

How Regents Grading Works 1

Grading Scale: What the numbers mean

The “1” essay fails to demonstrate competence. It has any one of the following problems to an extraordinary degree or it has several to a limited degree:

- It lacks a central idea;
- It lacks a clear organizational plan;
- It does not develop its points or develops them in a repetitious, incoherent, or illogical way;
- It does not relate directly to the assigned topic;
- It contains several serious grammatical errors;
- It contains numerous mechanical errors;
- Ordinary, everyday words are used inaccurately and unidiomatically;
- It contains a limited vocabulary so that the words chosen frequently do not serve the writer’s purpose;
- Syntax is frequently rudimentary or tangled;
- The essay is so brief that the rater cannot make an accurate judgment of the writer’s ability.

The “2” essay meets the basic criteria.

- It has a central idea related directly to the assigned topic and presented with sufficient clarity that the reader is aware of the writer’s purpose.
- The organization is clear enough for the reader to perceive the writer’s plan.
- The paragraphs coherently present some evidence or details to substantiate the points.
- The writer uses ordinary, everyday words accurately and idiomatically and generally avoids both the monotony created by series of choppy, simple sentences and the incoherence caused by long, tangled sentences.
- Although the essay may contain a few serious grammatical errors and several mechanical errors, they are not of sufficient severity or frequency to obscure the sense of what the writer is saying.

The “3” essay shows distinction.

- It meets all and exceeds most of the criteria for a “2.”
- The ideas are expressed freshly and vividly, and the essay arouses the reader’s interest to a greater extent than the typical “2” essay.

Raters are given two model essays: one that received a 1/2, and one that received a 2/3. This means that any essays that are worse than the 1/2 essay receive a 1, and any better are judged against the 2/3. If the essay is worse than the 2/3, it receives a 2, and if it is better, it receives a 3. Essays that receive a score of 3 are rare.

How Regents Grading Works 2

All raters are either English professors with an MA or a PhD, or English graduate students. So, pretend your audience will be your own English professor. Try not to address the rater in your essay (using the word “you”), as they tend to not like you making assumptions about them and acting as though you know them. Stick with either “I” or “he/she/they.”

Raters do keep in mind that students only have an hour to write the essay and that it has not been edited and proofread as one a student may turn in for class. They are looking for minimal competence in written English. Granted, most of you have written an essay for the SAT, but the state of Georgia requires this test too.

Raters only spend 3-5 minutes reading each essay. So, if an essay has a lot of problems in the first paragraph (misspelled words, bad syntax, words used unidomatically, or the paragraph is off topic) they may not read past that point and just give it a 1. Each essay is graded by 3 raters, and the grade it receives is the average of the three grades.

Make your handwriting legible. All of the essays are handwritten. If you know you have bad handwriting, you must try to make it neat. Raters are permitted to fail essays they cannot read. A way to make your essay neat is to double space. That way, any corrections you make can be made between lines, and there is not a lot of scribble the rater has to decode. A frustrated rater = a 1 for you.

Raters do not mind if you are creative with the essay and choose to tell a story as you argue your position. In fact, sometimes it is nice and breaks the monotony when they grade 130 essays in one sitting. However, you must make sure your essay is clearly on topic if you choose to write creatively. Even if everything else looks good, you will receive a 1 if the rater believes you did not address the topic.

How Regents Grading Works 3

The 1/2 model:

- The thesis is a simple 3-point that outlines each of the following paragraphs. There is not complexity to it.
- The paragraphs are rather short, about 3-4 sentences each. Paragraphs with more sentences and better development tend to receive a higher mark, but they have to be on topic and must not ramble. Only the 3rd paragraph has adequate development.
- The point of view constantly shifts between 1st (“I”) and 3rd person (“he/she/it”)
- Some words and phrases are used repeatedly (start, stress)
- It does have a direct answer to the topic and follows an organized plan
- The transitions are clear, but obvious and conventional
- There are only a few serious grammar errors and no spelling error
- The opening captures the reader’s interest

1/2 MODEL 1/2

TOPIC: WHY WOULD YOU LIKE OR DISLIKE OWNING YOUR OWN BUSINESS?

Going out of Business Sale! Signs of this nature can be seen everywhere. Today opening up a business can be scary, because of the extensive risk, high cost, and extreme stress.

The chief reason I would not want to start my own business is the great risk of failure. Today statistics show that four out of every six businesses fail within the first year. Those are not very good odds for one just starting his or her own business.

The second reason not to start my own business is the high cost of starting a business. Businesses take a great deal of money to get started, and for that matter to keep running. The first thing one has to do is find a place to put the business. Lots are very expensive. Then a building has to be built, and merchandise to fill the building has to be purchased.

Finally owning a business can be stressful. Being ones own boss can be stressful to her or him by the way of having to make all of the important decisions, or can cause stress at home. The stress at home can be very detrimental to the marriage, or even the family as a whole.

Concluding this owning a business is just one big headache. On the other hand some people are very successful, and they got that way by taking the risk of owning their own business. I personally don’t think that owning a business is worth the risk, when working for someone else is a lot safer.

How Regents Grading Works 4

The 2/3 model:

- Thesis is more of an argument than a list. (I have had bad experiences with them [cats] in the past) versus (Today opening up a business can be scary, because of the extensive risk, high cost, and extreme stress).
- The paragraphs have at least 4 sentences, and most have 5 or 6. The greater number of sentences allows you to better develop your ideas and be complex with your argument rather than simplistic.
- Does not follow a strict 5 paragraph essay format. A 5 paragraph essay is fine, but it again confines you just like a 3-point thesis. Good development of ideas can happen in 5 paragraphs if you make sure each individual paragraph is focused and fully explores each point. Still, you must make sure your organization is clear.
- It is not a 3 because it has some overuse of words (like “it” in paragraph 4)

2/3 MODEL 2/3

TOPIC: WHAT ANIMAL DO YOU LIKE (OR DILIKE) THE MOST? WHY?

In my family there are numerous animal lovers, including me. Though I love all of God's creatures, I must say that I am lacking in emotions for cats. It is not that I hate the creatures. I have had bad experiences with them in the past.

The first feline that I owned was a pure-bred Persian. A beautiful cat to say the least, but its beauty was deceiving. It constantly shed its fur all over the house. No where could I run to find a haven from my newly discovered allergies.

The second feline that I owned was a tabby. This cat was a fun animal to own. It was constantly playing and batting things around. All was well until it matured. When it got its claws in, my furniture became the clawing areas and when it went forth into the surrounding neighborhood it would bring back to me a rabbit, squirrel, bird, etc. that it would politely leave on the porch. I suppose that it was a gift, but I could not make the cat understand that I did not want it.

Now that I had owned two cats, I was not happy when my best friend got me another for my birthday. I immediately began trying to get rid of it, but nobody wanted it. I was reluctant to take it to a shelter because it might end up being put to sleep. I wanted to know that it would have a home, but not mine.

As my luck goes with cats, it would meow in the most horrific scream every night. After two nights of this torture I took it to my best-friend's house and left it with her parents. I told them to give it to her as a gift. She kept it and still has it. I am glad that she kept it and did not take it back to where she got it.

As for me, I prefer to own dogs, fish, parrots, and my horse Trigger. Why? Because none of these animals has ever destroyed my furniture, made me sick, brought dead animals to my house, or kept me up all night for no reason. My dogs are excellent guards. My horse Trigger is an old friend that I have grown up with. My fish are silent, beautiful creatures of the deep and my parrot is a most intelligent bird. They all keep me company, and they all make me happy.

Written and Compiled by Denise Slavinski for the University of West Georgia Writing Center – Sept 9, 2008

Thank you to the Official Regents' Exam website at www.gsu.edu/~wwwrtp

How Regents Grading Works 5

Try it yourself: What grade would each of these essays receive?

"AS WE GROW OLDER, OUR TOYS COST MORE." DISCUSS.

"As we get older, our toys begin to cost more." It seems in this day and age people are relying more and more on material things. It is very important to some people to gain prestige by owning a new sportscar or an expensive home. People do this when they get older for the same reasons they did as children, because they have a sense of competitiveness that tells them to be the best. Only as children their toys were not priced so high.

As children our sense of competition shines through at a very early age. It becomes important to us when we begin to play with the other children on the block that our barbie dolls or toy guns are as nice as theirs. This "competitive sense" continues as we grow. We move on to wanting even better things such as ten-speed bikes, designer clothes, and even at the early age of 16 we begin to dream of having that new Corvett.

Once we are adults we try to become a bit more subtle about our wanting things. We want the 165,000 home in Martha's Vineyard because it would be a good investment, but not because our friends from college are living in expensive homes. We also want to belong to the country club because we need a good workout on the golf course now and then, but not because our neighbor belongs to it.

All in all people grow-up and end up just spending more on their toys. It is no longer money on toy cars now it is sports cars. It is not money for a big new doll house but money for that expensive new home in the best subdivision. None of us really ever outgrow our sense of wanting to have the best things, we just find better ways of making what we want seem practical.

Grade: 2

It has a main idea, the structure of the paragraphs is clear and logical, there are few misspelled words, and the grammar is good.

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How Regents Grading Works 6

SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT DO MORE TO DISCOURAGE SMOKING? WHY OR WHY NOT?

"The High Rate for Cancer Has Decreased Because Cigarettes are Off the Market" would be a nice headline if the government did more to discourage cigarette smoking and succeeds. The government should do more to discourage cigarette smoking because this would decrease the high cancer percentage and help many people break their habit.

First, if the government does do more to discourage cigarette smoking it may succeed and there would be a tremendous decrease in the cancer percentage. Although, cigarettes are not the only items on market that cause cancer, but if cigarettes are removed, then there would be one less item on market that does cause cancer.

Second, if the government does more to discourage cigarette smoking it would help many people kick the smoking habit. There are many people trying to stop smoking but can not. If the government succeeds at its effort to discourage cigarette smoking many people, especially the smokers, would be very happy because they would no longer have to worry about trying to stop smoking.

In conclusion, if the government succeeds at its attempt to discourage cigarette smoking, this would be a great benefit for the smokers, because they would have kicked the habit and helped the cancer rate to decrease in the non-smokers.

Grade: 1

There are many misspelled words, bad mechanics ("it's" instead of "its"), the sentences are confusing, and the paragraphs are simple and underdeveloped.

How Regents Grading Works 7

"THE CURRENT GENERATION IS LAZY AND LACKS DISCIPLINE." DEFEND OR ATTACK THIS STATEMENT.

Each generation has been accused of being lazy and lacking discipline at one time or another. Eventually each generation becomes productive, despite previous predictions to the contrary.

The "Roaring Twenties" era is a good example of a generation of people wrongly accused as lazy and undisciplined. The great "Prohibition" of 1919 did little to stop the consumption of alcohol. Speakeasy saloons became easily accessible -- And what mother did not gasp at the revolutionary styles so-called "Flappers" donned? However, this very same generation faced a great depression just ten years later. Many families were ruined financially and the poor were even poorer. Somehow they survived and became a better people for it. I doubt if the outcome had anything to do with being "lazy" or "lacking discipline."

An even more recent example of a generation "gone bad" is the "sixties." On every campus students wore ragged blue jeans with at least one patch, usually a peace sign. Music of that generation was acid rock and anti-war. Girls wore short hair, men wore long hair. The older people wondered what to think of this new "lazy" generation that "lacked" discipline. This generation grew-up, too, many of them whizzing us into the computer age and forging the fields of technology.

Surely there will be more generations in the future prematurely judged, and unjustly labeled "lazy", "undisciplined." Do not be so quick to stereotype and find fault with generations yet to come. Someone once said "For every time there is a season". I believe this is to be true. What a better world this would be if everyone would revel in another persons' "spring."

Grade: 3

The paragraphs are well-developed (compare with the 1 essay), there are no spelling errors, and it has a high level of thought.