

Development of a rubric to assess academic writing incorporating the popular plagiarism software Turnitin

Salim Razi

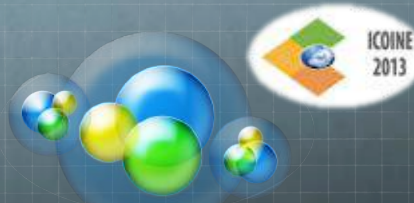
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Abstract

Concerns with plagiarism are an important barrier in assessment of academic papers. Although Turnitin appears to facilitate the detection of plagiarism to some extent, similarity reports should be approached with caution as they may not be sufficient to support allegations of plagiarism. The present study developed a 50-item rubric to simplify and standardize evaluation that also takes Turnitin results into consideration. At the end of the spring semester of 2011-2012 academic year, 161 freshmen's papers for the Advanced Reading and Writing Course at the Department of English Language Teaching of Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Turkey were assessed using the rubric. Validity and reliability were established for the rubric. The results indicated citation as a problematic aspect along with gender differences related with plagiarism concerns. It can be inferred that a fairer assessment procedure might be achieved by using the rubric along with Turnitin similarity results.

Key words:

academic writing, assessing academic papers, academic writing scoring rubric, plagiarism, plagiarism detector, Turnitin



Assessing academic writing: Development of a rubric and relating Turnitin reports

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Outline

- Assessment rubrics
- Electronic scoring
- Plagiarism detectors, Turnitin
- Problems with plagiarism detectors
- The study
 - Methodology
 - Findings and discussion
 - Conclusion and implications

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Introduction

- The problems in assessing writing are more than the solutions (Speck & Jones, 1998).
- Recent technological advances:
 - E.g., 'Turnitin' claims to prevent plagiarism and aid online grading.
 - It is still the lecturer who has to score the assignments.
- This study aims at:
 - developing a valid and reliable academic writing assessment rubric
 - by combining similarity reports retrieved from plagiarism detectors.



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Assessment rubrics

- Consider advantages and disadvantages (Hamp-Lyons, 2003; Weigle, 2002).
- A rubric should be developed by the lecturer who uses it (Comer, 2009).
- A rubric should meet the expectations of course outcomes.
- Moderating sessions: Interact to enable defining shared agreements (Comer, 2009).
- Very few universities design their own rubrics (Becker, 2010/2011).
- Integrate actual samples from student-papers through empirical investigations (Turner & Upshur, 2002).

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Types of assessment rubrics

- **Analytic scoring rubrics:**
 - In-depth analysis of the components such as unity, coherence, flow of ideas, formality level, etc.
 - increase reliability (Knoch, 2009).
 - develop better writing skills (Dappen, Isernhagen, & Anderson, 2008),
 - development of critical thinking sub-skills (Saxton, Belanger, & Becker, 2012).
- **Holistic scoring rubrics:**
 - quickly acknowledge the strengths of a writer rather than scrutinizing drawbacks (Cohen, 1994).
 - the ease of practicality; a popular assessment type.
 - greater validity (White, 1984) enable an overall examination.

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Primary trait vs. Multiple trait scoring

- **Primary trait scoring:**
 - deals with the vital features of particular types of writing; for instance, by considering differences among several types of essays.
 - the least common (Becker, 2010/2011).
 - equated to holistic scoring
- **Multiple-trait scoring:**
 - achieving an overall score via several subscores of various dimensions (Cooper, 1977).
 - associated with analytic scoring (Weigle, 2002).

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Use of assessment rubrics

- Using an assessment rubric as teaching material (Fyfe & Vella, 2012).
- Inter-rater reliability in the use of common assessment rubrics (Comer, 2009).
- Teachers' experiences have an impact on the evaluation process.
- Comer: Such a problem can be resolved by maintaining interaction among teachers.

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7

Rater training

- Subjective evaluation of writing.
- Scores are questionable; students' real writing skills (Knoch, 2007).
- Raters' teaching experiences have an impact on the scores that students attain (Weigle, 2002).
- Rating reliability: "a cornerstone of sound performance assessment" (Huang, 2008, p. 202).
- To increase the reliability of rubrics:
 - plan assessment procedure carefully before delivering the task.



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8

Electronic scoring

- Validity of the machine-markable scoring procedure (James, 2008).
- Bypassing human raters???
 - non-supportive results of relevant studies (e.g., McCurry, 2010; Sandene, et al. 2005).
- Researchers are soon expected to develop computer-raters that can score as reliably as human raters.



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9

Plagiarism detectors

- Electronic scoring is problematic but not online plagiarism detectors.
- Internet technology makes plagiarism a crucial problem:
 - specifically for university assignments (Walker, 2010).
- Detect expressions that do not originally belong to students.
- Refers to several databases:
 - web pages,
 - student papers,
 - articles, and
 - books.



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10

Problems with plagiarism detectors

- ⊗ Saves hours of work for the tutors (Walker, 2010)
- ⊗ Reliability of Turnitin similarity reports (Brown et al., 2007).
- To provide a fair evaluation:
 - Discriminate students who accidentally plagiarise because of their inadequacy in reporting others' ideas should be
 - from those who intentionally do so.
- The final responsibility belongs to the tutor.
- A well-developed rubric may provide a desirable impact with the support of Turnitin similarity reports.



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11

THE STUDY

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12

Methodology

- 'Transparent Academic Writing Rubric' (TAWR)**
- Research questions:**
- RQ1: In which category of TAWR do students receive lower scores?
 - RQ2: Do students repeating the course receive higher scores in comparison to regular students?
 - RQ3: Do male students plagiarise more than female students?

13

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Setting

- Conducted in the English Language Teaching Department of Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Turkey:
- In the spring semester of the 2011-2012 academic year.
- Appropriate to conduct the study with reference to the proficiency in English of the participants.



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14

Participants

- 272 students registered on the Advanced Reading and Writing Course
- 142 taking the course for the first time
- 130 repeating
- female learners (n = 172) / male learners (n = 100)
- Ages: 18-35, with an average of 21.
- Assignment: a 3000-word review paper.
- 82 students did not submit their assignments.
- 29 papers were rejected:
 - due to extensive use of two types of plagiarism, namely, verbatim and parloining.



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15

Acceptance and Rejection Data on the Students' Written Assignments

Groups	Gender	N	Accepted	Rejected	Total
Day	Female	26	23	3	37
	Male	11	4	7	
Evening	Female	34	33	1	51
	Male	17	14	3	
Repeat Day	Female	35	35	0	58
	Male	23	17	6	
Repeat Evening	Female	31	26	5	44
	Male	13	9	4	
Total		190	161	29	190

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16

INSTRUMENT VALIDITY

- Construct validity:**
 - A professor, head of the Foreign Languages Teaching Department at ÇOMU was consulted.
- Two assistant professors in the ÇOMU examined TAWR.
- Applicability of TAWR with languages other than English:**
 - An associate professor in the Turkish Language Teaching Department of ÇOMU was consulted.
 - Relevant studies considered assessing writing by developing rubrics related to English only (East, 2009).
- Reviewers' overall conclusion:**
 - Highlighted the validity of TAWR.

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17

Instrument reliability

- Cronbach alpha .89 for the 50-item TAWR.**
- Inter-rater reliability:**
 - An experienced instructor was trained on how to use TAWR.
 - Scored 55 samples selected from 161 student-papers.
 - Students' overall scores from the first assessment were considered.
 - Put into descending order and divided into smaller groups constituting of 15 papers.
 - 11 groups were constructed and the first five papers from each group were scored by the second rater to enable papers from all ranges to be checked.
 - Pearson's $r(55) = .97, p < .001$
- Intra-rater reliability:**
 - The researcher rescored the same 55 samples with a gap of 6 months.
 - Pearson's $r(55) = .99, p < .001$

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18

ITEMS IN TAWR


- TAWR: combination of several essential components of academic writing.
- None deals with the appropriate use of in-text citation rules.
- 50 items
- Each 2 points out of 100.
- Five categories of items:
 - introduction (8 items),
 - citation (16 items),
 - academic writing (8 items),
 - idea presentation (11 items),
 - mechanics (7 items).

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Procedures of data collection

Advanced Reading and Writing course contents suggested by Razi (2011).

- Fall semester:
 - 21 hours of classroom instruction.
 - APA in-text citation rules on blending other sources.
- Spring semester:
 - 21 hours of classroom instruction.
 - reviewing literature, parts of academic papers, headings, writing reference entries, and presenting tables and figures.



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1st step of the pre-screening

- Investigation of student portfolios:
 - Decide for further evaluation.
 - Students attended five-minute individual tutorial sessions on six occasions.
 - Kept records of step-by-step supplementary files:
 - a transcription of brainstorming on their topic, their assignment outline, the first and second drafts, and revised and proofread versions.
 - Investigation of portfolios and attendance of tutorials gave a general idea about their performance.

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2nd step of the pre-screening

- The length of the assignments was considered.
- The word-count:
 - ranged from 1220 to 5733 with an average of 2872.
- Overall scores were decreased in accordance with the number of words in their papers.

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Penalty Points for Immature Papers

Number of words	Penalty points
2700-3000	none
2699-2400	10
2399-2100	20
2099-1800	30
1799-1500	40
1499-1200	50
1199-900	60
899-600	70
599-300	80
less than 300	90


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3rd step of the pre-screening

- The quotation ratio was retrieved from Turnitin.
- Novice authors simply quote several expressions by adding them to each other without blending them into their discussion.
- Penalize excessive use of quotations.
- A ratio over 10% was regarded as excessive.

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4th step of the pre-screening



- Plagiarism concerns:
 - Similarity report does not necessarily indicate plagiarism.
 - In the case of detected plagiarism, Turnitin similarity reports were used as evidence for a penalty by subtracting the similarity ratio from the paper's overall score.
 - 1st year students were novice authors in academic writing:
 - Isolated instances of plagiarism were not considered plagiarism as such when consisting of short portions of copied but not cited expressions in a single sentence.

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Procedures of data analysis




- SPSS 20.0 was used.
- Descriptive statistics: demographic information and the items in TAWR.
- Cronbach's alpha reliability.
- Independent samples t-tests: gender differences, students' status either taking the course for the first time or not.
- Pearson correlation: student scores and several variables.

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Limitations of the study

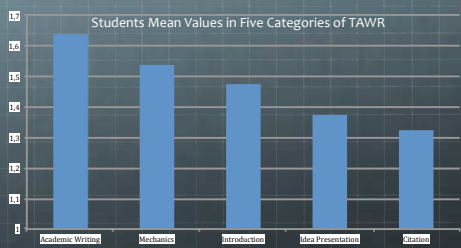
- The first limitation concerns Turnitin similarity reports.
 - It is possible to find sources which do not exist in their databases.
 - Similarity reports may not indicate actual plagiarism ratios (McKeever, 2006; Walker, 2010).
- The second limitation:
 - despite indicative results,
 - they may not be generalizable as data come from a single university in the Turkish tertiary context.



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Findings and discussion:

RQ1: In which category of TAWR do students receive lower scores?



Category	Mean Value
Academic Writing	~16.5
Mechanics	~15.5
Introduction	~14.5
Idea Presentation	~13.5
Statistic	~12.5

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RQ1: Items in TAWR

- Apart from the mean values in each category:
 - Highest scores for
 - topic selection
 - match of citations with reference entries
 - use of tables and figures
 - Lowest scores for
 - use of in-text citation rules
 - citing when necessary
 - ratio of quotes

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RQ2: Do students repeating the course receive higher scores in comparison to regular students?

- An independent samples t-test:
 - No significant differences between
 - regular students' ($M = 34.97$, $SD = 38.05$) and
 - repeating students' ($M = 33.01$, $SD = 30.78$),
 - $t(270) = .47$, $p = .64$ overall scores.
- !!! This analysis included students whose papers were rejected because of plagiarism along with students who did not submit their assignments.

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RQ2: Students' Submissions and Success in Terms of Regular/Repeating Status

Status	N	Submitted	Non-submitted	Fail	Succeed
Regular	142	88	54	85	57
Repeating	130	102	28	83	47
Total	272	190	82	168	104

- The incidents of failure and success were similar to each other in terms of being either a regular or repeating student.
- Non-submission was almost doubled that of regular students.
- This does not necessarily mean that repeating students possessed an advantage in terms of being successful on the course.

31

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RQ2: Evaluation is a continuous process

- Continuous evaluation: brainstormed items, outline, drafts, revised and proofread versions.
- Such a procedure in a writing class includes basic steps that are essential in writing (Rohman & Wlecke, 1964).
- The lecturer provided feedback in tutorials:
 - The course structure combined formative and summative assessments.
- Such a process of writing integrates reading skills:
 - The assessment benefits in terms of authenticity and validity.

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32



RQ2: Number of non-attendance hours to the course and overall scores

- Pearson correlation analysis:
 - significant negative weak and low correlation
 - $r(88) = -.32, p = .003$
- Non-attendance of the course resulted in lower scores for 10% of the students.
- !!! Repeating students were excluded as they did not have to attend the lectures.

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33

RQ2: Number of attendances to the tutorials and overall scores

- Pearson correlation analysis:
 - significant weak and low correlation
 - $r(88) = .48, p < .001$
- Attending the tutorials regularly provided the opportunity of getting higher scores for 23% of the students.
- !!! Repeating students were disregarded.

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34

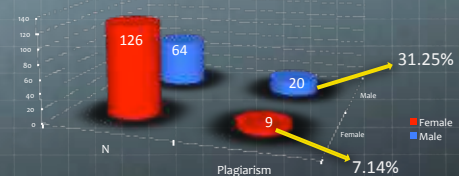
RQ2: Conclusion

- The students repeating the course were exposed to this process far more than the others:
 - Their exposure did not contribute to their scores either negatively or positively.
- The explanation:
 - Submitting written assignments does not guarantee receiving beneficial feedback from the lecturer.

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35

RQ3: Do male students plagiarise more than female ones?



- Pearson correlation analysis between Turnitin reports and overall scores.
 - significant negative moderate correlation $r(161) = .51, p < .001, r^2 = .26$
 - The increased amount of similarity reduced the assigned score.
- Thus, male students seem more prone to plagiarism than female students.

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36

RQ3: Do male students plagiarise more than female ones?

- !!! No gender differences on plagiarism in literature (e.g., Walker, 2010).
- Parallel with literature:
 - First-year undergraduates' problems with plagiarism due to their ignorance in academic writing (e.g., Park, 2003; Yeo & Chien, 2007).
 - E.g., Karlins et al. (1988):
 - one of the first to investigate plagiarism.
 - revealed that 3% of the students plagiarised by copying the works of previous students.
- Students might not feel that cheating on assignments is a serious problem (Brent & Atkinson, 2011).

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37

RQ3: Do male students plagiarise more than female ones?

- Independent samples t-test on overall scores:
 - significant differences
 - male ($M = 25.66$, $SD = 32.96$)
 - female ($M = 38.90$, $SD = 34.88$)
 - $t(270) = 3.08$, $p = .002$, $d = 0.39$
 - a moderate effect size.
- Plagiarism lowers male students' overall scores.
- !!! This analysis involved students whose papers were rejected because of plagiarism along with students who did not submit their assignments.

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38

Conclusions

- Notwithstanding the limitations,
- TAWR appeared to succeed as a scoring rubric with a high degree of validity and reliability.



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39

Conclusion 1

- 'Citation' was the most problematic aspect of writing a review paper followed by 'idea presentation'.
- Lecturers should focus more on these two issues in their curriculum.



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40

Conclusion 2

- Repeating the course does not automatically result in receiving better scores.
- Students gain more maturity with the help of other ELT related courses in the second year:
 - Academic writing requires separate skills that can only be gained by regular attendance at lectures and tutorials.



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41

Conclusion 3

- Turnitin similarity reports have an impact on students' overall scores when writing academic papers.
- Provides evidence on the contribution of Turnitin to a fair evaluation process.
- Identify how to approach these reports:
 - including or excluding
 - references,
 - small matches,
 - quoted expressions, etc.



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42

Conclusion 4

- Male students plagiarise more than females.
- Evidence to male students less well performance in higher education (e.g., Severiens & ten Dam, 2012).
- Male learners more suspicious in terms of verbatim and purloining.
- Fair assessment:**
 - Students who submit their assignments deserve to receive a score greater than '0'???
 - Consider students' goodwill.

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Implication: Reasons of plagiarism

- University students show a tendency towards plagiarising.
- Investigate reasons for plagiarising.
- Previous research studies provide reasons:
 - Monitor continuously as technological developments might have changed the reasons for plagiarism.

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Implication: Prevention of plagiarism

- Prevention of plagiarism requires cooperation of colleagues.
- Institutions should take precautions and encourage lecturers to follow them.
- Individual attempts would be fruitless.
- Encourage plagiarism detectors:
 - the participation of each lecturer into the database brings new opportunities to detect student plagiarism.
- Universities should develop their own campus-wide writing programme assessment (Good et al., 2012).

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Implication: Deterrent impact of Turnitin

- More than a quarter of the students did not submit their assignments.
- Hypothesis for further research:**
 - These students preferred not to submit a plagiarised paper as their efforts would be in vain.

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Implication: TAWR as a teaching material

- Existing rubrics: holistic evaluation.
- This might be problematic for two basic reasons.
 - Variations among raters: Scores may not reflect actual writing skills.
 - Students cannot receive feedback through holistic scoring.
- TAWR may assist lecturers to adopt assessment for learning to accelerate student learning (Davison & Leung, 2009).
- Further research:**
 - The effectiveness of using TAWR as a teaching material.
- Similar application by Fyfe and Vella (2012).

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Implication: Transparency in providing feedback

- Provide feedback throughout the term on the development of student papers (Comer, 2009).
- Share a copy of TAWR before submission.
- Provide feedback through TAWR on the final works.
- Students can learn the strong and weak points in their papers.
- Diagnostic assessment: detailed analysis of papers.
- The transparency in the evaluation also encourages lecturers to adopt a more detailed evaluation process.

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Implication:
Turnitin in writing process


- Turnitin:
 - Not only a plagiarism detector (Dahl, 2007).
 - Helps throughout writing process:
 - by enabling the submission of drafts and then
 - working on them by considering similarity reports.
- Further research: investigate the impact of Turnitin in the writing process.



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Implication:
Avoiding Turnitin


- The criticism against using plagiarism detection software:
 - lecturers aim to cope with plagiarism without using such detectors (Brown, Jordan, Rubin, & Arome, 2010).
- TAWR might be beneficial for those:
 - as it might be used as classroom teaching material instead to enable student evaluation of their own papers.



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Implication: Motivation


- The ratio of success is rather low in the Advanced Reading and Writing Course.
- Students need to be more motivated to write their assignments.
- Relate the task to real-life situations.
- 68 students were encouraged to publish.
- Many of the students reacted to this positively.
- Some had the opportunity to publish online.
- Further research:
 - Deeper analysis into motivational factors.



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Implication:
Bologna Declaration

- TAWR:
 - Easy-to-score.
 - Contributes to validity:
 - Reduces inter-rater variances.
- European universities aim to create a coherent European System of Higher Education through the Bologna Declaration.
- ECTS requires:
 - identifying clear and consistent course outcomes and
 - appropriate assessment procedures.
- Follow similar assessment procedures to maximize inter-rater reliability.



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Evaluation criteria	Point(s)		
	Poor	Acceptable	Excellent
INTRODUCTION			
1 Topic selection	0	1	2
2 Narrowing down the topic	0	1	2
3 Title of the paper	0	1	2
4 Headings and subheadings	0	1	2
5 Abstract	0	1	2
6 Key words	0	1	2
7 Introduction to the topic	0	1	2
8 Mentioning the aims in the introduction	0	1	2

Evaluation criteria	Point(s)		
	Poor	Acceptable	Excellent
CITATION			
9 Citing when necessary	0	1	2
10 Introducing paraphrases and summaries (variations in the style)	0	1	2
11 Restructuring in paraphrases/summaries	0	1	2
12 Rewording in paraphrases/summaries	0	1	2
13 Introducing quotes (variations in the style)	0	1	2
14 Use of quotations	0	1	2
15 Citing quotes appropriately	0	1	2
16 Ratio of quotes	0	1	2
17 Sufficiency of the number of cited sources	0	1	2
18 Reliability of the cited sources	0	1	2
19 Appropriate use of secondary sources	0	1	2
20 Ratio of secondary source use (abundance reduces the reliability of the author)	0	1	2
21 Appropriate use of in-text citation rules	0	1	2
22 Writing reference entries	0	1	2
23 Order of reference entries	0	1	2
24 Exact match of citations with reference entries	0	1	2

Evaluation criteria	Point(s)		
	Poor	Acceptable	Excellent
ACADEMIC WRITING			
25 Focussing on the issue (omitting personal pronouns)	0	1	2
26 Appropriate use of abbreviations	0	1	2
27 Avoiding contractions (e.g. don't)	0	1	2
28 Avoiding extremeness (e.g., use of must)	0	1	2
29 Avoiding slang, jargon and clichés	0	1	2
30 Use of words with precise meaning	0	1	2
31 Use of objective language	0	1	2
32 Balanced use of passive forms	0	1	2

Evaluation criteria	Point(s)		
	Poor	Acceptable	Excellent
IDEA PRESENTATION			
33 Appropriate use of markers (e.g., firstly)	0	1	2
34 Appropriate use of linking devices (e.g., however)	0	1	2
35 Flow of ideas	0	1	2
36 Paragraph unity	0	1	2
37 Overall unity	0	1	2
38 Paragraph coherence	0	1	2
39 Overall coherence	0	1	2
40 Appropriate length of paragraphs	0	1	2
41 Complexity of the sentences	0	1	2
42 Relevance of conclusions with the discussion	0	1	2
43 Drawing effective conclusions	0	1	2

Evaluation criteria	Point(s)		
	Poor	Acceptable	Excellent
MECHANICS			
44 Paper format	0	1	2
45 Grammar	0	1	2
46 Spelling	0	1	2
47 Punctuation	0	1	2
48 Vocabulary selection	0	1	2
49 Use of tables and figures	0	1	2
50 Length of the paper	0	1	2