Newton South High School Expectations for Literary and Persuasive Essays, 9-12

Trait		9	10	11	12	12+
Ideas/ Content	Controlling idea/thesis	Essay contains clear, logical, arguable thesis		Essay has clear, logical, arguable, and insightful thesis that addresses some important ideas in the text		Essay has a clear, original, insightful thesis that connects the text with larger ideas; the thesis may be implied rather than stated explicitly
		Essay convincingly explains importance of thesis				
	Use of Quotations	Essay uses MLA style to cite and punctuate quotations accurately; quotations are accurately integrated into the text: they are introduced, contextualized, and explained		Quotations cited accurately and appropriately integrated into the text	Quotations cited accurately and elegantly integrated into the text of the essay	
	Quality of Evidence	Evidence is accurate, relevant, and sufficient to develop thesis		Evidence is accurate, relevant, sufficient and convincing		Evidence is accurate, relevant, and particularly convincing because it is so well chosen
	Analysis of Evidence	■ Essay analyzes evidence rather than summarizes plot ■ Contains some consideration of opposing views or alternate interpretations ■ Begins to analyze author's language (in literary essays) ■ Shows clear understanding of text		■ Essay analyzes author's language effectively (in literary essays) ■ Contains appropriate and sufficient discussion of opposing views or alternate interpretations ■ Shows clear understanding of the text with some insight into its nuances		Analyzes language persuasively, addresses multiple viewpoints, and shows strong insight into the text's nuances
Organi-zation (Students should master 5P essay format by end of 8th grade, and move beyond it through high school)	Intro/ Conclusion Org.	Intro P begins w/ a clear and relevant hook, includes relevant background info and ends with an arguable thesis		Intro P begins with a creative and apt hook, subtly incorporates relevant background information, and ends with a sophisticated, arguable thesis	Intro P draws reader in, establishes the topic, and may contain an implicit thesis or question for discussion	
		Concluding P refers to but does not restate thesis and ends w/ an insightful "so what?"		Concluding P contains an element of discovery or surprise		
	Essay Org.	Multiple Ps develop the thesis in a clear, logical order. Each body P develops a different part of the overall idea rather than citing just another example of it.		Multiple Ps develop the thesis in a well-chosen order that purposefully builds an argument		
		Essay consistently uses transitional phrases, clauses, and sentences to structure a coherent argument				
	Body Paragraph Org.	Body paragraphs each: ■ Begin with a topic sentence that connects the idea of the paragraph to the thesis ■ Use evidence to develop one part of the overall thesis ■ End with a sentence that connects the idea of the paragraph to the controlling idea or thesis				Body Ps have clear focus and logical order, but topic sentences and concluding tie-ins may be implied rather than directly stated
Voice		Essay displays an appropriately formal voice, without its being distinctive		Writer sometimes makes stylistic choices to make the voice distinctive		Essay consistently displays a distinctive and engaging voice
Word Choice		Regardless of the age or level of accomplishment of the writer, we expect: The level of vocabulary in the essay to be appropriate for discussing the issue or text under discussion Word choices to be precise, varied, clear, and succinct Vivid verbs and specific nouns, with minimal reliance on adjectives and adverbs				
Sentence Structure		Avoids sentence fragments, run-ons, and comma splices		Uses occasional sentence error deliberately and effectively		
		Uses openers and closers for variety				
		Uses a variety of phrases and sentence types				
			Uses a variety of clauses			
Mechanics/ Conventions (Chart assumes that in subsequent year students continue to exhibit skills they learn)		Punctuates phrases correctly				
		Consistently uses a comma with introductory dependent clauses in complex sentences	Punctuates clauses correctly; avoids errors in parallelism			
		Consistently uses colons and semi-colons correctly				
		Consistently uses present tense to discuss the actions and thoughts in a text, and the past tens to discuss historical events				
		Essay uses the active voice		Uses passive voice deliberately in rare cases as a rhetorical device		
		Usually avoids subject/verb and pronoun agreement errors as well as vague pronoun references		Consistently avoids subject/verb and pronoun agreement errors as well as vague pronoun references		
		Usually avoids dangling modifiers		Consistently avoids dangling modifiers		

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