



## CHANGES TO FCAT WRITING 2012 AND BEYOND

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

#### **1. Why are changes being made to the scoring of FCAT Writing in 2012?**

Since the early 1990s, the FCAT Writing assessment has been administered in grades 4, 8, and 10 and has provided valuable information regarding how Florida's students have increased their proficiency in writing. As we move toward the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments in English Language Arts beginning in 2014-15, we must begin to increase the expectations of our current writing assessment to prepare for the increased rigor our students will encounter with the implementation of the PARCC writing component. Students will be "writing to a source" on the PARCC assessments. They will read complex text and then be prompted to present a clear and coherent analysis in writing, demonstrating a command of English language conventions. With an awareness of these approaching requirements for writing proficiency, it is the Department's responsibility to maximize the quality of our state writing assessment so that we can gain useful information about student achievement in this critically important content area.

#### **2. How will the scoring of the spring 2012 FCAT Writing assessment change?**

In addition to the elements of *focus*, *organization*, *support*, and *conventions* described in the rubrics, scoring decisions will include expanded expectations regarding the following:

- Scoring will include increased attention to the correct use of standard English conventions. The current rubrics, which will be used for scoring in 2012, include expectations regarding the basic conventions of standard English, yet the scoring of this element in the past has been applied with leniency. Responses will continue to be scored holistically as draft writing, but scoring will be more stringent. Responses earning scores of 4 or 5 must at least *generally* follow the conventions of sentence structure, mechanics, usage, punctuation, and spelling. To earn a score of 6, sentence structure will be varied, and few, if any, errors will occur in mechanics, usage, punctuation, and spelling.
- Scoring will include increased attention to the quality of details, requiring use of relevant, logical, and plausible support, rather than contrived statistical claims or unsubstantiated generalities. The quality of the support depends on word choice, specificity, depth, relevance, and thoroughness. Responses earning high scores must include specific and relevant supporting details that clarify the meaning, i.e., the point of the paragraph or the central theme of the response. Rote memorization or overuse of compositional techniques, such as rhetorical questions, implausible statistics, or pretentious language, is not the expectation for quality writing at any grade level.

### **3. Will the rubrics be changed for 2012 scoring?**

No, the rubrics will not be changed for 2012 FCAT Writing scoring. Florida's FCAT Writing rubrics are designed to be used in conjunction with exemplar papers that illustrate the meaning of the rubric as it applies to scoring decisions. The scorer training *will* change; scorers will be trained to judge the total piece of writing in terms of predefined criteria of focus, organization, support, and conventions with an **increased expectation of overall control of the quality of support and the correct use of conventions**. The 2012 FCAT Writing Anchor Sets will contain several student responses at each of the six score points on the rubric. These responses provide concrete examples for the scorers that illustrate the range of quality allowed within each score point. To ensure scoring consistency, scorers are trained to refer to this Anchor Set throughout the entire scoring window. This means that each scorer must compare the quality of the response being scored to the examples in the Anchor Set to determine the correct score. The 2012 FCAT Writing Anchor Sets will be released to the Department's website in August 2012.

### **4. Will misspelled words in a student's response negatively affect the score on the writing assessment more than in the past?**

Spelling is only one aspect of demonstrating knowledge of the standard English conventions described in the rubrics. Although spelling will continue to be considered in scoring, it is the preponderance of **commonly used** words being misspelled that could impact the score. If a student takes a compositional risk by including words that are not commonly used at his or her grade level, and such words are misspelled, the scoring will not be negatively affected. For example, if a 4th grade student generally spells commonly used words correctly and chooses to write about a rhinoceros but misspells this word throughout the response, the scoring will not be negatively affected. Students should spend some time proofreading the response to correct inadvertent misspellings and to edit for incorrect use of other conventions of standard English as needed.

### **5. What are the expectations for high scores on the writing assessment?**

The quality of the response, rather than the appearance or length of the response, continues to be part of Florida's scoring criteria. Although responses receiving high scores are not perfect, the writing demonstrates overall control of the following elements:

- efficient planning, drafting, revising, and editing;
- clear and consistent focus on the topic that establishes and maintains a main idea, theme, or unifying point in the response;
- effective organization for the writing purpose, including internal transitioning that helps the reader understand how paragraphs work together, reference one another, and build to a larger point;
- sufficient, specific, and relevant development of support, i.e., elaboration that includes concrete details and pertinent information that helps the reader construct mental images;
- clear, precise word choice that provides a natural, reasonable, and consistent tone to the response, rather than sudden bursts of elevated, contrived use of vocabulary or discordant use of creative writing strategies;
- various sentence structures and styles that add compositional facility and rhythm to the response, allow emphasis of critical points, and create interest for the reader;
- overall control of the basic conventions of standard English; and
- purposeful use of elements that promote the intended narrative, persuasive, or expository purpose for writing.

**6. Which organizational format is preferred for FCAT Writing?**

A critical part of effective writing is clear, logical organization. Florida's scoring criteria do not mandate a particular style, number of paragraphs, or organizational structure. Before deciding which organizational structure would be the most effective way to present the information, the student should consider the purpose for writing and who will read the response. Although some methods of organization do lend themselves to a particular purpose for writing, such as chronological order for narration and order of importance for persuasion, such patterns are not exclusive to those writing purposes. The choices of organizational pattern and the transitional devices employed should impose order on the information presented and allow the reader to understand the connections between and among ideas.

**7. Where can educators, students, and the public find a resource that illustrates the expectations regarding these changes?**

To illustrate the increased expectations for FCAT Writing scoring in 2012, examples of student responses will be available (late July) to districts via the external SharePoint site maintained by the Department's Test Development Center at <http://sharepoint.leon.k12.fl.us/tdc/external/default.aspx>. A committee of Florida educators will meet with the Department in early August to select student responses for the 2012 FCAT Writing Calibration Scoring Guides, which will be provided to districts in August 2011. These scoring guides will provide a basis for developing a common understanding of the scoring standards.

**8. Should educators use the 2011 FCAT Writing Anchor Sets on the Department's website (August 2011) for 2012 staff development purposes?**

Due to the changes regarding scoring decisions for 2012 and beyond, the 2011 FCAT Writing Anchor Sets should not be used for future staff-development purposes. Their purpose is to provide an understanding of student scores for the 2011 writing administration.

**9. Are the expected skills for Florida's writing assessment aligned to the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards (NGSSS) and to Florida's implementation plan of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English Language Arts?**

Yes, both the NGSSS and the Common Core State Standards describe what students should know and be able to do in writing. Beginning in school year 2011-12, educators should begin implementation of the CCSS with kindergarten students, followed by implementation with grade 1 in 2012-13 and grade 2 in 2013-14. In 2013-14, the instructional focus for grades 3–12 will include blending the appropriate Next Generation Sunshine State Standards with the CCSS to ensure student preparation for the last testing cycle of FCAT 2.0 as well as the PARCC assessments in English Language Arts. For more information about Florida's Common Core State Standards implementation timeline, visit <http://www.fldoe.org/BII/pdf/CCSS-ImplementationTimeline.pdf>.

**10. Will other changes be made to FCAT Writing in 2013 and 2014?**

Yes, additional changes will be made to the state writing assessment as follows:

- The writing assessment will be named FCAT 2.0 Writing.

- Specific scoring rubrics will be developed for each grade and writing purpose (mode). Grade 4 students will continue to write to either a narrative or an expository prompt, and students in grades 8 and 10 will continue to write to either a persuasive or an expository prompt; however, each rubric will be customized to evaluate the writer's skill in responding to the writing task, including the purpose and audience. For example, grade 10 persuasive responses will be scored using a unique rubric with scoring criteria that require the use of elements of persuasion.
- **2013** FCAT 2.0 Writing Calibration Scoring Guides (Anchor Sets) will be developed for each grade and writing purpose. These calibration guides will provide examples of student responses that illustrate the quality of writing within each score point on the rubric; each response will be annotated to clarify its compositional strengths and weaknesses.

By summer 2012, FCAT 2.0 Writing scoring rubrics and annotated scoring guides will also be posted to the Florida Department of Education website to illustrate increased expectations for 2013 and beyond.

Additional information regarding these changes and the future of the statewide writing assessment is provided in the memorandum posted at <http://www.fldoe.org/asp/k12memo/pdf/2011-07-05.pdf>.

#### **11. Who should I contact for additional information about FCAT Writing?**

If you have questions about these changes, please contact Renn Edenfield, FCAT/FCAT 2.0 English Language Arts Coordinator, at (850) 922-2584, extension 230, or [edenfieldr@leonschools.net](mailto:edenfieldr@leonschools.net).