

**'TIS THE GOOD
READER THAT MAKES
THE GOOD BOOK.
—Ralph Waldo Emerson**

Introduction

THE STUDENT'S GUIDE

Although the Student's Guide is written to the student, the parent or teacher should be familiar with it. Please take some time to at least skim the contents.

The Introduction provides some information on why reading and writing are important, basic writing guidelines, and ideas for expanding language arts studies (for example, a family reading/writing night). Encourage your students to refer to the Introduction throughout the year, especially the writing suggestions and instructions.

Each of the eight lessons is divided into different sections:

- Introduction with a short biography of the author, a description of the reading selection, and some things for the student to think about while reading the selection
- Comprehension Questions (these can be used as tests if you wish, but you need not do so)
- Literary Lesson
- Writing Exercises

Reading selections which are poems, essays, or short stories are included in the Student's Guide. Scattered throughout are additional informative articles called "Perspectives" and "Connections." These provide additional historical background, literary information, and writing instruction.

THE TEACHER'S GUIDE

This Teacher's Guide contains the answers to the comprehension questions. To make your job easier, we've also included the Schedules, Writing Exercises, and Discussion Questions and Project Suggestions from the Student's Guide. If you are not enrolled with Hewitt to grade students' papers, we hope you will find the grading tips and templates useful.

Grading Tips

Grading English papers can seem confusing and overwhelming. Especially if you feel insecure about your own writing, you may not feel qualified to judge someone else's, even your own child's. In truth, grading papers is more challenging than grading a math test. There are many aspects to judge (content, flow, organization, style, grammar, etc.), and you have no answer key by your side.

If you asked a hundred English teachers to show you how to grade an English paper, you'd probably get a hundred different answers. Nevertheless, most of those answers would have some commonalities. Here is my take on these common factors. (I first address nonfiction papers; afterwards I provide some special considerations for fiction and poetry.)

NONFICTION

The Assignment

First, know what assignment your student is fulfilling. Be sure all aspects of the assignment have been correctly addressed in the paper (unless you have a previous agreement that the student need not do this). For example, if an assignment asks the student to write a paper on one of Benjamin Franklin's pursuits, a paper that discusses his roles as inventor, statesman, and writer is unacceptable.

Content and Focus

Related to the above paragraph is the dual concern of content and focus. The paper should address the topic the assignment details, no more or less. When you've finished the paper, you should either be able to choose one sentence from the paper that summarizes the paper's topic, or you should be able to summarize it in one sentence of your own words. Look for sentences or even whole paragraphs that stray from the point. Furthermore, each paragraph should have its own focus.

Organization and Flow

Each sentence of the paper should flow naturally to the next, and each paragraph should also flow to the next one. If you do not see how one leads to the next, if you feel jarred back and forth as if you're riding a bucking bronco, there is a problem. An exception to this can be in a longer paper where there are subheadings; these can reasonably interrupt flow. But even in the case of subheadings, there should always be a logical organization to a paper. This can take various forms—most general to most specific, most interesting to least interesting, most important to least important, chronological, etc.—or the reverse of any of these. There are too many possibilities to list here, but the point is that you can identify an order and it makes sense.

One special case of organization is the comparison/contrast paper. Here there are two standard methods. The first is to provide all information about the first subject (using however many paragraphs are necessary), then to move on to the second subject and give it full due (and roughly as much coverage as the first subject). The second possibility is to focus each paragraph on a particular topic of comparison between the two subjects, discussing the subjects fully then moving on to the next thing.

For example, in a paper comparing dogs and cats as pets, I could spend two paragraphs discussing various aspects of dogs then two paragraphs discussing those same aspects in cats. Alternatively, I could spend a paragraph discussing how expensive dogs and cats are to acquire and maintain, then write a paragraph on common problems with dogs and cats, then a paragraph on their advantages as pets, etc.

Introduction and Conclusion

All papers should begin with an introduction. This introduction needs to introduce the paper's topic and tone. It also should make you want to read the paper. All papers should end with a conclusion. The conclusion should not just restate what the paper just said (unless the paper is quite long—at least 7 pages); instead, it should wrap things up with a bang. Ideally the conclusion should make one final, interesting point, while sticking to the topic.

Grammar and Mechanics

Hopefully, this is what you will feel most comfortable grading. If you are unclear about the rules for grammar, punctuation, capitalization, etc., there is no easy fix. Don't feel you need to be able to diagram a sentence or know what a gerund is, though. If you are familiar with correct sentence structure, know (at least most of) the rules for commas, and can tell your homophones apart, you'll probably do well. If you're feeling rusty, there are many websites (or many books in your local library) that can help you brush up on these topics.

Style

This is one of the trickiest parts of grading. Sometimes you will encounter sentences that are, strictly speaking, grammatically correct but that are awkward or unwieldy. The most common culprit here is verbiage. When you find yourself stumbling over a sentence, see if there is a way to rewrite the same thought with fewer words. Sometimes you'll see words that can simply be struck to leave a cleaner result. Other times you'll have to reword the whole sentence.

Citation of Sources

This is only an issue with a paper involving research. (Note that sometimes papers that aren't strictly "research papers" also involve research, and these considerations apply to them as well.) Determine ahead of time what sort of citations you expect from your student

(parenthetical citations, footnotes, endnotes), and review the requirements together. When grading the paper, be sure all the citations that need to be there are, and that they are properly formatted. Also be sure the bibliography is correctly formatted.

FICTION

Some fiction assignments are short stories. Others are more modest assignments, such as rewriting a scene from the reading from a different viewpoint. Not all the considerations below (or in the checklist) will apply to every paper.

The Assignment

As with nonfiction, the student needs to be following the assignment correctly. For example, if the assignment is to write a short story that argues a particular position, the student should not write a nonfiction essay arguing something.

Content and Focus

While fiction pieces won't have quite the same well-defined topic statement as a nonfiction paper will (or at least should) have, they should still have a point. For example, a short story will have a central plot line and all parts of the story should relate to that plot. An assignment that asks a student to write a diary entry from a character's point of view will also focus on something (for example, conflict). The paper needs to stick to its focus and not wander.

Organization and Flow

Again, this is not quite the same as with a nonfiction paper, yet it still applies. Events need to follow each other logically. There still needs to be a smooth flow from one sentence to another.

Grammar and Mechanics

The considerations here are nearly identical to those for nonfiction papers. Dialogue is more likely to occur in fiction than nonfiction, so be sure the formatting and punctuation for any dialogue is accurate. Also, sometimes students will use "incorrect" grammar in dialogue to reflect a character's speech. This would not need correcting, as long as you can tell that's the point of the "mistake."

Style

Everything in the nonfiction section applies here as well.

POETRY

The Assignment

Be sure all aspects of the assignment have been correctly addressed in the paper (unless you have a previous agreement that the student need not do this). For example, if an assignment requires a poem that includes examples of alliteration, assonance, metaphor and simile, be sure all these aspects are present.

Content

Just as with prose, a poem should be about something, and the poem should consistently address whatever its topic is. Sometimes students will veer from the poem's topic in order to satisfy the demands of rhyme. Gently correct this and encourage the student to rewrite that section, satisfying both rhyme pattern and content.

Grammar and Mechanics

Here we encounter the phrase “poetic license”—poems can be much freer with grammar and mechanics. However, that freedom should always be with a reason. Unconventional grammar, capitalization, and punctuation alone cannot make a poem.

Style

In some ways the considerations for style are the same as for prose. There should be no excess words, no flabby writing. But the syntax of poetry is quite different from that of prose, so phrases that would be awkward in prose can be fine, even admirable, in poetry. This is not always the case though. Trust your ear and discuss with your student any sections that seem off.

Checklists

CHECKLIST FOR NONFICTION PAPERS

Content

- ☐ Does the paper correctly address all aspects of the assignment and nothing more?
- ☐ Can you summarize the paper's theme in a single sentence?
- ☐ Is the content accurate?

Organization

- ☐ Is there a discernible and logical method of organization?
- ☐ Does each sentence flow to the next?
- ☐ Does each paragraph flow to the next (are there transition sentences)?
- ☐ If this is a comparison/contrast paper, is each subject given roughly equal coverage?

Introduction

- ☐ Does the introduction clearly state the topic (without saying something blatant like, "I am going to write about _____")?
- ☐ Does the introduction make the tone of the paper clear?
- ☐ Does the introduction make you want to read the rest of the paper?

Conclusion

- ☐ Does the conclusion wrap everything up? Do you feel like the paper has ended or has it simply stopped?
- ☐ Does the conclusion simply repeat what you just read two minutes ago? (This is a bad thing.)
- ☐ Does the conclusion stick to the topic?
- ☐ Does the conclusion end with a bang? That is, does it leave a good taste in your mouth and make you want to read another paper by this author?

Grammar and Mechanics

- ☐ Are all capitalizations correct?
- ☐ Are commas where they need to be (and not where they have no place)?
- ☐ Are all apostrophes present and accounted for?
- ☐ Are there any homophone problems?
- ☐ Are there sentence fragments, run-on sentences, or comma splices?
- ☐ Are there any rambling sentences?
- ☐ Is everything spelled properly?
- ☐ Are all words used correctly (regarding definition and connotation)?

Style

- ☐ Are there any extra words you can cross out?
- ☐ Can any of the sentences be rewritten in a tighter fashion without sacrificing meaning or tone?
- ☐ Is there a variety of short, medium-length, and long sentences?
- ☐ Are there any single-sentence paragraphs? (There should not be. For now, each paragraph should be at least three sentences.)

Citations

- ☐ Are facts gleaned through research (beyond basic encyclopedia data) cited?
- ☐ Are other people's opinions and analyses cited?
- ☐ Is every book, article, website, etc., listed in the bibliography?

Format

- ☐ If required, is there a title page?
- ☐ Does the student's name appear on either the title page or header of the paper?
- ☐ Is all other header information present?
- ☐ Does each page have a page number (other than any title page)?
- ☐ Is the paper double-spaced?
- ☐ Are citations properly formatted?
- ☐ Is the bibliography properly formatted?
- ☐ Are any quotes in the paper properly formatted?

CHECKLIST FOR FICTION PAPERS

Content

- ☐ Does the paper correctly address all aspects of the assignment and nothing more?
- ☐ Does the story hang together? That is, is it believable within its own world? (For example, a science fiction story might be "impossible" in our world, but everything that happens in it should be logical in the story's world.)
- ☐ Is the story enjoyable to read?
- ☐ If the fiction piece is meant to illuminate a character or scene from the reading (for example, writing a diary entry from a character's point of view), does it fit well with the original literature?

Organization

- ☐ Is there a reasonable flow to the piece? Do the events follow in a logical fashion?
- ☐ Does each sentence flow to the next?
- ☐ Does each paragraph flow to the next?

Grammar and Mechanics

- ☐ Are all capitalizations correct?
- ☐ Are commas where they need to be (and not where they have no place)?
- ☐ Are all apostrophes present and accounted for?
- ☐ Are there any homophone problems?
- ☐ Are there sentence fragments, run-on sentences, or comma splices?
- ☐ Are there any rambling sentences?
- ☐ Is everything spelled properly?
- ☐ Are all words used correctly (regarding definition and connotation)?
- ☐ Is all dialogue formatted and punctuated properly?

Style

- ☐ Are there any extra words you can cross out?
- ☐ Can any of the sentences be rewritten in a tighter fashion without sacrificing meaning or tone?
- ☐ Is there a variety of short, medium-length, and long sentences?
- ☐ Is there a mixture of description, narration, and dialogue?

Format

- ☐ If required, is there a title page?
- ☐ Does the student's name appear on either the title page or header of the paper?
- ☐ Is all other header information present?
- ☐ Does each page have a page number (other than any title page)?
- ☐ Is the paper double-spaced?

Characters

- ☐ Are the characters believable and well-rounded?
- ☐ If the characters are taken from the reading, do they retain their important characteristics from the original book?

Conflict

- ☐ Is there at least one identifiable conflict?
- ☐ Does the conflict reach a climax?
- ☐ Is the conflict resolved?

CHECKLIST FOR POEMS

Content

- ☐ Does the poem correctly address all aspects of the assignment?
- ☐ Can you identify what the poem is about?

Grammar and Mechanics

- ☐ Is all the grammar and punctuation correct, just as it would be for a prose piece?
- ☐ If it isn't, can you tell why? That is, does it add something to the poem?
- ☐ Are all words used correctly (regarding definition and connotation)?

Style

- ☐ Are there any extra words you can cross out?
- ☐ Are all the words chosen as vivid and dynamic as possible?
- ☐ If the assignment requires the student to write a particular type of poem (e.g., sonnet, haiku, etc.) does the poem follow the rules of the form?

FINAL WORDS

In grading any paper, it's important not to discourage your fledging author. You know your child best, and some children are more easily hurt by criticism than others. Take your child's personality in this regard into account. But here are some general guidelines about helpful constructive criticism:

- Don't necessarily mark everything that is wrong. A struggling writer especially can feel overwhelmed by too much correction. If your student's writing has ten basic things that need improvement, start by choosing the three that are most important to you. And try to make one of those three things something that is relatively easy to fix. (For example, it's pretty easy to learn the rules for using apostrophes, but much harder to learn all the comma rules.) As these start getting better, move on to other things. Once most of those ten basic problems have been fixed, you can start moving on to the more complex difficulties.
- Make your positive comments enthusiastic and your criticisms unemotional. Avoid expressing sarcasm, impatience, or irritation, no matter how much you may feel it.
- Avoid rewriting the paper yourself. It's fine to occasionally give an example of how to rewrite a sentence (for example, to make an awkward sentence less wordy), but remember this is not your paper, and the only way children learn to write well is by writing it themselves.
- While it can be fine for siblings to work together on improving their writing, or for one sibling to help another, don't make comparisons between siblings' papers and writing skills.
- Above all, find good things to say about the paper. It's easy to only comment on the problems we see with a paper; so make it a habit to look for and mention the good things too—strong organization, an interesting topic choice, an enjoyable style, progress with a previous problem, etc. Students can learn at least as much from what they do right as what they do wrong.

Grading Templates

The following grading templates are suggestions for **one way** to assign a grade to your student's work using the Lightning Lit program. There are certainly many other ways of coming to a quarterly grade. **Whether you need something like this or not will probably depend on how qualified you feel to grade your students' writing.** Our teachers don't use templates for grading, but they have graded thousands of papers written by home schoolers. You have read the preceding tips, which give you ideas of important points to consider when grading. Students should be challenged in their writing, but also successful in the outcome. You will want to offer constructive criticism where they haven't succeeded, but also concrete praise for where they have done good work. In other words, it's better to write, "You need to stagger your sentence length more, and have more of a punch in your topic sentences and your conclusion, but your ideas were well-organized and your content good," than to write, "Great paper! A." The first will provide a learning experience, the latter a momentary thrill. Give your students something to work on, something they can improve in the next assignment.

- The first template provides possible areas for grading various types of writing. You can adjust these as appropriate to the type of paper that has been written. Don't feel obligated to use this or any form. Do something that works for both you and your student.
- The second form provides a way to track comprehension scores. Again, this is optional, but if you are using the comprehension questions, this will give you a way to track success.
- Since we require our students to do vocabulary, we encourage you to include this in your students' study. This third form tracks the scores using any vocabulary program.
- Lastly, there's a synopsis template for assigning a quarter-end grade combining each of these three elements of your language-arts program. As with all the others, it's optional or can be adjusted as you see fit. The writing assignments are the core of the Lightning Lit program. That's why we've made them 80% of the student's grade, whereas vocabulary and comprehension sections are worth only 10% each. You may certainly decide to vary the importance of the sections as you see fit.

Make the grading process something that both you and your student can enjoy rather than dread. Our program starts with a Twain quote, so let's end here with another:

To get the full value of joy you must have someone to divide it with.

— Mark Twain

Use your grading as a way to divide your joy for your student's ability to share his or her thoughts on paper.

Paper # _____ of _____

Final Grade _____

Paper Title _____

Student Name _____ Date _____

Assign between 1 (lowest) and 10 (highest) points for each category. The total will be the percent/score for this paper.

1 Assignment _____

- Student followed instructions
- Student used good ideas

2 Content & Focus _____

- Paper's topic is clear
- Student stuck to the topic

3 Organization & Flow _____

- Each sentence and paragraph leads into the next
- Organization is logical (the paper could be easily outlined)

4 Introduction & Conclusion _____

- Introduction is clear, concise, and easily understood
- Conclusion is clear and emphatic

5 Words, Sentences & Paragraphs _____

- Student shows a good vocabulary
- Sentences are well constructed and vary in length
- Paragraphs are put together well

6 Grammar & Mechanics _____

- Grammar, punctuation, and spelling are correct
- Formatting is proper

7 Style _____

- Readers would feel engaged by the writing style

8 Citations and/or Character Development _____

- Citations are included as necessary and properly formatted
- If fiction, characters are well developed and maintain the same voice

9 Formatting _____

- Pages are properly formatted (double-spaced, headers, page numbers)
- Entire paper is formatted corrected (title page, quotes, bibliography)

10 Improvement _____

- This allows you to reward the student for improvement.

TOTAL _____ %

MID-TO-LATE AMERICAN LIGHTNING LIT COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Student Name _____ Date _____

Give your student a percentage correct for Comprehension Questions: Multiply the number of questions answered correctly by the point value to get the percentage score for the chapter. Round the number to an even percentage. For the final grade, add the total percentages and divide by the total number of lessons completed.

Unit 1

Lesson 1: Harriet Beecher Stowe (_____/80) 1.2 pts. each = _____%

Lesson 2: Walt Whitman (_____/8) 12.5 pts. each = _____%

Unit 2

Lesson 3: Bret Harte (_____/10) 10 pts. each = _____%

Lesson 4: Mark Twain (_____/45) 2.2 pts. each = _____%

Unit 3

Lesson 5: Paul L. Dunbar (_____/17) 5.9 pts. each = _____%

Lesson 6: Stephen Crane (_____/33) 3 pts. each = _____%

Unit 4

Lesson 7: Emily Dickinson (_____/12) 8.3 pts. each = _____%

Lesson 8: Jack London (_____/50) 2 pts. each = _____%

TOTAL AVERAGE FOR COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS . . _____%

Comments:

EARLY-TO-MID AMERICAN LIGHTNING LIT COMPREHENSION QUESTIONSStudent Name _____ Date _____ *sample*

Give your student a percentage correct for Comprehension Questions: Multiply the number of questions answered correctly by the point value to get the percentage score for the chapter. Round the number to an even percentage. For the final grade, add the total percentages and divide by the total number of lessons completed (in this example, $734/8 = 92\%$).

Unit 1Lesson 1: Benjamin Franklin (38 /43) 2.3 pts. each = 87 %Lesson 2: Washington Irving (9 /10) 10 pts. each = 90 %**Unit 2**Lesson 3: William Cullen Bryan . . (17 /18) 5.6 pts. each = 95 %Lesson 4: Frederick Douglass . . . (30 /34) 2.9 pts. each = 87 %**Unit 3**Lesson 5: Edgar Allan Poe (10 /12) 8.3 pts. each = 83 %Lesson 6: Nathaniel Hawthorne . . (53 /56) 1.8 pts. each = 95 %**Unit 4**Lesson 7: Herman Melville (96 /98) 1 pt. each = 96 %Lesson 8: Henry W. Longfellow . . (16 /16) 6.3 pts. each = 101 %**TOTAL AVERAGE FOR COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS . . 92 %****Comments:**

MID-TO-LATE AMERICAN LIGHTNING LIT VOCABULARY SCORES

Student Name _____ Date _____

Give your student a percentage correct for vocabulary work. For the final grade, add the total percentages and divide by the number of scores (e.g., $855 \div 9 = 89\%$). Feel free to write notes/comments about what is covered each week on the dotted line.

Week #1 _____%

Week #2 _____%

Week #3 _____%

Week #4 _____%

Week #5 _____%

Week #6 _____%

Week #7 _____%

Week #8 _____%

Week #9 _____%

TOTAL AVERAGE FOR VOCABULARY WORK _____%

MID-TO-LATE AMERICAN LIGHTNING LIT FOR QUARTER _____

Student Name _____ Date _____

Written Papers

Add the six percentages and divide by six for the final score.

Paper #1 %
Paper #2 %
Paper #3 %
Paper #4 %
Paper #5 %
Paper #6 %

TOTAL FOR WRITTEN PAPERS (80% of the final grade) . _____%

Comprehension Questions

TOTAL FOR COMPREHENSION (10% of the final grade . . _____%

Vocabulary Work

TOTAL FOR VOCABULARY (10% of the final grade) _____%

FINAL GRADE FOR QUARTER _____ _____%

To figure the final grade, multiply the average grade for written papers by 8, add the final scores for comprehension and vocabulary and divide by 10.

FINAL GRADE FOR YEAR

Final Grade for Quarter 1 %

Final Grade for Quarter 2 %

Final Grade for Quarter 3 %

Final Grade for Quarter 4 %

YEAR END GRADE (OPTIONAL) _____%