Writing Evaluation Checklist

When you write, you should be well-aware of the quality of your text. This entails knowing exactly what qualities your text should have. This checklist should serve as a tool for analyzing your own writing (or any writing). It covers all of the aspects of writing presented in any typical composition program, with a few additions especially for ESL writers.

1. **Linguistic aspects**
   a) Sentence Structure
   b) Noun phrases
   c) Verbs
   d) Subject-verb structures
   e) Miscellaneous grammar points

2. **Punctuation**
   a) Commas
   b) Semi-colons
   c) Colons
   d) Dashes
   e) Parenthesis

3. **Structure of the text**
   a) Introduction
   b) Paragraph Focus
   c) Paragraph Development
   d) Conclusion
   e) Title and headings

4. **Rhetorical aspects**
   a) Audience
   b) Purpose
   c) Strategies
   d) The Writer's Persona
   e) Level of language

5. **Content**
   a) Development and support of ideas
   b) Concrete, specific diction
   c) Details
   d) Perspective and insight
   e) Sense of the content in context

Additional comments and guidelines
   ➢ Revisions
   ➢ Formatting
   ➢ Emailing assignments
   ➢ Use of your text in class
   ➢ Descriptions of grading categories

➢ Linguistic aspects

Sentence structure

_____ overall unity and balance of the content of each sentence
_____ parallel structures
_____ coherence between the sentences – the writer uses all four types
_____ number of types used (assessed by the beginnings)
_____ number of the most common type used

Checklist of types used, giving the number of instances of each type (*for "zero" just leave the blank blank*)

_____ subject
_____ appositive about the subject
_____ dependent clause as subject
_____ complement clause (starting with "that")
_____ imperative verb
_____ prepositional phrase
_____ adverb
_____ past participial phrase

_____ present participial phrase
_____ gerundial phrase
_____ dependent clause (with a conjunction)
_____ infinitive phrase (adverbial)
_____ infinitive as subject
_____ introductory series
_____ conjunction (sentence adverb)
_____ questions

Noun phrases

_____ use of adjectives instead of relative clauses (*that, which, who*)
_____ well-crafted, well-chosen, not overly long and unwieldy
_____ use of appositives
_____ order of adjectives

Verbs

_____ instances of BE (*as a main verb, not as part of a progressive or passive tense – optimum = 0*)
_____ instances of a modal (*can, could, will, would, shall, should, may, might, have to, ought to,* or *must*)
_____ verbs well-chosen and varied

Subject-verb structures

_____ well-chosen, well-formed
_____ active verbs instead of passive

Miscellaneous grammar points

_____ determiners for all singular nouns
_____ no plural adjectives
_____ plural main noun in partitives (*one of the birds, some of the people*)
_____ to + verb structures used correctly
_____ present perfect used correctly, does not refer specifically to the past

➢ Punctuation

Commas

_____ commas after any phrases before the subject of any clause in the sentence
_____ commas before and after all non-restrictive relative clauses (*which, who, whom*)
_____ commas not used where a period could be used (not joining independent clauses)
_____ commas not used between the subject and the verb (unless after a relative clause in the subject)
_____ commas used before "and" for the final item in a series (*a variable convention*)

Semi-colons

_____ used to join independent clauses into one sentence (the second clause may have a conjunction)
_____ used to separate items in a list with items containing commas

Colons

_____ used to introduce a list
_____ used to introduce a quote
_____ followed by a clause
_____ followed by a noun phrase only
_____ followed by a verb phrase only

Dashes

_____ used to highlight a phrase within a sentence
_____ used to add a phrase at the end of a sentence

Parenthesis

_____ used to insert a phrase in a sentence

➢ Structure of the Text

Introduction
> _____ uses an effective strategy to capture the reader's attention
> _____ sets the relationships between the writer, the audience, and the topic
> _____ clearly and specifically indicates the content

Paragraph focus
> _____ clear focus and purpose for each paragraph
> _____ do not include any sentences that do not advance the purpose
> _____ uses an effective strategy
> _____ has a proper structure – for this course, 3 parts: set-up, state the point, make the point
> _____ can be given a clear, succinct heading that conveys the gist of the paragraph

Paragraph development
> _____ cogent, clear development
> _____ a variety of strategies among paragraphs
> _____ paragraphs linked by transitional words or phrases

Conclusion
> _____ summarizes the body paragraphs or points
> _____ loops back to the beginning with a reference to the title and/or introduction
> _____ adds a final, lasting impression

Title and headings and overall structure
> _____ title is clear, specific, and indicative of the content (even if so only after reading the text)
> _____ title is catchy, intriguing
> _____ heading for each section or paragraph clearly conveys the gist of it
> _____ the writer creates a clear structure for the reader, makes it easy to read the text overall

➢ Rhetorical aspects

Audience
> _____ writer shows a clear sense of the audience
> _____ writer maintains an appropriate relationship with the audience
> _____ all content (explanations, definitions, references, allusions) are suited to the audience

Purpose
> _____ purpose of the text suits the audience
> _____ purpose of the text is sufficiently narrow for the length
> _____ the writer accomplishes the purpose

Strategies
> _____ writer uses effective strategies throughout the text – in the intro, each paragraph, and the conclusion
> _____ the writer uses a variety of strategies
> _____ the strategies are well-suited to the purpose of each paragraph and the text overall

The Writer's Persona
> _____ the writer has a clear, personal voice – even if the text is only informative
> _____ the writer conveys a sense of their relationship to the content (authoritative, reporting, opinion, etc.)

Level of language
> _____ the writer does not use informal, colloquial language (this depends on the type of text)
> _____ the writer explains any words or terms that the audience might not know
> _____ the writer shows a sense of advanced diction, using words that might not be common in speech
> _____ the writer uses clear, natural English

➢ Content

Development and support of ideas
_____ each idea is clearly thought out
_____ each idea is cogently developed

Concrete, specific diction and details
_____ the writer uses concrete, specific language
_____ the writer does not make vague or general statements (unless with a very good reason)
_____ the writer presents pertinent details to make each point

Concise expression
_____ heading for each section or paragraph clear convey the gist of it
_____ no unnecessary determiners or modifiers
_____ relative clauses (*that, which, who*) turned into adjectives
_____ prepositional phrases turned into adjectives
_____ verb forms used instead of ~ion noun forms
_____ no unnecessary *It is . . .* or *There are . . .* phrases
_____ no infinitive phrases that could be made into verbs or noun phrases
_____ no repetitive wording or excessive detail

Perspective and insight
_____ the writer does not state the obvious (without good reason and immediate follow-up)
_____ the writer has a useful perspective on their content
_____ the writer acknowledges other perspectives or points of view
_____ the writer offers some insight into their topic
_____ the writer communicates something new and necessary to the reader

Sense of the content in context
_____ the writer shows knowledge of their content in a larger context
_____ the text can be seen as part of a larger discussion
_____ the writer seems aware of the knowledge and the situation of the reader

➢ About Revisions

Revision does not mean mere correction! "Revise" means to "see differently," and a revision entails fundamental changes in the text. If a writer keeps the basic ideas for their introduction and the same strategies for each paragraph, they have not truly revised their text. Moreover, a thorough revision may put new ideas into the text.

Revision entails reworking the content and the ideas, crafting more focused paragraphs, increasing the variety of your sentence beginnings, rewriting sentences so as not to use BE as the main verb, as well as fixing everything that was marked in your essay.

➢ Formatting
1) no cover page
2) only your name and the essay title at the top of the first page only (not in a header)
3) single spaced, blank line between paragraphs
4) document language set to "English"
5) page format set to "letter" (8.5 x 11 in.)
6) fit the essay on two pages or less (do what you need to do with the margins & font size)
7) preferred font: Times New Roman, 11pt

➢ Emailing Assignments
1) file name must be <YOUR NAME – ASSIGNMENT NUMBER – ESSAY TITLE>; if need be, the title may be shortened. Example: <thomas – essay 01 revised – how to write clearly.odt>
2) I can read most any file format from any word processing program (I do use Open Office)
3) send your assignment to the course email address – not to thomas@worldwordweb.com!
4) Give your email an appropriate, descriptive subject line, such as "essay 02, revised"

➢ **In-class use of your texts**
1) Throughout the course, we will review, analysis, criticize, and revise your assignments.
2) Your work may be displayed on the screen.
3) You actually benefit from having your text discussed in class; it is almost like a tutorial for you!
4) If, perchance, you have a text that is confidential or that you do not want displayed, note that in your text.

➢ **Description of Grade Categories**

A   An "A" paper may not be perfect, but it shows skill and attention to detail. In an "A" paper, the writer:
➢ skillfully crafts sentences with well-chosen subjects and verbs as well as overall structure and balance
➢ uses a variety of sentence types
➢ clearly sticks to one main point in each paragraph and makes the point cogently with an effective strategy
➢ uses a variety of strategies for making a point (developing a paragraph)
➢ fulfills the functions of an introduction and conclusion
➢ uses specific, concrete language and images
➢ addresses a specific audience with an appropriate tone and style
➢ has something to say
➢ uses grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation correctly (although, for ESL writers, maybe not perfectly)

B   In a "B" paper, the parts of the text fulfills their functions, but the writer is inconsistent.
➢ the introduction uses a weak strategy or does not clearly indicate the content
➢ the writer lacks control of their sentence structure, with some sentences unbalanced or unwieldy
➢ some paragraphs lack focus, containing sentences that do not belong
➢ a "B" paper clearly falls short of an "A"
➢ the text may not read smoothly; some parts are good, but some seem unfinished or unrefined
➢ the difference between a "B" and a "C" is that a "B" paper has a basically sound idea and conception, yet lacks something in the skills displayed

C   An "C" paper presents some problems with basic conception and development of the text:
➢ some problems handling sentence structures
➢ likely to overuse BE
➢ lacks a variety of sentence types, mostly simple sentences beginning with the subject
➢ paragraphs may wander from the main point and include irrelevant information
➢ a lack of variety of strategies for making a point (developing a paragraph)
➢ the introduction does not grab the reader's attention, starts with a vague, obvious, or general statement, and does not clearly indicate the content to follow
➢ the conclusion does not summarize the main points, maybe introduces something new, does not loop back to the introduction or title, and fails to make a final, lasting impression
➢ uses vague, abstract language and images
➢ the audience is not clear or the writer uses an ~~appropriate~~ inappropriate tone and style (such as colloquialism for an academic audience)
➢ not sure if the writer has something to say or if they are just writing commonplace knowledge
➢ problems with grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation interfere with reading

D   An "D" paper has such basic problems that it needs complete revision, starting with the basic conception of the writing task. The writer has not accomplished anything in their text – they seemed to have nothing to say and they did not complete each part of the essay. The introduction is weak (usually starting with vague, general, or obvious statements), the paragraphs lack focus and development, and the conclusion merely ends the text. The title may be uninformative or even missing. Most sentences probably start with the subject, maybe with a dummy subject (*It is* or *There are*).

E, F   These are very rare. The text would clearly not fulfill the assignment. Such a low grade would probably not surprise the writer.