

# Notes (Guidelines) for the Composition Reader Showcase

If you are reading this, you have agreed to score in a KAAC-sponsored Composition event. As the nominated reader from your school, you must understand that you are scoring for a rank in an academic competition, not evaluating classroom writing for a grade. Because most coaches submit their most talented and creative writers for the Composition event, it is likely that you will be scoring work from distinguished or otherwise excellent writers.

With an eye toward more consistent evaluation, revisions are often made to the scoresheet and scoring process. The scoresheet now allows up to 125 points to be awarded. This will help you avoid ties in total points. No two booklets may receive the same number of total points.

You may NOT remove booklets from the KAAC-approved host site to be scored.

In the Showcase, competitors will write an argumentative essay. Composition prompts will be closely aligned with standards set by the Kentucky Department of Education. Prompts no longer direct competitors to address a particular person, group or organization. Instead, after reading the prompt, the student may choose the focus of their writing and, in doing so, identify a specific audience appropriate for that focus. Allowing competitors to make these decisions promotes student ownership of the writing, and encourages them to develop unique perspectives as they respond to the prompt. As a result, you may award more points to those competitors who make a strong connection to their unique audience. An appropriate audience can be one specific person, a group, an organization, or the general population.

Because KAAC advocates honest scholarship, it is important that you reward competitors who develop their ideas in a scholarly manner without fabricating research. On occasion, competitors may provide statistics that help support the argument, or viewpoint, taken in the writing. These statistics should be factual from an article, book, TV news program, or similar reference. With that said, sometimes the statistics are so extreme, or skewed, that it breaks the flow of the reader's concentration because the reader questions the validity of the information given in the booklet. Competitors may allude to a statistic without using a number, and this may be the best option. Words such as *most*, *much*, *little*, *few*, *numerous*, *some*, and many other terms may be used. If it is obvious that a student has fabricated research, the student should receive a lower score for idea development. The scoresheet has an area for feedback to indicate whether or not the research appears to be authentic.

The booklets will be typed in an electronic format by the students. This alleviates any issues with handwriting. The format for the electronic booklet will offer suggestions for spelling.

The first section of the scoresheet identifies the competitor's work. **Please fill in the top of the scoresheet on the front and back of the page before you begin scoring.** All scoresheets are awarded the same number of points for each level of competition. Competitors will receive a score of 0 - 14 depending on how successfully they demonstrate mastery in maintaining a focused Purpose throughout, and in communicating with the unique Audience. In sustaining an appropriate Voice/Tone and Idea Development, the points will be 1-14. By providing a range of points to be awarded in the four unique markers in Content/Part 1, you can make subtle distinctions between booklets. Because participants are likely to be identified as distinguished writers, it is important to separate the highest level of writing by including a range of scores within the Distinguished-level subheadings and subcategories. This is why no two booklets may receive the same number of total points.

The next section, Structure/Part 2, assesses a competitor's ability to organize thoughts and words. Organization concerns their ability to present information in a logical manner. It includes how well a booklet establishes a Purpose, provides appropriate context when needed, and concludes the writing. The next element, Transitions, assesses the effective use of various transitional elements. Successful writers rely on numerous transitional elements (e.g., frequent paragraphing where appropriate, white space, subheadings, text features, transitional "glue" words or phrases). The final element in this domain is Sentence Structure or syntax. Sentence Structure scores should reveal how well competitors arrange words within a sentence to communicate their ideas. Writers who employ more sentence variety and demonstrate mastery with sentence construction will receive a higher score. After scoring each of these elements, you will assign a score between 1 and 13 for the Structure Component.

Conventions/Part 3 of the scoresheet assesses how well competitors have proofread their own work. In a competitive setting with time constraints, competitors who demonstrate control over surface features will receive higher scores than those who do not. The first trait identified within this Domain, Grammar, is concerned with how well competitors demonstrate control over grammatical issues such as subject-verb agreement, pronoun-antecedent agreement, preposition usage, misplaced modifiers, double negatives, and so on. The next trait, Word Choice, assesses how acceptable and accurate the writer's word choices are. Competitors demonstrating advanced vocabulary skills, or who use more precise language, will receive a higher score. The final trait of this domain is Correctness. Competitors who demonstrate control over punctuation, spelling, and capitalization will receive a higher score in this section. After assigning a numerical value to each of these elements, you will assign the score between 1 and 10 for Conventions.

As a Reader, it is your responsibility to not only assign scores but, more importantly, to provide the competitors with feedback justifying those scores. Detailed feedback also provides you with the opportunity to reflect on the scores you are assigning. Remember, competitors will use the feedback you provide to improve their writing.

## Caution—Alert Papers

As you read booklets, you may encounter a work that causes a concern about the mental or physical well-being of the author. If this occurs, contact the Contest Manager immediately. The host school's administrators then notify that student's administrators, so they may follow their own guidelines and protocols. As a Reader, at that point, continue to score the booklet against the rubric and the writing task given.

## Avoiding Reader Bias

Reader bias has no place in scoring. Some of the prompts may be controversial. You, as the reader, may have a very strong opinion regarding the subject of the composition. **DO NOT ALLOW THAT TO DICTATE THE SCORES YOU ASSIGN TO A BOOKLET.** Your task is not to evaluate whether the viewpoint of each writer is right or wrong, but whether the direction chosen by the writer is supported throughout their work. The goal of scoring Composition is to ensure that each piece is scored consistently, using the rubric, so the top competitors receive the appropriate recognition. Before you score any booklets, review the Composition Scoresheet for the rubric requirements and the Reader bias reminders. As you read each piece, remember that although competitors have the same prompts, their perspectives may differ.

*Reader bias information was taken from the Kentucky Writing Handbook Part II: Scoring.  
Adapted for use in the KAAC Composition Guidelines with modifications*

### **Do not let the following biases affect your scoring:**

- **Length**—The reader should only consider if the composition is complete. The type for the composition is set at 12 point and has a limit of 2 pages. The rubric does not dictate the length of a completed composition.
- **Presence and size of paragraphs**—Although paragraphs are a part of organization, competitors may select nontraditional ways to indicate paragraph changes. Do not penalize a student who uses these creative formatting techniques, if the techniques are appropriate to the task and style. Do not judge the value of the writing based on the length of the paragraphs. Creative competitors will write a paragraph length to complete the point being made.

### **Examples of other biases to avoid:**

- **Unfair/not objective personal reactions to the persona or tone of the writing**
- **Unfair/not objective reactions to the content of the writing** – For example, the writer's values are not the same as the scorer's, or the writer's choice of overall theme is unappealing to the reader. **Many of KAAC's topics are controversial.** Evaluators must strive to evaluate a student's writing on the merit of the student's development of his or her opinion.
- **Idiosyncratic preferences or prejudices in style or usage**
- **Deeply ingrained assessment standards from previous writing instruction experience** - Three misspelled words means a piece will receive a low score in "Conventions" or "a paper that is error-free receives a really high score," or expecting the piece to be written only in the three-point-five paragraph format.)

## **Methodology**

Numerous successful scorers of Composition have shared how they approach this task. While there is no "one" methodology, here is one example of how to proceed. First, read through the entire sample, sorting the papers as you read them into three stacks. Stack one would include booklets demonstrating minimal skills; stack two would include booklets that demonstrate average to moderate skills, while stack three would include booklets that exemplify more advanced skills. After sorting these papers into three stacks, begin assigning scores on the scoresheet. The ones in the stack demonstrating advanced skills should receive the highest scores.

On behalf of the students who take part in our KAAC composition events, THANK YOU for being one of the nominated officials from your school.

## **Characteristics of the Genre — Argumentative**

- The writer creates an introduction that contains a clearly defined claim that establishes the tone and direction for the rest of the essay
- The writer's introduction will immediately engage the reader.
- The writer establishes “common ground” with the reader by referring to relevant/pertinent information from the writing prompt. Advanced writers may be more subtle in incorporating relevant information from the prompt.
- The writer's development of ideas is coherent and logical.
- The writer uses effective organizational strategies to present his/her ideas (e.g., cause/effect; comparison/contrast; order of importance; rhetorical devices such as anaphora, epistrophe, epizeuxis).
- The writer effectively uses logical, ethical, and emotional appeals to support his/her position.
- The writer uses various strategies to develop his/her appeals: opinions, analogies, cause and effect, classification, comparison and contrast, definitions, narratives, facts, examples, rules of behavior, prior knowledge.
- The writer considers opposing viewpoints and addresses counterclaims. High-quality argumentative writing presents objections to the writer’s claim and then responds to them logically. Writers will rebut and explain why counterclaims are invalid if appropriate.
- The writer develops claim(s) and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly, supplying the most relevant evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience’s knowledge level, concerns, values and possible biases
- The writer uses precise language, topic-specific vocabulary, techniques such as metaphor, simile and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic
- The writer includes a conclusion that refocuses on the purpose by asking for a call to action, providing a solution to the problem, or a means with which the reader could implement the solution. The writer may provide reasons why the writer’s position is the most valid, tell what would happen if the position is not accepted, tell why the issue is important, or project an outcome.