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A Flood and Drought Tale

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Victor, a young man who lived in one of the flooded towns, was very unhappy about the continuing bad weather. Not only had he spent the last two days bailing water from his family's basement, but he was due to miss out on a camping trip, originally planned for the upcoming weekend, that he and his friends had been excitedly anticipating.

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Imagine that you will participate in a "tall-tale writing contest" at your school. Write your own tall tale. You can write about yourself, someone you know, or someone you imagine. Be sure to give your main character whatever superhuman abilities are necessary to save the day.

Scoring Guide

Score & Description

Excellent

- Tells a clear story that is consistently well-developed and detailed; details enhance story being told.
- Well organized; integrates narrative events into a smooth telling; effective transitions move the story forward.
- Consistently exhibits variety in sentence structure and precision in word choice.
- Errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation are few and do not interfere with understanding.

Skillful

- Tells a clear story that is well-developed and supported with pertinent details in much of the response.
- Well organized with story elements that are connected across most of the response; may have occasional lapses in transitions.
- Exhibits some variety in sentence structure and uses good word choice; occasionally, words may be used inaccurately.

- Errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation do not interfere with understanding.

Sufficient

- Tells a clear story that is developed with some pertinent details.
- Generally organized, but transitions among parts of the story may be lacking.
- Sentence structure may be simple and unvaried; word choice is mostly accurate.
- Errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation do not interfere with understanding.

Uneven

May be characterized by one or more of the following:

- Tells a story that may be clear and developed in parts; other parts are unfocused, repetitive, or minimally developed OR is no more than a well-written beginning.
- Organized in parts of the response; other parts are disjointed and/or lack transitions.
- Exhibits uneven control over sentence boundaries and sentence structure; may exhibit some inaccurate word choices.
- Errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation sometimes interfere with understanding.

Insufficient

May be characterized by one or more of the following:

- Attempts to tell a story, but is very undeveloped, list-like, or fragmentary.
- Disorganized or unfocused in much of the response OR the response is too brief to detect organization.
- Minimal control over sentence boundaries and sentence structure; word choice may often be inaccurate.
- Errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation interfere with understanding in much of the response.

Unsatisfactory

May be characterized by one or more of the following:

- Responds to prompt but provides little or no coherent content OR merely paraphrases the prompt.
- Little or no apparent organization.
- Minimal or no control over sentence boundaries and sentence structure; word choice may be inaccurate in much or all of the response.
- Errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation severely impede understanding across the response.

Excellent - Student Response

1. A tall tale is a type of story that uses exaggeration to solve a real-life problem. As the story progresses, the main character demonstrates superhuman abilities to overcome ordinary obstacles. The story shown below is an example of a tall tale.

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Victor put a small rope in his back pocket and walked outside. As he stood with the rain pelting down on him, he grew until he stood a mile high. Standing up above the rain clouds, he took the rope from his back pocket. The rope was now hundreds of yards long and Victor used it to lasso the rain clouds. Holding the clouds in the rope, he walked across the country taking fifty-mile steps. He untied the clouds over the drought-stricken land and a heavy rain began to fall there. Then he walked back to his house in his town where the sun was now shining, shrunk back down to his regular size, and went inside to pack for the camping trip.

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Ms. Smith was not your typical teacher. She was mean and cold-hearted to her students, giving them one day to complete 10-page assignments. She did not care if her students did well in her class or not, for she was too occupied with finding more work to give to her students.

All of Ms. Smith's students were hopelessly discouraged when, on Tuesday, she assigned them a 15-page essay to complete and turn in the next day. All but Maury. Fortunately for Maury, he was an extremely clever kid who thought he could do anything. He had an idea to how he could pull off his essay in the little time he was given.

That evening, Maury slaved away at his essay with renewed energy, on top of his brilliant plan working. When the sun set, Maury was not even half finished his paper. He worked all through the night, writing, thinking, researching, more writing, and when the kitchen clock read "quarter past six", he knew his plan needed to start.

So, with fingers crossed, Maury took his beloved slingshot outside to the driveway, where he then gathered a few rocks. Aiming carefully at the rising sun, he took a shot. "Ping!" Maury cried out with glee as he watched the sun, which he just hit with great precision, fall back below the horizon. Hurrying back inside to finish his essay, Maury was satisfied with his success to gain a few more precious hours to work, giving the title "all-nighter" a new meaning.

Scorer Comments:

"Excellent" responses consistently used well-chosen details and integrated narrative elements into a smooth telling. This sample response tells a compact, smooth story with very effective details, consistent variety in sentence structure, and good word choices that develop Maury's character: ("Ping!" Maury cried out with glee...").

Skillful - Student Response

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Jacob the Strongman

In the town of Creteless, the citizens would always experience problems with the snow. Usually for months, it would snow and snow on the town, causing massive snowstorms and on top of that, when the snow began to thaw, flooding would start pulling businesses and homes. The mayor of the town knew about the problem and called for a town meeting. The citizens of the town talked and debated and decided that they would need the help of Jacob the strongman to solve the problem.

Jacob was a very strongman. He could lift anything from big trucks to gigantic horses. Whatever required great strength, Jacob was the man for the job. However this time it was a difficult problem. The town wanted Jacob to lift up the town and bring it to a higher elevation to prevent flooding and to minimize the amount of snow being collected. He thought to himself "Could I really do it?" He debated with this question for many days and decided he will do what is best for the town.

So on one uncommon sunny day, the town waited anxiously for Jacob. As he came out of his house, Jacob had a determined look on his face and he talked to no one. Then he went to the edge of town and began

pulling the ground. He was pulling and pulling and it seemed as if Jacob

Scorer Comments:

"Skillful" responses told well-developed and well-organized stories, but with occasional lapses in continuity. These responses also exhibit some sentence variety and good word choices. The story shown below exhibits a mix of well-executed sentences and more awkward sentences with simple word choices. The response's well-chosen details about Jacob and the snow crisis balance these weaknesses.

Sufficient - Student Response

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Who is stealing the sunshine?

One day on a bright sunny morning a little boy was playing in the forest down by the stream. He liked to play there because if he got thirsty then he could just get a drink from the stream.

As the morning went on a darkness fell over the land. The boy got so scared. You, see, he had never been in the forest when it was dark.

He felt his way out because he could not see anything. When he finally got home, his mom was very glad to see him.

For the next couple days it stayed as dark as night. The little boy was getting sick of not being able to play in the forest.

He decided that the sun was stolen and it was up to him to find it.

First he went back to his favorite stream to think it over.

When he got there it glowed. All of the sudden he was a little tad pale.

He went around in the stream to the very bright light to see what it was.

When he noticed that it was the sun he found a way

Scorer Comments:

"Sufficient" responses told clear stories developed with some pertinent details. Parts of the stories were generally related, but transitions were often lacking. In the "Sufficient" response below, the student offers a simple, clear story. The story lacks detail, sentence variety, and has a number of minor errors.

Uneven - Student Response

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It was a great night with stars and the moon. The night was calm, no noise, and peaceful. Sally and one other friend were out observing the sky. Both of them were amazed of how beautiful the night was. When all of a sudden something strange started to occur. Sally looked closely and saw that two of the stars were fighting. The stars were glowing really fast and bumping into each other. Sally and her friend were scared. After a few minutes, the moon appeared to get closer. After the moon got closer the problem seemed to stop.

Scorer Comments:

"Uneven" responses told stories that were clear in parts, while other parts were unfocused or minimally developed. Clarity in some responses was affected by disjointed organization, uneven control over sentence boundaries or structure, or errors in grammar. The sample included here does attempt to tell a story, but has large gaps in development that make the response unclear.

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A guy named Mikey B. came on the Mounties football team that was 0-5 this season and 1-20 in the last two seasons combined. He was the evening back he told the coach to just give him the ball and he will get a touch down. Sure enough, coach put him in when the team was on the 20 yard line going in to score. Mike took the hand off for a touch down. Then on Mike averaged 20 yds a carry on took the mounties on a 14-0 winning and took the Superbowl. Were they won big Mikey was the MVP.

Scorer Comments:

"Insufficient" responses attempted to tell stories but were very underdeveloped, disorganized, or had severe errors in sentence control or grammar. The response shown here, although it attempts to develop a complete narrative, exhibits minimal control over sentence boundaries and structure, as well as inaccurate word choices.

Unsatisfactory - Student Response

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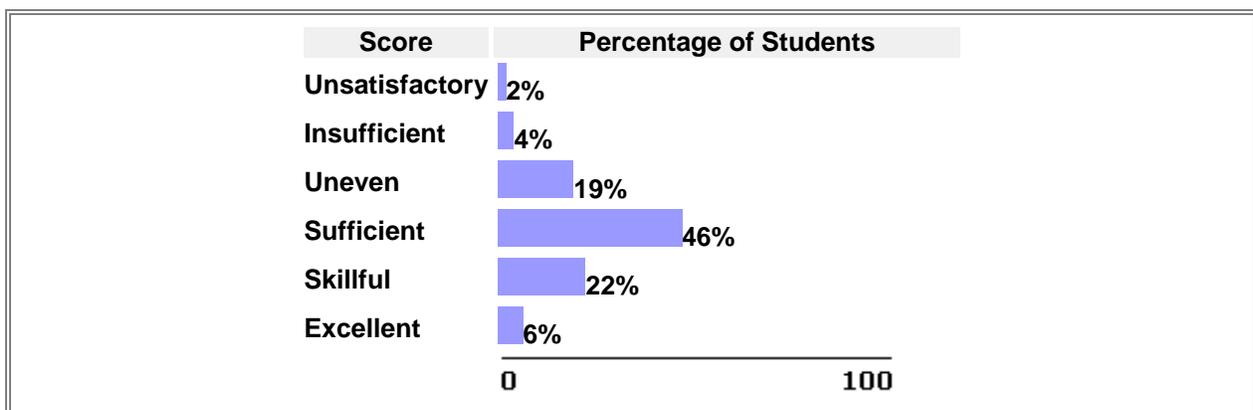
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It was at midnight during the winter in a little cabin in Texas. A young woman was giving birth to a healthy baby boy. In a few weeks

Scorer Comments:

"Unsatisfactory" responses responded to the prompt but provided little coherent content. The response below provides no more than an opening for a story.

2002 National Performance Results



Note:

- These results are for public and nonpublic school students.
- Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Narrative Writing

Narrative writing involves the production of stories or personal essays. Practice with these forms helps writers to develop an ear for language. Also, informative and persuasive writing can benefit from many of the strategies used in narrative writing. For example, there must be an effective ordering of events when relating an incident as part of a report.

Sometimes narrative writing contributes to an awareness of the world as the writer creates, manipulates, and interprets reality. Such writing — whether fact or fiction, personal essay, or creative narrative — requires close observation of people, objects, and places. Further, this type of writing fosters creativity, imagination, and speculation by allowing the writer to express thoughts and then stand back, as a more detached observer might, and grasp more fully what is being felt and why. Thus, narrative writing offers a special opportunity to analyze and understand emotions and actions.