



## Best Practices for Using Utah Compose

What are the best practices for using Utah Compose? First, use Utah Compose as intended – as a *practice* site. Consider Utah Compose and yourself as the coaching team.

1. Let students practice, practice, practice.
2. Teach students to use the graphic organizers. These can be a tremendous help in their development of ideas and organization.
3. Help students become familiar with the rubrics. These are the basis for their scores, and familiarity with them will help students succeed.
4. Teach students how to use their feedback to improve their essays.
5. Allow students many revisions. Research shows that a minimum of five revisions is necessary to see what students can do. Remember, professional writers do not publish their first, second, or even third draft.
6. Model writing. Show students your own process. Submit your own writing to PEG in a demo account for scoring, and then show students how you would apply the feedback to improve your writing. (You may want to score your writing on a higher grade level than that of your students).
7. Include your own feedback through conferences, electronic sticky notes, or messages, as well as assigning content and text evidence scores and feedback.
8. Teach students that revising for development, organization, style, and word choice will have the most impact on the quality of their essays as well as their scores.
9. As coaches do, cheer your students on when they improve and help them correct mistakes when needed.
10. Set goals that are manageable. The goal for each student is to improve, not to reach a 5 in every trait.
11. Never require students to earn a certain score in order to achieve a specific grade. For example, 28 or higher for an A, etc. is an unrealistic goal for all students.
12. Allow students to abandon essays that are not working. Encourage them to continue to revise essays in their portfolios in which they are especially interested.
13. Encourage students to choose what they consider their best work to format and “publish.”

### How to Appropriately and Fairly Use Utah Compose Scores for Grades

Utah Compose is designed for formative assessment. However, that doesn't mean that you cannot use any part of it for grading purposes. Just remember to use it appropriately. ALL grades must be based on class expectations and learning goals rather than on Utah Compose scores. Below are some ideas:

#### Improvement:

Set a goal for students appropriate to their individual skill level. Be sure that the goal is manageable and achievable by each student in the time allotted. If the goal is met during the

specified time, the student could receive an A in writing. Those who move toward the goal could receive grades accordingly.

#### In-Class Instruction:

Combine classwork instruction with improvement. For example, if your instruction includes rules about subject/verb agreement, include the essays students submit in Utah Compose as a part of your assessment. Be sure to check their usage yourself, in case PEG misses something! You could also include submitted essays in your assessment of how well students applied new learning of figurative language, transitions, or even citations. This list is endless.

One of the most over-looked tools for good writing is the graphic organizer. After teaching students how to use graphic organizers to improve the development of ideas and organization of their essays, you could grade the next assigned essay on how successfully students utilized a graphic organizer.

#### Formatted Essays:

- ✓ Explain from the beginning that the essay will culminate in a grade.
- ✓ Create and distribute your own rubric upon which the grade will be based. This will not necessarily mirror Utah Compose’s rubric. Yours should reflect the priorities established for the assignment, including specific content and content words, research, formatting, etc.
- ✓ Give students opportunity for unlimited revisions within the assignment’s time frame of the assignment.
- ✓ Have students “turn in” a formal, formatted essay.
- ✓ Do NOT base grades on scores from Utah Compose. PEG Scores do not reflect what you have taught students. They do not reflect your instructional goals for a specific prompt, and therefore, these instructional goals are not assessed properly. Remember to use the rubric you created for the assignment.