



Why Aren't My Students Scoring 5s in PEG Writing?

Teachers and students are often frustrated when essays they believe are excellent do not score 5s. By design, a score of 5 is intended to be rare, indicating an exceptional essay. In addition, until the summer of 2017, scores were rounded to the nearest whole number, so a score of 4.5 or above was rounded to a 5.

Scores in PEG Writing are determined by models built using a multi-step process that begins with a committee of experts in writing. The committee reviews hundreds of essays to choose three exemplars, one high, one middle, and one low, for every grade band, genre, and trait at each score point. The highest exemplar is exceptional. The essay chosen has been compared to other excellent essays and determined to be the best example of a 5 in a particular trait and genre for that grade span. Further, for example, an essay selected as the highest exemplar for development of ideas for grades 7/8 argumentative will likely not be the one also chosen for organization, style, or any of the other traits. This is because even excellent essays do not necessarily demonstrate exceptional skill in all six traits.

A comparison to the Academy Awards might help to clarify. Viewers are probably most familiar with the categories of best supporting actor and actress, best actor and actress, best director, and best picture. All six categories, however, have never been won by a single picture. In fact, no picture has ever won all four acting categories. Each nominated actor is compared only to the other actors in that specific category.

Keep in mind, as well, that the essays used for building models include those from students who are particularly gifted in writing as well as those who struggle. Thus, a score of 5 may only be attainable for especially gifted writers. This is good, because it allows students to continually challenge themselves. However, it is not constructive for students to focus on attaining the highest score. Rather, students and teachers should expect growth in skills through focus on the demands of each writing task. A student who has worked hard to raise a score by a whole point or has achieved a score of 4 has done an amazing job.