**PD Module: Norming the TASC Essay**

**and Responding Effectively to Student Writing**

**Goals:**

* Teachers will understand how the scoring rubric for the TASC essay aligns with anchor papers
* Teachers will be able to apply this knowledge in preparing students to write passing essays
* Teachers will be able to apply this knowledge in scoring their own students’ papers
* Teachers will be able to this knowledge in responding constructively to student writing

**Part One: Scoring Rubric and Anchor Papers**

**Materials**: Anchor papers, scoring rubric, prompt, and source texts for the TASC argumentative essay exemplar (Should Public Libraries be Free?) On a separate page, the TASC annotations for the scoring of each anchor paper; the same for the informational essay (Make a Plan for High School Students who Work Part-time)

**Steps:**

1. Ask teachers to talk in pairs about the guidance they give students about the TASC essay. What are the key messages they try to give? Bring the group together for a report out on this.
2. Tell teachers that they are about to look at the anchor papers and scoring rubric (make sure everyone understands what these are). They may end up revising some of their assumptions about the demands of the essay based on what they see. It’s a good idea to keep an open mind to this possibility.
3. Give out the source texts and prompt for the essay and give teachers some time to read it.
4. Then, give out the scoring rubric and anchor papers for the essay scored 3, 2 and 1. Begin with the “3” anchor paper. Ask teachers to look at the scoring rubric for the “3” paper, and find evidence of these characteristics in the actual anchor paper. Where do they see evidence that the writer “clearly introduces an opinion or claim ,” or “uses reasoning and evidence to support an opinion or claim?” Allow some time for this, then have teachers report back. Once you feel that teachers have “noticed” the important elements in the anchor paper, give out the TASC-produced annotations, so teachers can see where they observed similar characteristics as the TASCmakers.
5. Repeat the process for the “2” and “1” scoring rubric/anchor paper.
6. Try to establish some key takeaways for teachers as a result of this process:

* Most important is that essay is organized. The “2” paper has many weaknesses, but it’s organized, and it passed.
* The key difference between the “3: and “2: paper is that the “3’ paper is more elaborated
* The counterargument is important
* Using information from the text is important, but it can be minimal and students do not need to quote.
* Scoring is holistic—there is not a score assigned to different elements
* Errors play a part, but organization, a claim, and support are key.

1. Repeat the whole process with the informational essay
2. When finished, ask teachers what surprised them or what they have learned.

**Part Two: Responding Effectively to Student Writing**

**Materials**: copies of the prompt, source texts, and student papers for the prompt on whether video game playing leads to violence in real life from “Essay Prompts and Readings for the TASC Argumentative Essay” posted on collectedny.org under “Framework Posts.” (<http://www.collectedny.org/frameworkposts/essay-prompts-and-readings-for-the-tasc-argumentative-essay/>

Alternative: Source texts, prompts and student papers for an essay the teacher has assigned

**Steps**:

1. Tell teachers that now that they know what the “goal” of student essay writing is, it’s time to think about how to help students reach the goal. Preparing students through routines they can follow to write an essay is very effective, but what does the research say? According to a TEAL report on improving student writing, research backs the following practices: writing a lot, conferences, and revision
2. Ask teachers how they provide feedback to students—in writing, in person or both? Point out that many teachers are not paid for prep, and writing a lot of comments is time-consuming, so it’s helpful to know how to write short, effective comments. Also, while some written feedback is very helpful, students do not always understand teachers’ written comments; therefore it’s good to mix the modes of delivering feedback. Having students write in class and offering “over the shoulder” advice, as well as one-on-one conferences are also very effective.
3. Ask teachers what guidelines they use to respond to student writing. What do they pay attention to? Introduce the concept of HOCs (Higher Order concerns) and LOCs (Lower Order Concerns). HOCs include the following:

* Is the question answered?
* Is there a central argument or idea?
* Does the introduction give a preview of what will come?
* Is the essay organized? Is each paragraph about one main idea?
* Are the ideas supported with examples, details or facts?

LOCs include sentence structure, grammatical issues such as verb tense consistency and subject-verb agreement, punctuation, word choice, spelling.

1. Ask teachers to work in pairs to discuss the following question: What are your goals when you provide feedback to students about their writing? and “What are the qualities or characteristics of good feedback? After a few minutes of speaking in pairs, ask teachers to report back.
2. Give out the following criteria for effective feedback:

* It says specifically what a student has done well.
* It responds to content
* Responses are written adjacent to the writing that is being commented on
* Often, it asks questions
* It provides explicit instructions for improving the essay
* It focuses mainly on higher order concerns, with only one or two grammar, spelling, or punctuation points to revise.
* Lower order concerns that interfere with meaning (you literally don’t know what the student is trying to say, or it’s a lot of work to decipher what the student is trying to say) are given priority.
* Lower order concerns that are repeated or frequent mistakes are given priority

1. Give out three student papers with written teacher comments. Ask teachers to look at the teacher comments in pairs and discuss the following questions:

* Does the student know what he/she did well?
* Does the student know specifically one thing to do to improve the essay?
* Does the student have a high utility grammar/mechanics issue to work on?

1. Give out the prompt, source texts, and student papers for the prompt on whether video game playing leads to violence in real life from “Essay Prompts and Readings for the TASC Argumentative Essay” posted on collectedny.org under “Framework Posts.” (<http://www.collectedny.org/frameworkposts/essay-prompts-and-readings-for-the-tasc-argumentative-essay/> and ask teachers to read them. When teachers are finished, give out the two student papers. Ask teachers to work together in pairs to do the following:

* Identify a strength of the paper
* Identify ONE higher order concern for the student and WHERE in the paper to address it
* Identify ONE question they could ask to help the student improve the essay.
* Identify ONE grammar/mechanics issue for the student to work on
* Then, SCORE the essay using the TASC scoring rubric.
* Finally, WRITE TWO comments they would make on the student’s paper to help them improve the essay.

1. When teachers have finished, ask them to tape one of the student papers to a larger piece of paper that can be mounted on the wall, and write their comments alongside. Do a gallery walk, with each pair of teachers talking through the strengths, questions and grammar issues they identified and showing their comments. As a whole group, discuss the comments.
2. For additional practice, or to make this part of the workshop more immediately useful to teachers, have them bring student papers that were all written in response to a prompt and source text that they provide. Make copies for all, then follow the rest of the steps.