Scoring Guide
The following Scoring Guide

At each of the six score points for on topic papers, descriptors of writing performance are lettered so that:

a. response to the topic
b. quality and clarity of thought
c. syntax and command of language
d. grammar, usage, and mechanics
e. organization, development, and support

Score of 6: Superior
A 6 essay is superior writing, but may have minor flaws.

A typical essay in this category:

a. addresses the topic clearly and responds effectively to all aspects of the task
b. explores the issues thoughtfully and in depth
c. is coherently organized, with ideas supported by apt reasons and well-chosen examples
d. has an effective, fluent style marked by syntactic variety and a clear command of language
e. is generally free from errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

Score of 5: Strong
A 5 essay demonstrates clear competence in writing. It may have some errors, but they are not serious enough to distract or confuse the reader.

A typical essay in this category:

a. addresses the topic clearly, but may respond to some aspects of the task more effectively than others
b. shows some depth and complexity of thought
c. is well organized and developed with ideas supported by appropriate reasons and examples
d. displays some syntactic variety and facility in the use of language
e. may have a few errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

Score of 4: Adequate
A 4 essay demonstrates adequate writing. It may have some errors that distract the reader, but they do not significantly obscure meaning.

A typical essay in this category:

a. addresses the topic, but may slight some aspects of the task
b. may treat the topic simplistically or repetitively
c. is adequately organized and developed, generally supporting ideas with reasons and examples
d. demonstrates adequate use of syntax and language
e. may have some errors, but generally demonstrates control of grammar, usage, and mechanics
Score of 3: Marginal
A 3 essay demonstrates developing competence, but is flawed in some significant way(s).
A typical essay in this category reveals one or more of the following weaknesses:

a. distorts or neglects aspects of the task
b. lacks focus, or demonstrates confused or simplistic thinking
c. is poorly organized and developed, presenting generalizations without adequate and appropriate support or presenting details without generalizations
d. has limited control of syntax and vocabulary
e. has an accumulation of errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics that sometimes interfere with meaning

Score of 2: Very Weak
A 2 essay is seriously flawed.
A typical essay in this category reveals one or more of the following weaknesses:

a. indicates confusion about the topic or neglects important aspects of the task
b. lacks focus and coherence, and often fails to communicate its ideas
c. has very weak organization and development, providing simplistic generalizations without support
d. has inadequate control of syntax and vocabulary
e. is marred by numerous errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics that frequently interfere with meaning

Score of 1: Incompetent
A 1 essay demonstrates fundamental deficiencies in writing skills.
A typical essay in this category reveals one or more of the following weaknesses:

a. suggests an inability to comprehend the question or to respond meaningfully to the topic
b. is unfocused, illogical, incoherent, or disorganized
c. is disorganized and undeveloped, providing little or no relevant support
d. lacks basic control of syntax and vocabulary
e. has serious and persistent errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics that severely interfere with meaning

Readers should not penalize writers excessively for slight shifts in idiom, problems with articles, confusion over prepositions, and occasional misuse of verb tense and verb forms, so long as such features do not obscure meaning.