**Evaluation Rubric for Holistic Assessment of**

**Graduate Student Writing**

Readers will evaluate each essay according to the following rubric:  
  
  
**Exceptional Graduate-Level Writing:**  
  
A score 4 is given to an essay that uniformly  
  
(1) demonstrates exceptional knowledge of the subject, both within and beyond narrow disciplinary boundaries;  
  
(2) makes clear from the outset the important critical problem that the paper will solve or the critical question that it will answer;  
  
(3) demonstrates exceptional knowledge of the critical debate informing the problem or question;  
  
(4) makes a significant and sophisticated argument of its own that will be an important contribution to the critical debate about the subject;  
  
(5) uses secondary sources judiciously and convincingly;  
  
(6) is organized with clear rhetorical purpose;  
  
(7) uses a critical idiom that is sophisticated, crystal clear, and technically flawless;  
  
(8) makes clear why the argument of the paper is important to the critical debate about the question or problem; and  
  
(9) is formatted according to professional (MLA) conventions for writing in the field.

**Acceptable Graduate-Level Writing:**  
  
A score of 2 or 3 is given to an essay that uniformly  
  
(1) demonstrates competent graduate-level knowledge of the subject;  
  
(2) shows a clearly defined critical question or problem that the paper sets out to answer or solve;    
(3) demonstrates familiarity with the critical debate informing the question or problem;  
  
(4) adequately defends a carefully considered argument (that is, has a clear thesis);  
  
(5) uses secondary sources well enough to support broad claims;    
  
(6) strikes a good balance between levels of generalization and specificity;    
  
(7) is purposefully organized and written clearly and correctly in an idiom befitting graduate-level expression in English;  
  
(8) follows formatting conventions for writing in the field, as determined by the MLA.  
  
The distinction between a grade of 3 and 2 is determined by the student’s success in meeting the standards listed above.

**Unacceptable Graduate-Level Writing:**  
  
A score of 1 is given to an essay that uniformly  
  
(1) fails to convince readers that its author has a competent understanding or the subject;  
  
(2) fails to establish contexts by introducing the significant critical question that it will answer or the significant critical problem that it will solve;  
  
(3) fails to demonstrate an awareness of the critical debate informing the subject;  
  
(4) fails to develop an argument (that is, has no apparent thesis);  
  
(5) fails to use secondary sources convincingly to support generalizations;  
  
(6) is incoherent or ill-organized;  
  
(7) is fraught with construction, grammar, and usage problems; and  
  
(8) fails to follow formatting conventions for writing in the field, as determined by the MLA.