

In 1992 the University Composition Board² members at The University of Arizona (UA) read six portfolios submitted by incoming students and used the results of their readings to place those students in first-year composition. Since then, the Portfolio Placement Project (PPP) has grown to include more than five hundred portfolios, most submitted by students graduating from high schools in the Tucson area. I have worked with the PPP for three years, and I believe that the program that has developed at UA is a model from which other universities can learn when exploring alternative methods of student placement. The use of portfolios for placement, as practiced here, provides a more valid and reliable measure of student writing ability than either a timed essay exam or a multiple-choice test. In addition, the PPP has had a positive impact on the curriculum of both the local secondary schools and the curriculum of the Composition Program at UA.

I have divided this article into several sections. In section one I provide an overview of the PPP, arguing that it differs from similar projects at other universities in two fundamentally important ways: (1) both high school English teachers and university writing teachers score the portfolios, and (2) all portfolio readers give written feedback (and not just a number score) to the student writers. Next I explore the concept of validity as it relates to the PPP, arguing that the positive aspects Peter Elbow and others describe of portfolios

The Trinity of Portfolio Placement: Validity, Reliability, and Curriculum Reform¹

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make the portfolio placement practiced at UA a much more valid measure of writing ability than other measures. In section three I explore the concept of reliability within the PPP, arguing that the way in which the scoring rubric is developed and shared with scorers accounts for the high inter-rater reliability that the PPP enjoys. In my conclusion I argue that the PPP has had enormous positive impact on the curriculum of The University of Arizona and the schools whose students submit portfolios for placement.

A Brief Overview of the Portfolio Placement Project

Students, primarily those in Tucson, who are planning to attend The University of Arizona may compile a portfolio of their writing which will be used in place of a timed placement essay (previously written to a common prompt in thirty minutes during first-year orientation, now written in sixty minutes). To be read and evaluated, a portfolio must contain four pieces of writing: a literary analysis, a piece of expressive writing, a text written from a class other than English, and a reflective letter addressed to writing teachers at UA (see Appendix A for the instruction sheet the students are given). Taken as a whole, these four pieces of writing—final drafts only—are used to place students into either English 100, the basic writing course; English 101, standard first-year composition; English 103, honors composition; or English 109, a one-semester honors course which is the equivalent of the normal, two-course sequence.

The Portfolio Placement Project was piloted in 1992, when portfolios were used to place six students in the composition sequence at The University of Arizona. In 1993 the number of portfolios read climbed to sixty, and it has risen each year since. In 1998 420 placement portfolios were read; 120 high school juniors' portfolios were also read. This aspect of the program, begun in 1997, is unique: not only are portfolios read and evaluated for those students from the Tucson area who are matriculating to the University, but portfolios are also read for students who are just moving into their senior year of high school.³ (This aspect of the PPP will be discussed in more detail in later sections.)

Portfolios are scored on a six-point rubric (see Appendix F for the final draft of the 1998 rubric). Scoring is done by both university and high school instructors. A composite score of four or less places the student in English 100. Students whose portfolios receive a score between five and nine are placed in English 101. A score of ten or eleven gives the student the option of placing into Honors English 103. A score of twelve allows the student to

enroll in English 109, the one-semester honors course that fulfills the entire writing requirement for U of A students. Students, however, are never told their score; they are simply told the name of the course into which they have placed. The students do get more than their English course number, though: each student receives written feedback from two—or possibly three if there is significant disagreement—readers.

Each portfolio that is used for placement is read and scored by two readers; in addition to assigning the portfolio a number grade, each reader also responds in writing to the student who compiled the portfolio (see Appendix C for the advice given to readers concerning commenting on portfolios).⁴ This set of written responses is one of the most valuable aspects of the PPP for both students and those who are scoring their work, and it allows readers and student writers to connect in a way that “sudden death” writing exams, as Grant Wiggins calls standard essay testing, do not. The written feedback personalizes the process in a way that a number score, no matter how well-designed the rubric may be, cannot, and it is a response that is philosophically aligned with portfolio evaluation. As Peter Elbow states concerning the personalized nature of portfolios,

[P]ortfolios are inherently more personal than other forms of assessment. When we read only one text per student, we can easily forget the complexity of the person behind the paper and thus be more comfortable scoring it with a single number. But when we read a portfolio we get a much stronger sense of contact with the person behind the texts: an author with a life history, a diversity of facets, . . . someone who had good days and bad days. (“Will” 53)

The written response allows for more feedback than a single score or a set of possibly conflicting scores. By *responding* to the student writer, rather than only numerically labeling him/her, portfolio readers are able to engage the writer in a discussion about the writing.

Validity and the Portfolio Placement Project

According to Edward M. White, “Validity . . . has to do with honesty and accuracy, with a demonstrated connection between what a test proclaims it is measuring and what it in fact measures” (*Teaching* 283). For example, a driving test is only valid if it tests one’s ability to drive, and a writing test is only valid if it tests one’s ability to write. But what the test

claims to measure cannot be separated from its purpose for measurement. A driving test assesses basic competency in the operation of a motor vehicle, and it assesses nothing more than that. In the PPP, the "test" is measuring writing ability for the purpose of placing students in the composition course for which they are most prepared and from which they will receive the most benefit. Within this context, the portfolio is a much more valid measure than a timed impromptu placement essay.

Writing about the use of impromptu essay testing, White states that "[O]ver 70% of colleges and universities that assess writing use some form of impromptu essay as part of their writing assessments" ("Apologia" 30). Such a statistic is promising, as it suggests that no more than 30% of post-secondary institutions are using multiple-choice tests or other indirect measures of student writing ability. Unfortunately, direct evaluations of writing, such as the traditional timed essay, also suffer from validity problems. Because the timed essay is written on-the-spot and under pressure, in a high-anxiety "test" atmosphere where no feedback or collaboration is allowed, the timed impromptu essay produces what Elbow calls "a faint, smudged, and distorted picture of the student's writing ability" ("Foreword" xiii). Instead of presenting a student's fully-formed writing ability, the timed essay presents a blurred picture of the student's ability to compress the entire writing process into a short time period.⁵

While the impromptu essay allows for only the most abbreviated writing process, portfolios have the potential to "reward students for using a good writerly process: to explore a topic in discussion and exploratory writing; to complicate their thinking; to allow for perplexity and getting lost; to get feedback; to revise; and to collaborate" (Elbow, "Will" 41). Portfolios, under the best of conditions, allow for one fundamental component of the writing process that timed essay testing, by its very nature, cannot allow: time to work and rework a piece of writing. This allowance for time makes a portfolio, potentially, a much more valid measuring device for student writing ability.

The portfolios students submit in the PPP take advantage of all of the positive aspects of the system that Elbow describes. Students learn about the requirements of the PPP at the beginning of the school year; the portfolio is not turned in to the University Composition Board until the middle of March. Thus students have roughly five months to craft, revise, receive feedback on, further revise, edit, and polish the pieces they select for inclusion in their placement portfolio (see Appendix D for the guidelines

students are given concerning the construction of their portfolios and Appendix E for the advice students are given concerning the selection of texts for the placement portfolio).

Ultimately, "The validity of a measurement instrument or test refers to whether or not it does what it purports to do" (Huot 330). The PPP is as valid as any portfolio placement can be. It claims to measure a student's writing ability for the purpose of placement into First-Year Composition, and the portfolio each student compiles reflects his or her level of skill as well as any measurement of writing is able.

Reliability and the Portfolio Placement Project

Defining *reliability*, White writes that "reliability means fairness and consistency" ("Portfolios" 35-36). Elaborating on this definition, Dana Elder and Larry Beason write, "*Reliability* refers to consistency in testing, to the ability of scores or measurements to agree. Historically, writing evaluation has been largely concerned with *inter-rater* reliability, or the correlation between different scorers' evaluations of the same piece of writing" (38). In the PPP, the level of inter-rater reliability has always been relatively high. In 1997 inter-rater reliability was .895; in 1998 the level of inter-rater reliability rose to .96.⁶ As important as the numerical level of reliability, though, is the conceptual foundation on which the numbers rest.

Both definitions of reliability offered above rest on the same fundamental assumption: for an assessment of writing ability to be fair, there must be agreement between multiple readers about the score the piece of writing in question deserves. This is, however, a site of contention in writing assessment, for readers must *agree to read in the same basic manner* in order to produce consistent results. Faced with this challenge to individual choice, Elbow offers this dangerous advice: "Given the tension between validity and reliability . . . it makes most sense to put our chips on validity and allow reliability to suffer" ("Foreword" xiii).

Elbow's contention is that any attempt to force agreement among readers invalidates the reading, and thus the scoring, process by making the reading of the students' work an unnatural one. What Elbow fails to recognize, though, is that an unreliable assessment system, one which produces inconsistent scores for a single piece of writing, invalidates itself by being so unreliable.

Opposing Elbow's position, White argues that validity can climb no higher than reliability allows it to: "Statisticians tell us that reliability is the

upper limit for validity, that no assessment device can be more valid than it is reliable. And that makes perfect sense. Your measure must give consistent results as well as honestly measure what you say it measures" (*Teaching* 17). Because of the interdependent nature of validity and reliability, neither can be given short shrift; any measure of writing must take both into account. In the PPP, reliability rests on two related procedural aspects of the program: the physical conditions in which the scoring of portfolios takes place and the generation of the scoring rubric.

The logistics of scoring play a part in inter-rater reliability in large-scale writing assessment. In David W. Smit's situation at Kansas State University, portfolios are scored by small groups of instructors, all of whom have similar experience levels (Smit 308). At the University of Louisville, portfolios are read by instructors who are selected for their experience teaching in the program.⁷ In both cases, inter-rater reliability rests on the shared background of the readers. The situation at UA is similar to this, although it occurs on a larger scale.

Scoring of portfolios is done in a single day at UA, traditionally on a Saturday. On either the Thursday or Friday before the portfolios are scored, readers take part in a norming session that lasts approximately four hours. During both the training and scoring sessions, readers all sit in the same large room.⁸ As White argues, "Experience with essay tests has shown that reliable readings can take place only in controlled sessions, with all evaluators reading at the same time and place, under the direction of a chief reader. This experience may not hold true for portfolios . . . , but it probably will, as the scoring of portfolios seems in every way even more difficult than the scoring of essays" (White, *Assigning* 69). The norming session coupled with the close proximity of readers to one another and to the chief reader greatly increases inter-rater reliability.

When they score papers in the same room, readers sit together in small groups. They discuss papers that they read. They discuss the scoring criteria. They take coffee and cigarette breaks together, often taking their conversations about the task at hand with them. This close proximity makes high inter-rater reliability possible, but it is also a danger. As Marvin Diogenes, a member of the UCB, states, there are "hardships" associated with the reading of portfolios. After four hours, despite breaks, readers become exhausted. Their scores begin to fluctuate; the written comments to the students become brief and perfunctory—and often much more difficult to read as the quality of handwriting slumps. To combat this degradation, the

UCB plans to divide the reading session over two days. The effects this will have on reliability are not yet known.

The second aspect of the PPP that fosters reliability is the development of the rubric to which readers are introduced during their norming session—a rubric that is carefully crafted during the process of pulling anchor-portfolios for training purposes. Discussing scoring rubrics, Grant Wiggins writes, "All rubrics involve abstractions, based on generalizations of samples of work" (132), and the rubric generated by the UCB for scorers in the PPP is no exception: its criteria for the various levels of the six-point scale are abstractions, but they are abstractions based on real examples of student work. This makes it conducive to high inter-rater reliability.

During the two weeks prior to the scoring of the placement portfolios, members of the UCB begin reading random samples of student portfolios from each participating school. Each portfolio is ranked according to a detailed six-point scale that is based on the rubrics used in previous years (see Appendix F for the 1998 rubric). As UCB members rate the portfolios, they compare and contrast those portfolios with others that received the same score. After several days of such comparisons, the rubric is revised. The new draft of the rubric is tested against the scores that have already been given to sample portfolios, and the UCB members confer again, after more portfolios have been read, about the rubric. A final revision is done before the rubric is presented to the raters.

The recursive process through which the UCB takes the scoring rubric every year increases the inter-rater reliability of the PPP and the validity of the process as well. Because the rubric is produced on-site through examination of student portfolios, it is perfectly suited to judge *those* portfolios. Because the rubric is revised each year, the UCB is able to keep the rubric's categories finely attuned to the portfolios that students are submitting.

By the time readers arrive for their training session, the rubric has been thoroughly tested, and anchor portfolios have been readied. Although the rubric is not given another formal revision, its meaning is subtly altered during the training session (and the norming session that precedes the Saturday scoring session). As the UCB members guide readers through the anchor portfolios, the group negotiates the meaning of various levels of the rubric. Although an "outside" rubric is imposed on scorers, the subtleties of the rubric are openly negotiated by all participants. Because of this dynamic

process, high inter-rater reliability is always generated—even though portfolios may differ radically in content from one another.

The Portfolio Placement Project and the Secondary/Post-Secondary Curriculum

Proving that the PPP is both valid and reliable is important for political, pedagogical, and professional purposes. Politically, proof of validity and reliability allows the PPP to compete with other tools of writing assessment—tools that are less expensive and less time-consuming. Pedagogically, the power of the PPP is also important; its effects are being felt in composition classes at UA and English courses at all of the participating high schools. Professionally, the PPP has an impact on the teaching of English in the Tucson area: it brings high school and college English teachers together to talk about writing, and it brings writing into non-English classrooms where writing may not have been taught before.

In the high school English classroom, the PPP has brought current ideas about process and collaboration in writing into classes where they may not have been practiced before. The portfolio, by its very nature, encourages communication between teachers and students concerning writing. The portfolio also explicitly connects teachers to their students' portfolios; each teacher must sign the cover sheet that his or her student includes with the placement portfolio (see Appendix B). In a subtle way, this pushes teachers to push their students. Such small incentives can bring about collaboration where none existed before—and reinforce notions of collaboration between students and teachers who already work in this way.

The PPP also directly impacts the teaching of writing at both the junior and senior levels of high school in another way. Seniors spend time compiling their portfolios and revising their work, as they are the ones hoping to attend UA in the coming fall, but juniors are also encouraged to submit portfolios to the PPP for review. The comments these students receive open a dialogue about writing and the expectations university teachers might have for it between the students and the English teacher with whom they are working. The dialogue that is created directly impacts the writing instruction the students receive during the remainder of their junior year—and the senior year in which they compile a placement portfolio of their own.

Both the secondary and post-secondary English curriculums enjoy an added benefit from the PPP: in this instance our method of assessment meshes clearly and completely with the manner in which we teach.

Portfolio assessment allows teachers to assess writing as a process that produces a series of products. Students have numerous chances to revise, to rethink, to seek out and then incorporate feedback on the writing they submit for assessment. This is important, for “You are what you assess” (Wiggins 130). Assessing writing in a timed impromptu essay test implies that that is what we value as a profession—the ability to write quick essays that may go beyond the most shallow level of development (but probably not much beyond). When we use portfolios, we teach writing as a process and grade writing that has been improved by that process.

At the secondary level, though, English classes are not the only ones to be affected positively by the PPP. One of the requirements of the placement portfolio is that students submit a piece of expository writing from a discipline other than English (see Appendix A). Through the grapevine, teachers have told UCB members that the effects of this single requirement have been enormous. Administrators overseeing the collection of placement portfolios at some schools learned that no writing was being done in courses other than English. Six years after the inception of the PPP, writing is taking place across the high school curriculum—because of the PPP.

For the secondary and post-secondary teachers involved with the PPP, one “benefit of using portfolios for assessment [is that] they tend to promote a richer and more sophisticated understanding of writing” (Elbow, “Foreword” xiv). Portfolios open the definition of writing up for teachers by showcasing several pieces of work for each student—often with an enormous range of genres represented. Thus the definition of writing cannot become fixed and static. Portfolios have this effect on teachers, but there is another. Being involved in the assessment of portfolios tends to promote a richer and more sophisticated understanding of the assessment of writing.

When teachers work in isolation, alone with their classroom door closed and a stack of papers on the desk, working within the picture of the profession that Elbow describes so well in *Writing with Power*, they do not have to articulate their standards to anyone (including themselves and their students). The PPP brings teachers together for the purpose of evaluating student writing according to communally-defined standards. This is the polar opposite of the normal isolation-method of assessment that most teachers practice. By bringing teachers together to share their ideas about the evaluating of writing, the PPP impacts all of the teachers involved in a positive way, a way that promotes professional development and adherence to (or awareness of) common standards.

Conclusion: Who Assesses Writing and How?

The Portfolio Placement Project at The University of Arizona provides a valid and reliable assessment of students' writing abilities; moreover, the PPP has a positive impact on the curriculum of the schools which take part in the Project and on the professional development of the teachers who come together to score the students' work. Portfolio assessment of writing is an appropriate method of assessing student writing, for it clearly meshes with both contemporary pedagogical processes and the theories of writing that form the foundations for them. But portfolio assessment is of great importance for another reason, and it is on this that I would like to end.

Large-scale assessment of writing is unavoidable. Students need to be placed into composition courses, and often their writing skills are evaluated again at the end of those courses. Another test of writing ability may confront them before they enter upper-division courses. Successfully completing a writing assessment of one kind or another may even be a graduation requirement. With this high-stakes situation in mind, those of us intimately involved with the teaching of writing must ask ourselves two questions: (1) who is best prepared to evaluate student writing, and (2) what is the best way for student writing to be tested? Despite the common misconception, writing is not something that can be taught or evaluated by anyone. It is a job for professionals in the field of writing, and currently most professionals in this field agree that portfolios have the potential to be a more reliable and valid form of assessment of student writing than any other.

As teachers who are accustomed to evaluating writing, we must always remind ourselves that the high-stakes arena of large-scale assessment is not the same as our classrooms. On our own, we can assume that our assignments are valid and that our scores are reliable. But we must not carry these assumptions with us when we speak of large-scale assessment. If we do let either reliability or validity slide, then we prove that the evaluation of writing is as subjective, arbitrary, and idiosyncratic as many students believe it to be. If we sacrifice either validity or reliability, then we will be removing ourselves from large-scale assessment and closing ourselves back in our classrooms. When this happens someone else—someone who does not view writing as a process that produces products—will take over the job of assessing student writing. The stakes are too high for our students and for our profession for us to let someone else decide how writing will be assessed.

Notes

1. I thank WPA reviewers Edward M. White and Rebecca Moore Howard for their thoughtful responses to my original draft and the members of the University Composition Board who graciously allowed me to take part in the Portfolio Placement Project—and offered advice and encouragement throughout the writing and revision of this article. I am also indebted to my wife Elizabeth for, among many things, her multiple readings of this work.
2. The University Composition Board at The University of Arizona was founded in 1983. Its structure is based on that of the University of Michigan's English Composition Board. As Yvonne Merrill, a member of the UCB, states, "The mission of the five-member University Composition Board is to support and improve student writing, the teaching of writing across the campus and in this community, and the awareness of writing as a primary mode of thinking." UCB members teach first-year composition courses, administer both placement and mid-career writing assessments, and are heavily involved in the WAC movement at UA. The UCB members are also a driving force behind both faculty development and high school outreach programs.
3. Anecdotal evidence suggests that a high percentage of the students who submit portfolios as juniors eventually both submit placement portfolios and then enroll at The University of Arizona. This subject is currently being researched by the UCB, and recent software changes have made it possible to begin collecting the necessary data.
4. Names are removed from portfolios, so each receives two blind readings. Only social security numbers are used to identify the students, and a numerical code identifies the schools the students attend.
5. At The University of Arizona, students who do not submit portfolios perform a one-hour writing exam to determine their placement. In the exam, students read a short passage and then respond to a question that requires them to summarize and analyze the reading and to argue their view on the issue.
6. This does not include the 120 portfolios submitted by high school juniors, which were read only once.

7. There is one aspect of reader-selection at the University of Louisville that I find particularly interesting: instructors are chosen for their overall experience, but they are also chosen based on the course they have most recently taught. Thus the teacher who has just completed teaching English 100 will be considered the expert on English 100 for purposes of portfolio scoring.
8. Approximately 50 readers take part in the scoring of portfolios each year, and the scoring session lasts about nine hours.

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Appendices

All documents represented in these appendices were constructed by members of the UCB and used in the 1998 Portfolio Placement Project.

Appendix A Description of Portfolio Contents

A portfolio consists of a completed cover sheet, a Table of Contents, and the following four pieces of writing. The four pieces of writing in the portfolio should be approximately ten to fifteen pages, not exceeding fifteen pages.

1. Reflective Letter

This letter, addressed to The University of Arizona Composition Teachers, should introduce you as a writer, and provide information about the selections included in your portfolio. Your letter will help readers understand your experiences as a writer. Therefore you may want to consider discussing the following:

- explain the purpose of the assignment;
- explain why you selected the pieces you included (what do they show about you as a writer?);
- comment on features which especially reveal your style and aims as a writer;
- discuss your writing processes;
- comment on writing in your life;
- evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of your writing.

2. Expressive Writing

This kind of writing can range in tone from serious to humorous to satirical, and range in genre from essays to narratives (personal experience or imaginative) to poetry. It is a "free choice" selection. This might be your favorite piece, for example.

3. A Literary Analysis

This essay should be a piece in which you respond critically or analytically to something you've read, preferably a significant literary text (such as a short story, novel, poem, play, or piece of non-fiction prose).

4. Expository Writing from a Discipline other than English

This is any kind of writing from a class other than English in which the writer examines and communicates the ideas clearly to the reader. At The University of Arizona, you will be asked to write in many of the courses across the curriculum.

Appendix B 1998 University of Arizona English Placement Portfolio Cover Sheet

To the student: Complete the top half of this form (type or print) and give it to your supervising teacher who is working with the University Composition Board in this pilot project.

Student's Name: _____

Social Security Number: _____

High School: _____

Home Address: Street _____

City, State, Zip _____

AP English Exam _____ Score ACT English Score _____ SAT Verbal Score _____

Did you attach a photocopy of either your ACT or SAT verbal scores? _____

I plan to attend The University of Arizona ____yes ____no

I pledge that all the writing included in this portfolio is my own, and I grant The University of Arizona permission to reproduce part or all of its contents for educational purposes. I understand that I will be assessed a \$10 processing fee for the scoring of my First-Year Placement Essay-Portfolio (FPE-P) rather than for the First-Year Placement Essay (FPE) when I attend The University of Arizona new student orientation in summer 1998. I understand that the First-Year Placement Essay-Portfolio (FPE-P) will replace the FPE as my placement instrument into a first-year composition sequence.

Signature of Student _____

Date _____

.....

To the Teacher: If you believe that the accompanying portfolio contains only the student's work, please complete this form, attach it to the portfolio, and submit them both.

Name of Supervising Teacher: _____

Signature of Supervising Teacher: _____

Home Address: Street _____

City, State, Zip _____

Appendix C Reading and Commenting

SOME TIPS ON PORTFOLIO READING

Why a portfolio? Why not just a simple, single timed-writing sample? You probably know the answers that are regularly given. But the truth is that scoring portfolios for placement purposes IS a whole lot more work, and it can be harder work, too. It's easy with portfolios to get into a series of complicated arguments with yourself—especially if one piece is really strong where the others are just so-so, or where one piece is absolutely unacceptable where the others are okay, or where all the pieces are just short of good but the topics and “voice” are engaging. Nothing will make those decisions “easy”—but here are a few tips to consider:

- 1. USE THE WHOLE PORTFOLIO:** this may seem obvious, but many readers say that they form a general judgment very early in their reading. We suggest that if you find yourself making a judgment early on, use it as a sort of “hypothesis” which could be called into question with subsequent evidence. Use all the pieces in the portfolio to illuminate your judgment.
- 2. WATCH OUT FOR HALO and SHADOW:** extending the previous suggestion, be on guard against two common effects of uneven portfolios: a “halo” of good impressions created by an outstanding reflective letter, or a “shadow” created by a less-than-impressive beginning. Remember that, occasionally the letter may not be a reliable indicator of the quality of writing in the selections.
- 3. READ HOLISTICALLY:** don't over-analyze any given paper, and when you're done, think ‘across the set’: most of the pieces are under-developed...the strongest moments in the papers come when the writer is using narrative examples...all the papers lurch between formal and informal moments...all the texts have strong thesis statements...the texts are very uneven, some pretty good; others very bad.
- 4. START WITH A THREE-WAY SORT:** before trying to apply the rubric in detail, place the paper high—medium—low. Then look at the appropriate range of the rubric if you need to.
- 5. CONSIDER ‘RANGE’ IN HARD-TO-CALL SCORES:** remember that you do have a variety of writing types to use in making your decision, and look for decisive evidence in contrasting pieces. For example, if a writer's organization seems problematic in the more formal pieces, look closely at the less formal texts, especially the letter: can the student effectively organize less formal language? If those pieces too seem loosely structured, this may confirm your concern. If they are stronger in organization, then perhaps the student simply needs to gain greater familiarity with formal structures.
- 6. WEIGHT THE ACADEMIC PIECES BUT USE THEM ALL:** since the majority of the writing students will do at the University involves more-or-less formal, school-sponsored writing, you may feel that the literary analysis and expository texts are the best indicators for placement. The letter and the expressive text, however, do give you important clues about the student's ability to use language for reflective purposes and in situations where there are fewer “practiced” models of form. How writers handle these more open-ended writing situations can be instructive.

SOME TIPS ON COMMENTING

While you want your comment to provide personal feedback, remember that you are communicating a holistic impression of the student's writing abilities. The rubric suggests some key areas of concern: Development, Organization, Expression, Mechanics.

CONNECT TO THE LETTER: where possible, connect your comment to the student's own self-assessment in the letter: “You say that writing is important to you and your selections convince me of that.”

SINGLE OUT MAJOR PATTERNS: your comments should reflect your overall judgment, so highlight PATTERNS of strength or weakness. “All of your papers convey your energy and concern for your topics.” or “In each of your selections you raise many challenging ideas, but then fail to develop them in much detail.” or “You'll need to learn to focus your writing with more clearly stated theses so that your readers—and you yourself—know what you're trying to prove in each paper.”

BUILD STOCK PHRASES: while you want the comment to be “individualized” to some degree, remember that there are “types” of errors, problems, strengths; don't worry about using fairly stock phrases to describe these common features. Individualize through references to particular pieces. It is not inappropriate to tell all your “4” writers similar things.

REMEMBER THE FUTURE: remember that these are high-school seniors who will be starting their college-level study of writing—frame your comments as advice on things to be aware of or look out for.

THINK OF THE COURSES: your comments will be read by students who have been assigned placement in our course sequences. Keeping the courses in mind can help you decide what aspects of the student's performance to highlight. All these courses typically demand greater maturity of thought (and time

management) and greater sophistication about rhetoric and writing than most high school students have developed. Also, the courses usually encourage students to pursue subjects that are interesting both to them and to their teachers—so students can't assume that teachers will be telling them exactly what to “do” for a given paper.

Typically, scores 1 and 2 are very likely to be in 100, which is designed to give students an extra semester in which to develop their reading/writing abilities.

Scores 3 and 4 are English 101 range, and 101 is a challenging course in which students will be expected to work far more independently and in far greater depth than most have done in high school. The more complex ideas required in these papers will make new demands on students' ability to develop and organize.

Scores 5 and 6 are Honors range scores and will typically result in a 103 Placement; and while it is nice to compliment such students on their accomplishments, you need to let them know that they will be expected to use their abilities to explore far more demanding form of expression.

Appendix D
1997-98 Guidelines for Submitting Your
English Placement Portfolio

1. All materials must be submitted on or before March 16, 1998 to your supervising English teacher who is working with the University Composition Board to develop the Portfolio Placement option. The supervising teacher signs a statement on the cover sheet that, to the best of his or her knowledge, all writing in the portfolio is the student's. You sign a similar statement.
2. Arrange your portfolio in the following order: (1) Cover Sheet, (2) Table of Contents, (3) Reflective Letter, (4) Expressive Writing, (5) Literary Analysis, (6) Expository Writing from a Discipline other than English.
3. All items must be free of teachers' comments, grades, or markings of any sort.
4. Your written work must not exceed 15 pages (typed, double-spaced, 8.5" x 11").
5. Do not put your name anywhere except on the cover sheet, but do write your social security number in the upper right corner of each page. Also, number each page on the bottom center of the page.
6. Do not staple your papers together. Fasten the entire portfolio with large paper clips or binder clip. Do not use a folder or plastic cover.
7. When documenting sources, *be consistent*. Use a recognized style sheet (like MLA or APA) for your Bibliography or Works Cited.
8. The University Composition Board will notify you about the evaluation results by May 15, 1998. This portfolio along with your ACT or SAT scores will result in a binding placement in a first-year composition sequence at The University of Arizona. You will be assessed a \$10 processing fee during new student orientation in summer 1998, but you will not take the First-Year Placement Essay during orientation.

Appendix E
Suggestions for Selecting Materials and
Composing Your Letter

1. Select from all the writing you have done those pieces which will best represent you writing at your best. Remember that you may select essays which you have revised in keeping with a teacher's suggestions.
2. Select a set of papers which shows your flexibility as a writer, illustrating the variety of your interests and your range of style and tone. The Composition Program at The University of Arizona values the ability to write well to a variety of audiences in a variety of situations.
3. In composing your letter, remember that you are introducing yourself as a person, as a writer, and as a student of writing. Remember, too, that your portfolio will help us place you in a course designed to get you started as a college writer and student. In your letter, evaluate your abilities as a writer—both strengths and weaknesses—as these are reflected in the samples you are submitting. Questions to guide you:
 - What is your basic attitude about writing? How is this attitude reflected in your selections? (Be *specific*. Think of incidents which illustrate your attitudes.)
 - What do you usually do when you write a paper?
 - What aspects of writing are hardest for you? What do you do to compensate for these difficulties?
 - What are the most prominent characteristics of your writing?
 - Who are your favorite writers? What do you especially like about each?
 - What qualities do you most value in the types of writing you read?
 - How might writing figure into your future (e.g., school, career, personal interests, etc.)?
4. It may help you to think of your portfolio as a sort of argument: in the reflective letter you claim to be such-and-such a writer, and in the selections which follow the letter is the proof for these claims.

Appendix F
Final Draft of 1998 Scoring Rubric

6 AN EXCELLENT PORTFOLIO: a set of extremely well-written pieces varied in range (e.g., topics, purposes, audiences or situations), at least two of which are exceptionally well-written (the "WOW" response); reflective letter provides a full context for understanding the selections and what they show about the student as writer.

- Range: considerable variety of approach, subject matter, style—all executed with exceptional skill
- Development: ideas elaborated in ways which engage reader with subject matter, sources used effectively to advance the writer's ideas; analytic material skillfully contextualized and integrated into whole
- Organization: clarity of structure which serves the writer's rhetorical and conceptual goals and allow reader to be fully engaged with the arguments
- Expression: complex language used effectively, varied syntax adequate to complexity of thought, few flaws result from trying to express complex ideas
- Mechanics: few if any errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation

5 A VERY GOOD PORTFOLIO: a set of strong performances, uniformly beyond competence in meeting readers' expectations and writer's purposes—although some pieces may seem less than completely satisfying; reflective letter provides adequate context for understanding the pieces and their place in the writer's present development.

- Range: varied in approach and subject matter, perhaps some flawed passages resulting from over ambition
- Development: ideas elaborated effectively and engagingly in ways that suggest the writer understands concepts, sources and their interconnections; analyses are adequately contextualized and integrated into a unified argument
- Organization: ideas presented in meaningful and rhetorically effective sequences, with skillful transitions which highlight the structure of thinking
- Expression: effective language for communicating concepts, occasional difficulties in expressing complex/ambitious ideas, but manages most risks successfully
- Mechanics: few if any errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation

4 A GOOD PORTFOLIO: a uniformly competent set of pieces suggesting the writer understands the basic requirements of academic writing; reflective letter provides sufficient context for understanding selections and communicates a sufficient knowledge of writing processes

- Range: limited variety of approach, style, mostly school-related materials
- Development: ideas elaborated with appropriate examples/illustrations which are adequately explained; sources used appropriately to supplement or substantiate writer's thesis; analysis identifies distinct "parts" or concepts but these may not be integrated, each 'part' standing as separate point of focus
- Organization: ideas developed in meaningful (though sometimes slightly mechanical) sequences, with adequate transitions which signal structure of thinking
- Expression: adequate language for communicating concepts, occasional lapses in usage, or uneven control of formal vocabulary, but explores ideas without major confusions
- Mechanics: few errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation are distracting but do not impede understanding

3 A MINIMALLY COMPETENT PORTFOLIO: an uneven set of pieces suggesting the writer faces a challenge in overcoming some clear deficiencies in academic work; reflective letter provides minimal context for understanding the selections

- Range: very limited variety of approach, style, mostly school-related materials
- Development: ideas elaborated with minimal examples but little discussion of illustrations; sources may be used to state major ideas, may not be appropriately integrated into the writer's discussion, and may be inadequately documented; analysis usually unsuccessful attempt to describe distinct "parts" or concepts, but points are usually inadequately developed
- Organization: ideas arranged in somewhat artificial sequences, with minimal transitions which mostly signal little more than change of subject
- Expression: limited language for exploring concepts, lapses in usage and formal vocabulary, occasional confusions about ideas, a mostly mechanical use of technical terms
- Mechanics: distracting errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation, but few if any which impede understanding

2 A WEAK PORTFOLIO: a set of pieces most of which reveal little competence with academic conventions and modes of thought, suggesting the writer will need extensive practice writing and reading before s/he will be able to do sustained academic writing; reflective letter provides little context for understanding the writer's processes, the selections, or the relation of the selections to the writer's development.

- Range: severely limited in style and range of approach
- Development: texts are under-developed and suggest minimal understanding of abstract ideas (narratives may be better developed than more abstract passages); sources are not integrated into the writer's ideas but simply inserted into text often undocumented; "analysis" simply summary of content
- Organization: ideas in choppy sometimes inappropriate sequences, with few if any transitions
- Expression: severely limited conceptual language, serious lapses in usage and/or misunderstanding of technical vocabulary, confusions about ideas, and often inappropriate sense of formal/informal language
- Mechanics: numbers of errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation, sometimes so severe they seriously impede understanding

1 A VERY WEAK PORTFOLIO: the writer needs extensive support and practice with reading and writing as expressive acts before he/she can begin to study writing as an academic tool

- Range: Minimal variety in style and approach
- Development: texts only minimally developed, simplistic examples inadequately explained, minimal movement between levels of generality, sources inadequately integrated/documented (you may suspect extensive cribbing); analysis not attempted
- Organization: paragraphing may be inappropriate, sequence of ideas arbitrary or confusing, transitions missing or inappropriate
- Expression: severely limited conceptual vocabulary and little sense of formal register; language may be highly oral/inappropriate for written communication
- Mechanics: large numbers of errors which regularly impede understanding