

FAQs

Q: How does Savvas EssayScorer work?

A: Students enter their essays into Savvas Realize and receive immediate feedback on their writing. All essay prompts in the program are evaluated for an Overall score, while prompts that have been successfully “trained” by the system also provide detailed Feedback on six writing traits.

Q: What is a “trained” prompt?

A: The EssayScorer system has been trained to score each prompt by evaluating hundreds of essays written to the prompt by students at the specified grade level, and scored by professional human scorers. Using a technique that evaluates the meaning of text, the computer compares the content and relevant qualities of writing of each of the student responses, along with the scores given to the responses by the human scorers. From these comparisons, the system derives a prompt-specific algorithm to predict the scores that the same human scorers would assign to new responses.

Prompts that have been trained and calibrated are considered trained prompts. In short, EssayScorer measures the quality of essays by determining:

- The language features that human scorers evaluate when scoring a response
- How those features are weighed and combined to produce a score

Q: How does EssayScorer score an essay?

A: When a student submits an essay for scoring, the system immediately compares the the essay to those on which it was trained and assigns a score based on the most similar essays. Each trait is scored independently in this way. Only trained essays will provide detailed Feedback for each writing trait. Untrained essays provide an Overall score only.

Q: How does EssayScorer assign an overall score?

A: The overall score is computed by averaging the individual trait scores.

Q: Can teachers create their own writing prompts?

A: Yes, teachers can create their own prompts using the Create Content feature. Teacher-created prompts will provide an Overall score only since they are not trained.

Q: How does EssayScorer's scoring compare to the way teachers grade writing?

A: EssayScorer's approach is conceptually similar to the way in which teachers grade essays. When teachers evaluate a student's essay, they look for characteristics that identify an essay as an A, B, or C paper. Their expectations are likely based on their previous experience as a grader and on criteria for the assignment in question. In other words, teachers search for a match between the essay itself and the criteria for a particular grade or score. EssayScorer is trained to mimic this process. Savvas recommends that EssayScorer be used alongside teacher's valuable instruction as students learn the writing process.

Q: My students seem to be getting higher scores when they write online versus when they write on paper. Why?

A: Students are often better able to craft their responses online. As digital natives, students are more comfortable typing than they are writing. Revising drafts and moving text around is often easier when composing online, and the feedback students receive from EssayScorer helps students revise and improve their drafts.

Q: My student made a minor change and his/her score changed. Why?

A: EssayScorer computes a continuous score, such as 3.46, for each essay. That score is then transformed into a categorical score, such as 3, that is presented to the student. A minor change in an essay may move the continuous score just above or below the cut point for a given categorical score and so can result in a change in score.

Q: Why wasn't my student's essay scored?

A: EssayScorer compares new essays to essays in the system that were written by students at the grade level specified for the given prompt. EssayScorer has certain expectations about the content, style, and skill level of a newly submit essay as it compares this essay to other essays in the system. If an essay does not meet certain expectations, the

system will not be able accurately to return a score.

Some reasons an essay cannot be scored may include:

- The essay may be too short to evaluate the skill level of the student (essays must be more than 50 words and less than 1200 words).
- The essay may be much longer than expected for an essay.
- The essay may be off-topic or it may be highly creative.
- The essay may demonstrate a skill level that is very different from the expected skill level. For example, this can happen when a 6th grade student is asked to respond to a 12th grade prompt and vice versa.
- The essay may be in all capital letters and does not demonstrate appropriate formal writing style.
- The essay may include too much repeated content, such as copying and pasting the same paragraph over and over.
- The essay may not look like an essay. For example, it may be just a list of words or contain little to no punctuation.