Writing rubrics for elementary students: five free ones for K–2 and 3–5

Peabody blog · Teaching · updated 2026-10-30

Free writing rubrics for elementary students: paragraph, opinion, narrative, informational and kindergarten writing, with what each scores in K–2 and 3–5.

A writing rubric for elementary students works best when it matches the kind of writing and the age of the writer: three plain levels with no points for K–2, and four levels with points for grades 3–5. Peabody Teach has five free, printable writing rubrics built that way: paragraph, opinion, narrative, informational and kindergarten writing. Each one also has a 6–8 band and an "I can" checklist for students. Peabody is free through the end of 2026, and the rubrics need no sign-in.

This post shows what each rubric scores in K–2 and 3–5, why the youngest band has no points, and how to turn any of them into a checklist students use while they write.

Why K–2 gets three levels and no points

A six-year-old can't do much with "Approaching, 2 points". They can do a lot with "Wow!", "Yes" and "Not yet". So every Peabody rubric's K–2 band has exactly those three levels, no points by default, and cells written in a child's voice, short enough to read aloud. "Not yet" says where the writer is now without calling it a failure.

In the K–2 paragraph rubric, for example, the three cells for details read:

- Wow! "I write three or more sentences that tell more about my topic."
- Yes "I write two sentences that tell more."
- Not yet "I write one sentence, or my sentences are about something else."

If your school needs a number, the rubric maker has a switch that adds points to the K–2 band.

Grades 3–5 use four levels with points: Exceeds (4), Meets (3), Approaching (2) and Beginning (1). In each 3–5 writing rubric, one row counts twice, the one that carries the most weight for that kind of writing.

The five rubrics at a glance

- Rubric: Paragraph · K–2 rows: 4 · 3–5 rows (the one that counts twice): 5 (supporting details) · 3–5 total: 24
- Rubric: Opinion · K–2 rows: 4 · 3–5 rows (the one that counts twice): 5 (reasons and facts) · 3–5 total: 24
- Rubric: Narrative · K–2 rows: 5 · 3–5 rows (the one that counts twice): 5 (sequence of

events) · 3–5 total: 24
• Rubric: Informational · K–2 rows: 5 · 3–5 rows (the one that counts twice): 5 (facts and details) · 3–5 total: 24
• Rubric: Kindergarten writing · K–2 rows: 5 · 3–5 rows (the one that counts twice): 4 (sentences) · 3–5 total: 20

Paragraph writing

K–2: Topic sentence, Details, Closing sentence, and Neat sentences (capitals, periods and spaces).

3–5: Topic sentence, Supporting details (counts twice), Closing sentence, Flow, and Conventions. The top Flow cell asks for varied linking words (first, also, for example, finally). The top closing-sentence cell asks the writer to restate the main idea in new words, and the Approaching cell names the common slip: a closing sentence that repeats the topic sentence word for word.

Use it for any one-paragraph task: a short answer, a daily prompt, a summary. The page suggests it early in the year, before multi-paragraph essays.

Opinion writing

K–2: My opinion, My reasons, My ending, and Capitals and periods. The top reasons cell is "I give two or more reasons, using 'because.'"

3–5: Opinion, Reasons and facts (counts twice), Organization, Voice, and Conventions. Voice is the row that separates a list of reasons from a piece that persuades: the top cell asks for "confident, convincing words that speak right to the reader."

The 6–8 band adds a Counterclaim row, for when your fifth graders move up.

Narrative writing

K–2: My beginning, What happened, Feelings and details, My ending, and Capitals and periods. The top "What happened" cell is "I tell three or more things in order, using first, next and last."

3–5: Beginning, Sequence of events (counts twice), Details and dialogue, Ending, and Conventions. The conventions row asks for quotation marks to be punctuated correctly, since dialogue is where third graders first meet them.

It fits a personal narrative, a small-moment story or a made-up adventure. One of the lines to say to students: zoom in on one small moment instead of a whole day.

Informational writing

K–2: My topic, My facts, Pictures and labels, My ending, and Capitals and periods. The picture row matters at this age: the top cell is "My picture has labels that teach something new."

3–5: Topic, Facts and details (counts twice), Organization, Vocabulary, and Conventions. The Vocabulary row asks students to use topic words correctly and explain each one for the reader.

Use it for an all-about book, a how-to, an animal report, or an explanation at the end of a science unit.

Kindergarten writing

The K–2 band is the heart of this one: My picture, Letters and sounds, Spaces, Capital and period, and Telling my idea. The cells follow how early writing grows. In Letters and sounds, Not yet is "I write some letters, but they do not match the sounds yet", Yes is "I write the first and last sounds in my words", and Wow! is a letter for every sound plus some words spelled the right way. In Telling my idea, Not yet is "I tell my idea out loud, but not in words yet."

The page suggests scoring the same rubric in fall, winter and spring and keeping the pages together, so growth is easy to see. Its 3–5 and 6–8 bands keep the same criteria for older students just starting out in English, or anyone who needs a simpler writing rubric.

The "I can" checklist

Every row of every rubric has an "I can" line: "I can write a topic sentence that tells the main idea", "I can put spaces between my words", "I can give reasons and back them up with facts and details". On each rubric page, "Print the 'I can' checklist" prints those lines on their own, one band at a time.

Here are some ways to use it:

1. Before writing: read the checklist aloud and talk through one line a day.
2. While writing: keep it on the desk beside the draft, as the narrative page suggests.
3. Before handing in: students check each line, or color the rubric cell that matches their work.
4. In the maker: the same "I can" lines become a single-point rubric, with a column on one side for areas for growth and on the other for evidence of going beyond.

How to print or change a rubric

Open a rubric page, pick the band and press Print for a landscape copy with Name and Date lines (plus a Total in 3–5). Copy for Google Docs copies the band as a table for Docs or Word. Open in the maker loads it into the rubric maker, where you can change a word or add a row;

what you change stays in your browser. The criteria are generic, with no standards codes, so they fit any curriculum.

If your class needs something to write about, Peabody's free stories make good mentor texts for a narrative or an opinion piece ("Which character made the best choice?").

Questions

What is a good writing rubric for elementary students?

One that matches the kind of writing and the writer's age. For K–2, three levels in a child's words (Wow!, Yes, Not yet) with no points. For 3–5, four levels with points and one row that counts twice. Peabody's paragraph, opinion, narrative, informational and kindergarten rubrics are built that way.

Should a kindergarten writing rubric have points?

It doesn't need them. Peabody's K–2 rubrics have no points by default, so the focus stays on what the child can do next. If your school needs a score, a switch in the rubric maker adds points.

What is an "I can" writing checklist?

The rubric's goals written in the student's voice, one line per row, such as "I can put spaces between my words." Students use it before and while they write. Every Peabody rubric prints one.

Are these writing rubrics free?

Yes. Each prints, copies into Google Docs and opens in the rubric maker with no sign-in, and Peabody is free through the end of 2026.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/writing-rubric-for-elementary-students