

**OBSERVATIONAL WRITING**  
**DoDEA Scoring Rubric**  
**Grade 7 and 9**

**Score Point 6 – Exceptional Achievement**

**Identification of Subject.** Writers of six-point essays clearly identify or define the subject of the observation. The subject may be anything observed by the writer, such as an activity involving people, a scene, an animal, an object, or a scientific experiment.

**Context.** The writer locates the subject in a specific physical or psychological context. The writer focuses the subject clearly and establishes the context as fully and precisely as necessary to orient and ground the reader.

The writer of the six-point essay does not ever allow the context to dominate the essay at the expense of the presentation of the subject but goes beyond simply pointing to the subject. Some writers may devote considerable space in the essay to establishing the context; others may focus so compellingly on the details of the scene itself that the context is only briefly mentioned. In any event, throughout the essay the writer keeps the reader sufficiently aware of the context of the scene.

**Observational Stance.** In six-point essays, the relationship between the writer

as eyewitness and the subject is clearly established, developed, and maintained. Though not an active participant in the scene, the writer is an acute observer, and the stance – the vantage point or point of view of the observation and the voice and tone with which the writer presents the observation – is clear and strong throughout the essay. It is the assured stance that reveals authority while conveying a sense of discovery as much as any other quality that distinguishes the exceptional essay from the commendable.

Writers convey their stance by the details they select in presenting their observations to the reader as well as by the point of view, voice, and tone. The best writers might shift their point of view, moving, for example, from close-ups to distant views, to explore the scene from multiple perspectives, while retaining consistency in stance. They maintain focus by establishing and continually developing the scene, keeping close and purposeful control of their own vantage point. For six-point writers, the stance of the historian, the naturalist, the poet, and the journalist are all available ways of perceiving and ordering a scene, depending on their purpose in writing and their potential readers.

**Presentation of the Experience.** The six-point essay provides sufficient detail to recreate for the reader the concrete subject or situation being observed and

the writer's perceptual experience of that observation. The writer enables the reader to see the scene clearly, to recognize the meaning, impact, and importance that the experience had for the writer.

Because the goal of the observational writer is to re-create the singularity of his or her perception for the reader, the success of these essays is based largely on the writer's choice of and manipulation of presentational strategies such as the following:

- Factual descriptions of appearance and actions
- Sensory detail
- Concrete images
- Dialogue or monologue
- Narration
- Specific actions, behavior
- Shifting perspectives
- Metaphoric language

Writers of six-point essays use a variety of strategies; they may present multiple aspects of the subject, interweaving them, moving around the scene like a camera, assuming different vantage points to create a full, rich picture; or they may proceed more methodically through the scene, uncovering it slowly, one detail at a time. Whatever strategies the writer uses, the six-point essay writer exhibits throughout the essay a controlled awareness of the scene itself, of his or her

own purposes, and of the developing effect of the essay on the reader.

### **Score Point 5 – Commendable Achievement**

**Identification of Subject.** Writers of five-point essays clearly identify or define the subject of the observations.

**Context.** The writer locates the subject in a specific physical context. The writer focuses the subject clearly and establishes the context fully to orient and ground the reader.

The writer of the five-point essay does not allow the context to dominate the essay at the expense of the presentation of the subject but, like the six-point essay, goes beyond simply pointing to the subject. Some writers may devote considerable space in the essay to establishing the context; others focus on the details of the scene itself, mentioning the context only briefly. In any event, the writer keeps the reader sufficiently aware of the context of the scene.

**Observational Stance.** In five-point essays, the relationship between the writer as eyewitness and the subject is well-established; it may not be so fully developed and maintained as in the six-point essay, however. The sense of discovery, characteristic of the six-point essay, is usually lacking in the five-point essay.

**Presentation of the Experience.** The five-point essay provides sufficient detail to recreate for the reader the concrete subject or situation being observed and the writer's experience of the observation. The writer enables the reader to see the scene clearly and to recognize the meaning and importance that the experience had for the writer.

Writers of five-point essays use a number of strategies but will either use fewer strategies than the six-point writer or use them less effectively. The five-point essay writer exhibits throughout the essay a fairly well controlled awareness of the scene itself, of his or her own purposes, and of the developing effect on the reader.

### **Score Point 4 – Adequate Achievement**

**Identification of Subject.** Writers of four-point essays clearly identify but rarely define the subject of the observation.

**Context.** The writer provides a context for the observation and goes beyond simply pointing to the subject. The writer of the four-point essay may allow the context to dominate the essay at the expense of presentation of the subject or the context may be very scant.

**Observational Stance.** In four-point essays, the relationship between the writer and the subject is less clear than in the five- or six-point essay. The point of view

may shift but not with the control or purpose that we see in the five- and six-point essays. Voice and tone are likely to convey a less authoritative but still assured stance.

**Presentation of the Experience.** The four-point essay provides some detail but it is often skimpy, unelaborated. The writer provides enough of the scene to enable the reader to see the broad strokes and some aspects in greater detail. The writer may not, however, convey the meaning or importance that the experience had for the writer.

Writers of four-point essays use several strategies, but will often use them with little elaboration. The writer of the four-point essay may show little awareness of the reader.

### **Score Point 3 – Some Evidence of Achievement**

**Identification of Subject.** Writers of three-point essays identify the subject of the observation but often in a very general rather than specific way.

**Context.** The writer may provide some context for the observation, but may allow the context to dominate the essay at the expense of the presentation of the subject or provide very minimal context. Still, the three-point essay writer goes a bit beyond simply pointing to the subject.

**Observational Stance.** In three-point essays, the stance is often inconsistent. The writer may point to a relationship between the writer and the subject often tending toward an autobiographical focus. The point of view may shift but not with control or purpose. Voice and tone may be inappropriate to the content of the essay.

**Presentation of the Experience.** The three-point essay is characterized by generalities rather than specific details. The writer will rely on very few strategies. The writer will not convey the meaning or importance of the experience and will show little awareness of the reader.

### **Score Point 2 – Limited Evidence of Achievement**

**Identification of Subject.** Writers of two-point essays frequently introduce many subjects.

**Context.** The writer may provide minimal context for the observation; in the case of multiple subjects, context may be completely lacking.

**Observational Stance.** In two-point essays, the observer is usually central, often evaluative. The writer will usually focus on an autobiographical approach. Voice and tone are likely to be inappropriate to the content of the essay.

**Presentation of the Experience.** The two-point essay is characterized by generalities, often listed, rather than specific details. The writer will not convey the meaning or importance of the experience and will rarely show any awareness of the reader.

### **Score Point 1 – Minimal Evidence of Achievement**

**Identification of Subject.** Writers of one-point essays may or may not indicate a subject or subjects.

**Context.** The writer will provide no context for the observation.

**Observational Stance.** In one-point essays, the observer is central. The subject, when discernible, may be mentioned only once or twice.

**Presentation of the Experience.** The one-point essay is characterized by a lack of any information about the subject or by garbled information. The writer will not convey any meaning or importance of the experience to the reader.

### **Score Point 0 – Inappropriate Response**

Off Topic