

# **Request for Approval of an Assessment Instrument: Locally Developed Writing Sample for English Course Placement**

**Submitted by Rancho Santiago Community College District  
November 2005**

## **Background**

In 1999, the Santa Ana College English Department faculty participated in a holistic scoring activity with Santa Ana Unified School District high schools. Faculty and counselors at both institutions wanted to improve articulation and placement in writing classes to promote our students' success in college coursework. A steering committee collaborated to develop a process for use in placing students in Rancho Santiago Community College District's (RSCCD) credit English curriculum. That committee is comprised of English instructors and counselors from both the high schools and the college:

- **Santa Ana College:** John Acuña, Dana Bassett, Gary Bennett, Kelly Brandon, Mark Higgins, Todd Huck, Shelly Jaffray, Kathy Patterson, Chuck Ramshaw, Dennis Gilmour.
- **Santa Ana Unified School District:** Pat Clark, Mark Bartoleo, Katie Burger, Sharon Schiessel, Dominic Crew.

Currently, the English sequence at Santa Ana College includes four courses:

1. N50 Introduction to Written Communication
2. N60 Basics of Effective Writing
3. 061 Introduction to Composition
4. 101 Freshman Composition

In the fall semesters of 2001 through 2003, the holistic writing sample was piloted to a sample of high school students in the Santa Ana Unified School District (n=1153) through a early registration program called "Early Decision." To date, those scores have been used by Santa Ana College counselors as a multiple measure to place SAUSD graduates into appropriate English and ESL classes at our college. English faculty and counselors agree that the use of the writing sample provides a valuable tool to help identify the proper level English course for our students and improve course success.

According to the "*Standards, Policies and Procedures for the Evaluation of Assessment Instruments Used in the California Community Colleges*" (March 2001 edition) college responsibility for the approval of a proposed writing sample includes the following areas which are included in this request:

1. Content Validity. Rubric development and alignment to course prerequisite skills.
2. Reliability. Demonstrated inter-rater reliability.
3. Test Bias. Examine prompts for cultural bias.
4. Cut-Score Validation. Describe the initial setting of the cut-scores.
5. Disproportionate Impact. Describe a plan to monitor disproportionate impact.
6. ADA Accommodations. Describe accommodations that are provided.

## **Content Validity**

Initially, the steering committee developed a prompt that could serve primarily as a placement tool for the college and, secondarily, an exit proficiency writing sample for the high schools. Of the many possible prompts proposed and considered by steering committee members, one was formatted to unanimous approval. Students are given a short excerpt from either fiction/non-fiction. They read the excerpt and write a reflective piece, using their own experiences to make a generalization. Each year since, the process has been repeated to develop additional prompts. Careful consideration is given to select prompts which are appropriate for a wide range of writing abilities and life experiences, as well as avoiding subjects that may be biased to age, gender, or culture.

Part of the scorers' training involves distributing course outlines of the four composition classes at SAC to the high school scorers so that they may familiarize themselves with the requirements and expectations of the courses. Then, approximately one week prior to scoring, packets are distributed to all scorers. These packets include sample papers (including a minimum of two samples representative of each course level) selected from the high schools by the steering committee. The level assigned to each paper by the steering committee is not disclosed to the scorers. Each scorer is asked to assign the appropriate course level to each of the papers. The rubric, therefore, is developed so that in its features it corresponds to different levels of performance that match the course levels (see Attachment 1)

The steering committee selects scorers who are faculty members at either the college or the high schools (in equal numbers). Over the years that we have conducted this pilot, a high level of consistency in scorers has been maintained; the same individuals, with very little exception, have participated. Sixteen scorers participated in the last scoring activity.

On the date that scoring takes place, the scorers meet for a norming session. Scorers identify the levels they have assigned to the sample papers in the packet. There is routinely a high level of agreement among the scorers. The scoring sessions conform to general professional practice. Each essay is assessed by a minimum of two readers; a third reader is used when the first two are not in agreement.

## **Inter-Rater Reliability (REVISED FOR 11/05 SUBMISSION OF EVIDENCE)**

Each writing sample was scored by two readers. To determine the extent to which different scorers reach agreement when evaluating student writing samples, a percent agreement index was utilized. Of the total 1153 writing samples scored, 1144 scores were within one point of each other, resulting in agreement of 99%. The remaining 9 essays (for which there was disagreement) were scored by a third reader.

## **Inter-Prompt Reliability (REVISED FOR 11/05 SUBMISSION OF EVIDENCE)**

For piloting purposes, a single prompt was used each semester for placement purposes. It is the intention of the Steering Committee to continue that process. During the phasing-in process, a sample of students will be administered two prompts in order to establish inter-prompt reliability so that multiple prompts may be used in the future when multiple testing sessions are scheduled within the semester.

### **Test Bias**

A Bias Panel is convened to conduct a logical review of the prompts selected by the Steering Committee. This panel is comprised of members who are representative of the impacted student and community populations that our colleges serve. Demographic characteristics of current panel members are shown below. As membership in the panel changes, the Steering Committee will ensure that representation by impacted groups remains at the appropriate levels (both in numbers and demographics).

<b>Demographics</b>	<b>Bias Panel Member</b>					
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Gender</b>						
Male			X	X	X	
Female	X	X				X
<b>Age</b>						
<30 years of age			X			
30-45 years of age		X			X	
46-59 years of age						X
60+ years of age	X			X		
<b>Ethnicity</b>						
African-American	X					
Asian		X	X			
Caucasian						X
Latino				X	X	

The panel is reminded that prompts are to be examined for fairness from the perspective of their own group membership (ethnic/cultural) for bias, offensiveness or insensitivity (ethnic, cultural, gender, or language). The panel reviews each proposed prompt and returns its findings to the Steering Committee.

### **Consequential-Related Predictive Validity**

At the third week of the Fall 2003 semester, 120 students who had been administered the writing sample were rated by faculty for appropriate placement. Instructors were asked to rate students who were placed into their classes using their writing sample as a multiple measure according to the following scale:

1. Could have been placed at a higher level.
2. Is well placed. Has a good chance of success.
3. Is properly placed. Can succeed with appropriate effort.
4. Can succeed in this course only with a great deal of effort.
5. Should have been placed in a lower level course.
6. Should have been placed into ESL.

Of those, 80% were assessed as being “very well placed” or “properly placed.” These analyses will be ongoing.

<b>Instructor Rating of Appropriateness of Placement</b>	<b>ENG N50</b>	<b>ENG N60</b>	<b>ENG 061</b>	<b>ENG 101</b>	<b>Total</b>
could have been placed higher	-	3%	-	4%	2%
very well placed	13%	16%	27%	26%	22%
properly placed	38%	66%	53%	70%	58%
can succeed only with great effort	38%	16%	18%	-	17%
should be at lower level	6%	-	2%	-	2%
should be in ESL	6%	-	-	-	1%
Total Count	16	32	49	23	120

### **Disproportionate Impact**

Latinos make up 95% of the high school students who were administered the writing sample; thus, no comparisons are available. If administration of the writing sample is expanded to the general student body at Santa Ana College, further study will be possible and is planned.

Comparable proportions of males and females placed into English N60, 061, and 101 (exceeding the 80% EEOC guidelines). However, a larger proportion of males placed into English N50 (9% of males vs. 16% of females). However, the sample at this level is small. Ongoing study will be conducted.

	<b>ENG N50</b>	<b>ENG N60</b>	<b>ENG 061</b>	<b>ENG 101</b>	<b>Total Count</b>
Female	8.6%	41.1%	37.0%	13.3%	594
Male	15.7%	41.6%	31.7%	11.0%	356
Total Count	107	392	333	118	950
Ratio	55%	99%	86%	83%	

Based upon the available data, we have concluded that disproportionate impact is not taking place with the holistic writing sample.

## **Alternative Assessment Procedures**

Alternative assessment procedures are provided at RSCCD for persons with impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills who cannot take the District placement tests under standard conditions as follows:

- **Accommodations for Hearing Impairment**
  - Signers are provided
  - Instruction are given in writing
- **Accommodations for Visual Impairment**
  - Questions are read to students
  - Visual enlargement equipment is provided
  - MDTP (math) test is given in Braille version
  - Screen reading program combined with a sound card
- **Accommodations for Other Physical Impairments**
  - Testing facilities are accessible
  - Accommodations arranged on an individual basis by Testing Coordinator as necessary
- **Accommodations for Learning Disability**
  - Adjustments in allocated time (up to twice the standardized time) can be made

The alternative assessment procedures have been scrutinized by faculty members with expertise and experience working with students and disabilities. Faculty members have determined that the alternative assessment procedures yield test scores with appropriate characteristics based upon the rationale that the accommodations made for placement testing are congruent with the test-taking facilitation and the provision of services for students with disabilities in the instructional setting mandated in Section 56026 of Title V.

Alternative assessment procedures are provided in the Disabled Students' Center and the RSCCD Testing Center.

Attachment 1

**Santa Ana College English Department  
Holistic Scoring Rubric**

**English 101**

- A. Addresses all parts of the prompt;
- B. The work contains an explicitly-stated thesis statement or a strongly implied main idea;
- C. The work will be divided into paragraphs and there is internal logic of separate, subordinate ideas;
- D. Ideas are logically connected, and most of the ideas are illustrated by specific examples. Specific examples are frequently followed by commentary or elaboration;
- E. Reflective prompt: 1) the work shows awareness of the basic elements of narration such as setting, characterization, and sense of completeness, and 2) reflection will go beyond the personal and may make generalizations and draw conclusions about the issue.
- F. Use of various sentence patterns (coordination and subordination);
- G. Grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors may be present such as an occasional run-on or fragment, but they do not substantially distract the reader.

**English 061**

- A. May make some attempt at addressing all parts of the prompt;
- B. May not contain a thesis statement, but it does contain an implied main idea;
- C. The work may not be divided into paragraphs, but there is an internal logic of separate, subordinate ideas;
- D. Examples are used to illustrate ideas, but they are generally underdeveloped;
- E. Reflective prompt: 1) the work shows some awareness of the basic elements of narration such as setting, characterization, and sense of completeness, and 2) the reflection may not go beyond the personal and may not make generalizations or draw conclusions about the issue.
- F. Some evidence of subordination, but most sentences may lack variety, and some of the sentences may not be logically connected or may not be relevant;
- G. Several distracting errors (comma splices/run-ons/fragments) present, poor spelling of commonly used words, or an excessive number of misspelled words.

## English N60

- A. Slight awareness of the prompt, may address only one part of the prompt;
- B. Little or no evidence of topic sentence;
- C. Little or no evidence of paragraph structure, and many sentences are not logically connected, and may have no concluding sentence;
- D. Ideas are either not illustrated at all, or examples are not developed or relevant;
- E. Reflective prompt: 1) the work shows little awareness of the basic elements of narration such as setting, characterization, and sense of completeness, and 2) the reflection does not go beyond the personal and does not make generalization or draw conclusions about the issue;
- F. Little evidence of subordination, reliance mainly on simple/compound sentences;
- G. Serious and distracting spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors.

## English N50

- A. Does not address the prompt, and shows no awareness of the assignment;
- B. No evidence of the main idea;
- C. No evidence of paragraph structure, serious internal confusion/non-sequiturs;
- D. Examples are not present or are irrelevant;
- E. Reflective prompt: 1) the work shows no awareness of the basic elements of narration such as setting, characterization, and sense of completeness, and 2) reflection does not go beyond the personal, and no attempt to make generalization or draw conclusions about the issue;
- F. Simple sentences;
- G. Little knowledge of punctuation, acute spelling errors, seriously garbled sentences