Building Rubrics

Contents:
- Your Assignment
- Things to Consider
- Holistic Rubrics from Julie Lippman’s “Assessing Writing” and ENGL 150
- Analytical Rubrics from Kim Emmons, SAGES, and Washington State’s Critical Thinking Rubric

Your Assignment

This exercise will help you start thinking about creating and using rubrics in a first-year composition course. The first section will familiarize you with student writing and give you a chance to evaluate student essays, while the second asks you to use this experience to compile your own rubric based on the examples below.

Step 1: Find two essays written by freshmen in a writing class. Write a quick rubric you might use to respond to these papers. Respond to one paper using the rubric you devised and modify the rubric to make it more useful. Respond to the second paper using the modified rubric.

Step 2: Look at the various rubrics below. Decide what the important elements of a rubric are and devise a rubric that will help you respond to student papers. Use this rubric to respond to one of the papers you looked at in step 1.

Things To Consider

Huot, Brian. “Reliability, Validity, and Holistic Scoring: What We Know and What We Need to Know.” *College Composition and Communication*. 41.2 (1990): 201-213.

Odell, Lee. “Assessing Thinking.”

In their study on Factors in the Judgment of Writing Quality in 1961, Diederich, French and Carlton found the five most common factors used by readers in holistic evaluation were, in order of importance: ideas, form, flavor, mechanics, and wording (Huot “Reliability” 207). In other words, those are the five factors readers automatically considered most important.

In “Assessing Thinking,” Lee Odell lists six things to consider when responding to the first item on Diederich’s list, ideas:

- **Dissonance:** What sort of problems, ambiguities, ironies, questions, uncertainties, or conflicts do students mention (or overlook)?
- **Selecting:** What kinds of information (observations, “facts,” personal experiences, feelings, memories) do students include in or exclude from their writing?
- **Encoding/Representing:** What sort of language do students use to articulate their ideas (feelings, perceptions, memories)?
- **Drawing on Prior Knowledge:** Do students explicitly refer to things they already know in order to understand something new?
- **Seeing Relationships:** What kinds of relationships (cause-effect, time, if… then, similarity, difference) do students mention in their writing?
- **Considering Different Perspectives:** To what extent to students try to consider different ways in which other people might perceive, interpret, or respond to a given idea, fact or experience?

Odell also suggests encouraging students to ask these questions about a text as they read their classmates’ work:

- What kinds of details has this writer selected?
- Are there kinds of details that seem significantly missing?
- What questions (problems, conflicts, dissonances) does the writer seem to have considered?
- Can you think of other questions the writer might consider?
- Has this writer considered different perspectives?
- Is it necessary to consider different perspectives in this case?
Holistic Rubrics


**Rubric 1**

6 Range;
AN EXCELLENT PAPER: It has substantial content and clear organization and focus. It presents ideas clearly and even gracefully.

5 Range:
A VERY GOOD PAPER: The strength outweighs its weaknesses. It has solid development and is clearly organized and focused, but it is not as strong as a 6.

4 Range:
A GOOD PAPER: The strengths of the folder outweigh the weaknesses, but the development of ideas is not as complete, the organization and focus are not as clear, and the language is not as strong.

3 Range:
A FAIR PAPER: The strengths and weaknesses are about equally balanced. The writer has tried to develop ideas, focus the paper and use effective language. But parts are underdeveloped, disorganized, or confusing. The writing may also be too general or predictable.

2 Range:
A WEAK PAPER: The weaknesses outweigh the strengths. The folder is weak, underdeveloped, poorly focused, and too general. However, it could be error-free.

1 Range:
A POOR PAPER: Its weaknesses outweigh its strengths in most ways. It is unfocused, underdeveloped, and also plagued with grammatical errors that make it unintelligible.

**Rubric 2**

An “A” Paper
- Answers a question at issue. The answer to the question provides a thesis and a means for organizing the paper.
- Makes good use of sources for analysis, discussion, and clarity.
- Has a title that creates expectations.
- Has paragraphs that have a central idea and purpose related to the thesis.
- Has smooth transitions between paragraphs, which clarify reasoning.
- Is untroubled by numerous spelling, punctuation, and syntax errors.
- Correctly uses the MLA format for citation of sources.

A “B” Paper
- Has a clear thesis, which organizes the paper.
- Makes good use of sources for analysis, discussion and clarity.
- Has a title that relates to the content of the paper.
- Has paragraphs that have a central idea and purpose.
- Has some sense of transition or development from paragraph to paragraph.
- Is untroubled by numerous spelling, punctuation, and syntax errors.
- Correctly uses the MLA format for citation of sources.

A “C” Paper
- Has a purpose but is not organized around a thesis or a question at issue.
- Has no title or uses the paper assignment as the title.
- Has paragraphs that have a discernible purpose.
- Is relatively untroubled by numerous spelling, punctuation, and syntax errors.
- Provides some consistent form of documentation of sources.

A “D” Paper
- Purpose is not clear and does not have a thesis or question.
- Has a significant number of paragraphs that are confused by lack of purpose, contradictory ideas, or lack of clarity.
- Has no title.
- Has a significant number of spelling, punctuation, and syntax errors.
- Has little or no documentation.

An “F” Paper
- Has no discernible purpose, question or thesis.
- Discussion rambles from topic to topic and paragraphs are without purpose.
- Has no title.
- Is plagued with spelling, punctuation, and syntax errors.
- Has little or no documentation.
To: English 150 Students  
From: The Director of Composition  

Grading Criteria  

The A Paper: EXCEPTIONAL  
1. It not only fulfills the assignment but does so in a fresh and mature way. The paper is pleasing to read; it accommodates itself well to the intended audience.  
2. The evidence is detailed and used persuasively; claims are thoroughly substantiated using sufficient, typical, accurate, and relevant supporting evidence; where appropriate, citations are used effectively and are formatted correctly.  
3. The organization gives the reader a sense of the necessary flow of the argument or explanation. Paragraphs are fully developed and follow naturally from what proceeds them; the conclusion reinforces the reader’s confidence in the writer’s control of the argument.  
4. The prose is clear, apt, and occasionally notable. It contains virtually no errors by contemporary American Standard English criteria. Think of it as a style consistent with sophisticated adult writing, such as that of op-ed writers found in major American newspapers and magazines. An “A” is a “product” grade.  

The B Paper: HIGHLY COMPETENT  
1. The assignment has been followed and fulfilled in a predictable way, but nevertheless represents sophisticated understanding of the problem. It addresses its intended audience appropriately. Often, this is the kind of paper that with relatively slight revision could be an A paper.  
2. The evidence is obvious, though the writer does not consistently settle for the obvious. The major claims are supported (perhaps not thoroughly) with sufficient, typical, accurate, and relevant evidence. The writer represents an awareness of other points of view.  
3. The introduction and conclusion are clear, but perhaps are not as effective or pointed as they could be. Most paragraphs follow well and are appropriately divided, though one or two could be better placed and developed.  
4. The expression is clean and competent. Not only is sentence structure correct, but subordination, emphasis, sentence length, and variety are used effectively. No serious sentence errors—comma splices, fragments, or fused sentences—occur in a B paper. Punctuation, grammar, and spelling reveal proficient use of the conventions of edited American English.  

The C Paper: COMPETENT  
1. The assignment has been followed and fulfilled, but in a predictable way. The thesis may be too broad or unclear. For various reasons the intended audience may have trouble immediately discerning the thesis, although one is present.  
2. Though an effort is made to support the argument with evidence, the evidence is nearly always obvious; the paper may lack some pertinent information. Supporting evidence that is relevant and accurate should still be easily discernable to the reader. The reasoning is predictable and/or occasionally flawed. There is slight awareness of other points of view.  
3. The paper exhibits an implicit sense of organization, but several paragraphs and/or sentences within paragraphs are ineffectively placed. In short, the organizational structure is recognizable but disjointed.  
4. Sentence structure is generally correct, although the writer may show limited competence with sentence effectiveness, failing to use such devices as subordination, sentence variety, and modifiers to achieve emphasis. However, gross mechanical errors such comma splices, unintentional fragments, fused sentences, subject/verb and noun/pronoun disagreement—errors that betray inadequate understanding of sentence structure—are absent.
The D Paper: DOES NOT MEET STANDARDS

1. The paper exhibits a poor sense of audience and a limited sense of purpose. The purpose or thesis cannot be discerned without significant work on the part of the reader.
2. Necessary evidence is out of order and/or missing; the writer does not supply sufficient, typical, accurate, and relevant evidence that is easily discernable; in fact, irrelevant evidence may instead be present. The reasoning will necessarily be flawed.
3. The organization is difficult to discern, with an introduction that is unclear or nonexistent, paragraphs that are underdeveloped and disorganized, and transitions that are inappropriate or nonexistent.
4. The paper displays numerous errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation. The diction may be so weak as to make sentences incomprehensible for the intended audience, although experienced readers could make sense of them. Lack of proofreading could turn an otherwise competent paper into an incompetent paper.

The F Paper: DYSFUNCTIONAL

1. The assignment is neither followed nor fulfilled. The thesis is unclear, and the paper moves confusedly in several directions. It may fall seriously short of minimum length requirements and/or
2. The writer presents virtually no evidence, or the attribution of evidence is weak and/or
3. The organization appears completely haphazard or arbitrary and/or
4. The paper exhibits numerous grammatical, spelling, and punctuation errors, as well as serious problems with diction and syntax that seriously hinder communication. Many sentences are incomprehensible, even to experienced readers. and/or
5. It is not the student's own work.
Analytical Rubrics

Most of these rubrics are available online at http://www.case.edu/artseng/engl/writing/ (retrieved 11.4.06)

Peter Elbow’s Rubric


The argument is the main point that drives a paper. In evaluating a paper’s argument, ask the following questions:
- Does the paper’s thesis state a debatable position? Does it do more than offer an opinion, summarize, or just report information?
- Is the paper’s thesis responsive to the assignment?
- Does the thesis use straightforward language? Does it make clear the specific direction the argument is going to move in while balancing the general goals of the paper?
- Does it cover the WHAT, HOW, and WHY necessary in the thesis statement? Does the thesis present the main point of the paper, the WHAT? Does it set up the HOW – the specifics that will prove this point? Does the thesis promise to open up to a larger, more general issue related to the argument, the WHY or SO WHAT?
- Does the paper as a whole fulfill the promises set out in the thesis statement? Does the paper actually argue what the thesis statement says it will?

Information is intimately linked with argument; it’s what the writer has observed and then uses to support the argument set forth in the thesis statement. To evaluate the information in the paper, ask the following:
- Are the details provided necessary? There should not be unnecessary details that lead a reader away from the writer’s main point.
- Is the information accurate, or consistent with verifiable sources? What effect do the sources cited have on the way you view the writer’s argument? Are they recognizable as authorities on the subject in question? Do they inspire confidence in you as a reader?
- Is there any obviously erroneous information (including basing an argument on personal opinion or belief) presented which would undermine the writer’s authority?

Analysis (How the Information in the Paper is Explored, Discussed, and Used)

Like information, the category of analysis is closely linked to the writer’s argument. In-depth analysis can convince a reader of an argument, while sloppy analysis can leave huge gaps in a reader’s understanding of a paper’s main point. In other words, to support an argument, a writer not only must include information (or evidence) but also needs to interpret or explain that information for the reader. To evaluate the analysis in a paper, ask the following:
Is there enough exploration of information (quotations, paraphrases, references, and details from the readings) for the argument the writer makes? Does the paper have sufficient sentences of explanation in which the writer processes information for the reader and try to convince her/him of her/his argument? Do you find yourself wanting more explanation of the writer’s assertions?

Does the analysis of quotes, scenes, details, words, metaphors, anecdotal evidence, or other support seem logical and well developed? Are the methods of analysis consistent throughout the paper? (Are quotes from a “sketchy” source, for instance, treated as okay in one part of the paper, and as unreliable in another?)

Does the paper contain generalizations (unsupported statements that just assume the reader agrees)?

Does the combination of information and its analysis make a solid argument that justifies the thesis of the paper? Does the argument lead to some interesting idea – a new perspective, a focused conclusion, an informed recommendation, a thoughtful question? Does it answer the “so what” question?

4. ORGANIZATION (HOW THE IDEAS IN THE PAPER RELATE)

Organization refers to the structure of the paper – how the information and its analyses are assembled to support the thesis. Most readers of academic papers expect a writer to clearly set up the organization of the argument early on in the paper and then develop the ideas in corresponding order. Organization takes place at two key levels: the essay level and the paragraph level.

**Essay Level:**
- Does the paper have an overall logical structure that is clear when you read the thesis statement?
- Is the piece unified? How do you know it’s unified – what “common threads” are woven throughout the essay? Are there parts of the paper you think the writer might need to weave in a little more tightly? Are there any unconnected ideas wandering around in the essay? Where might they be more effective, and/or where might they be omitted?
- Is there a clear progression of ideas in the essay? Do you, as the reader, feel that the writer is “leading” or “navigating” you through her/his ideas in the way that most efficiently furthers her/his purpose? Are there smooth transitions between ideas? Do they articulate the relationship between the ideas involved? Do they further the writer’s argument?

**Paragraph Level:**
- Does each paragraph relate to the thesis? Does each paragraph focus on one aspect of the thesis?
- Does each paragraph thoroughly develop one idea, point, or aspect of the overall argument?
- Does each paragraph have its own organized structure, consisting of a clear topic, evidence, analysis, and a portion that concludes the paragraph or transitions into the next paragraph?

5. RHETORIC (AWARENESS OF YOUR AUDIENCE AND THE IMPACT YOUR CHOICES HAVE ON YOUR READERS)

The rhetorical choices you make as an author help establish you both as an authoritative, confident writer and as a legitimate member of a disciplinary community. That is, you show that you are “part of the conversation” by using the appropriate language, evidence, analysis, etc. for your writing situation. Consider these questions:

- Is there an awareness of audience in this paper?
- Is the tone appropriate to the paper’s purpose, and is the tone consistent?
- Is the voice (the perceived personality of the writer) appropriate to the paper’s purpose and is it consistent? Does the paper give you a picture of an authoritative and reliable writer?
- Is the diction (word choice) appropriate to the paper? Are the words used clear and straightforward or are they a lot of “fluff” or “filler”?

6. CONVENTIONS (MECHANICS AND FORMAT)

Following appropriate conventions is important for formal work – consult a style guide for citation conventions, etc.

- Do mechanical errors (sentence structure, punctuation, spelling, and the like) interfere with your reading or understanding of the text? Do mechanical errors interfere with the authority or credibility of the writer? (Would you “buy” an idea from this person?)
- Are the citations formatted in MLA style? Does the writer attribute information that is not her or his own to the appropriate sources?
- Is the paper double-spaced, in regular 12-point font, with standard one-inch margins? Is there a title located at the top center of the first page that is an effective entry into the paper? Are there page numbers?

7. REVISION

All good writers revise their work, taking into consideration the responses of their peers and their own sense of how the argument can be improved/developed more completely. Consider the following questions:

- Does the writer respond to peer and instructor commentary?
- Does the writer truly revise rather than simply correct the work submitted? In other words, does the writer rethink the argument rather than simply fix mechanical problems?
- Has the writer adapted his or her original positions to new information, readings, or research?
- Does the writer demonstrate a range of revision strategies – not only attending to editing issues but also rereading materials, finding new sources, asking peers for additional readings, and generating new material and ideas?
(Kim Emmons’s) Essay Evaluation/Feedback Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>EVALUATION</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ARGUMENT</strong></td>
<td>(The thesis/claim sets out a roadmap for the reader; makes an arguable claim that addresses the topic)</td>
<td><strong>EVALUATION</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excellent – thoughtful and engaging.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strong – solid and complete.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A start – could use more work.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Missing or ineffective.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INFORMATION</strong></td>
<td>(Sufficient evidence, quotes, and details support the writer’s argument; this information is relevant, necessary, and accurate.)</td>
<td><strong>EVALUATION</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excellent – thoughtful and engaging.</td>
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<td>Missing or ineffective.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ANALYSIS/So WHAT?</strong></td>
<td>(The information is well-developed, fully explored, and effectively explained to justify the argument/theme of the paper.)</td>
<td><strong>EVALUATION</strong></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Excellent – thoughtful and engaging.</td>
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<td>Missing or ineffective.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ORGANIZATION</strong></td>
<td>(The argument proceeds in a logically ordered manner; each point connects to the following point using clear transitions)</td>
<td><strong>EVALUATION</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Excellent – thoughtful and engaging.</td>
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<td>EVALUATION</td>
<td>COMMENTS</td>
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<tr>
<td>RHETORIC</td>
<td>(The paper reflects an awareness of audience and the impact the writer's choices have on readers – for example, through appropriate word choice and consistent tone)</td>
<td>Excellent – thoughtful and engaging.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strong – solid and complete.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Missing or ineffective.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CONVENTIONS</td>
<td>(The essay uses appropriate style and contains few, if any, grammatical or mechanical errors; MLA format is used correctly)</td>
<td>Excellent – thoughtful and engaging.</td>
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<td>Strong – solid and complete.</td>
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<td>Missing or ineffective.</td>
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<tr>
<td>REVISION</td>
<td>(The paper responds to readers' commentary; its ideas have been re-thought and re-visualized – the revision goes beyond the simple correction of errors)</td>
<td>Excellent – thoughtful and engaging.</td>
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COMMENTS:
SAGES WRITING ASSESSMENT

Student: ___________________________ Date: __________
Instructors: ___________________________

On this form, instructors score and comment briefly on each student’s writing performance in five key areas. When students submit their final portfolios, we ask them to include copies of these forms from all of their seminars.

Evaluation Scale:
1 = does not meet standards
2 = making progress, but still in need of improvement
3 = proficient
4 = excellent
5 = superb

Score | Criteria
--- | ---

Substance
The writer
• explores an idea instead of merely reiterating a thesis
• displays a full, clear understanding of the subject
• makes distinctions as well as generalizations
• draws connections (between events, concepts, statements)
• fairly presents opposing points of view

Comments:

Structure
The writer
• presents topics in a logical order
• moves purposefully from one point to another (transitions)
• alternates between general statements and examples
• gives each topic the attention it deserves, in light of the essay’s purpose
• constructs unified paragraphs and sections

Comments:

Words and Sentences
The writer
• chooses words precisely, aware of their meanings and implications
• avoids undue repetition of single words or phrases (without relying on a thesaurus)
• limits use of passive verbs by writing sentences with human subjects (not “It can be claimed,” but rather “Some scientists claim”)
• keeps verb tenses consistent
• applies the rules of English syntax, constructing sentences that are logical and clear
• expresses ideas concisely and idiomatically, so that a reader never thinks, "But no one would say it this way"
• demonstrates mastery of grammar and punctuation

Comments (on "Words and Sentences"):

______

Editing/Revision
The writer
• proofreads work carefully, often catching mistakes and infelicities by reading aloud
• responds thoughtfully to criticisms and suggestions, thus acquiring editorial skills that will prove valuable in future assignments
• tinkers with phrasing, recognizing that the first few words of a sentence are often the ones most in need of revision
• revises essays substantially, even radically, when necessary

Comments:

______

Use of Sources
The writer
• cites an appropriate range of sources
• uses a single citation system consistently
• chooses relevant quotations that advance the argument
• fits quotations smoothly into his/her own sentences and paragraphs
• synthesizes and summarizes source material through paraphrase

Comments:
### The Critical Thinking Rubric

1) Identifies and summarizes the problem/question at issue (and/or the source's position).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging</th>
<th>Mastering</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does not identify and summarize the problem, is confused or identifies a different and inappropriate problem.</td>
<td>Identifies the main problem and subsidiary, embedded, or implicit aspects of the problem, and identifies them clearly, addressing their relationships to each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not identify or is confused by the issue, or represents the issue inaccurately.</td>
<td>Identifies not only the basics of the issue, but recognizes nuances of the issue.</td>
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</table>

2) Identifies and presents the STUDENT'S OWN hypothesis, perspective and position as it is important to the analysis of the issue.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging</th>
<th>Mastering</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addresses a single source or view of the argument and fails to clarify the established or presented position relative to one's own. Fails to establish other critical distinctions.</td>
<td>Identifies, appropriately, one's own position on the issue, drawing support from experience, and information not available from assigned sources.</td>
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</table>

3) Identifies and considers OTHER salient perspectives and positions that are important to the analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging</th>
<th>Mastering</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deals only with a single perspective and fails to discuss other possible perspectives, especially those salient to the issue.</td>
<td>Addresses perspectives noted previously, and additional diverse perspectives drawn from outside information.</td>
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</table>

4) Identifies and assesses the key assumptions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does not surface the assumptions and ethical issues that underlie the issue, or does so superficially.</td>
<td>Identifies and questions the validity of the assumptions and addresses the ethical dimensions that underlie the issue.</td>
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5) Identifies and assesses the quality of supporting data/evidence and provides additional data/evidence related to the issue.

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Merely repeats information provided, taking it as truth, or denies evidence without adequate justification. Confuses associations and correlations with cause and effect. Does not distinguish between fact, opinion, and value judgments.</td>
<td>Examines the evidence and source of evidence; questions its accuracy, precision, relevance, completeness. Observes cause and effect and addresses existing or potential consequences. Clearly distinguishes between fact, opinion, &amp; acknowledges value judgments.</td>
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6) Identifies and considers the influence of the context * on the issue.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Mastering</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discusses the problem only in egocentric or sociocentric terms.</td>
<td>Analyzes the issue with a clear sense of scope and context, including an assessment of the audience of the analysis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Does not present the problem as having connections to other contexts-cultural, political, etc.  

Considers other pertinent contexts.

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7) Identifies and assesses **conclusions, implications and consequences**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fails to identify conclusions, implications, and consequences of the issue or the key relationships between the other elements of the problem, such as context, implications, assumptions, or data and evidence.</td>
<td>Identifies and discusses conclusions, implications, and consequences considering context, assumptions, data, and evidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectively reflects upon the their own assertions.</td>
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**Contexts for Consideration**

1. **Cultural/Social**  
   Group, national, ethnic behavior/attitude

2. **Scientific**  
   Conceptual, basic science, scientific method

3. **Educational**  
   Schooling, formal training

4. **Economic**  
   Trade, business concerns costs

5. **Technological**  
   Applied science, engineering

6. **Ethical**  
   Values

7. **Political**  
   Organizational or governmental

8. **Personal Experience**  
   Personal observation, informal character