> at the bottom of the Create/Edit Assignment screen to ensure the prompt will elicit a scorable response.

To use any public domain prompt from any source, proceed as you would for creating your own Scored Instructor topic. Copy the prompt from your chosen source and paste it into the text box on the Create Assignment screen.

To change the grade/level of a previously created assignment put a check in front of the assignment you wish to change and choose <View/Edit Assignment>. To keep from losing the prompt, copy it from the text box onto your clipboard. Choose the grade/level at which you wish the topic to be scored and then choose the appropriate <Grade “n” Scored Instructor Topic>. If the prompt has disappeared from the text box, copy it from your clipboard. Note: the new grade/level scoring will only apply to essays submitted after the grade/level was changed. It will have no effect on previously submitted assignments.

Please Note: Scores received by students for Scored Instructor Topics need to be reviewed by the teacher for accuracy. The Criterion system is designed to only evaluate writing processes and skills; the correctness of informational content needs to be evaluated by the teacher.

It is also possible for instructors to use the Text Editor feature to create open-ended assignments (e.g., “Write a persuasive essay on any topic you choose.”). Such assignments will receive all feedback except for organization and development. Text Editor assignments do not receive a score, since they are not on a specific topic.

The Text Editor can also be used by students to submit any writing sample to the Criterion system for all diagnostic feedback except organization & development. In this case, instructors should create the Text Editor assignment under its own name, change the limit of submissions to unlimited, and leave all feedback available to students.
SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

The following document provides an overview of the recommended minimum technical specifications for using the Criterion service. Note on Welcome Page: You will find a button [Check Req] to determine if your system meets minimum requirements.

To view the recommended minimum network guidelines for your local network infrastructure, click here.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

The Criterion system is an online interactive application; if your bandwidth is insufficient, overall performance will be affected during periods of high network traffic at your location. We recommend that your network bandwidth utilization levels should be maintained below 70%.