advisory board which included classroom teachers set
the initial specifications for the skills to be measured.
Test development committees composed of California
college and school faculty members wrote and selected
all of the questions in the three sections of the test.
The three sections of the CBEST include a section
testing competency in mathematics, a section testing
reading, and a section testing writing.
The reading and mathematics sections of the test
are composed entirely of multiple-choice questions.
The writing section consists of two essay questions —
one calls for exposition, the other for a personal
experience essay. Each essay is graded by two
readers who are college professors from public and
private institutions in California or English teachers
from California elementary and secondary schools. The
essays are scored independently by the two readers,
who assign a score of 4 to a passing essay, a score of
3 to a marginally passing essay, a score of 2 to a
marginally failing essay, or a score of 1 to a failing
essay. In assigning a score, teachers refer to predetermined grading criteria for each of the score categories.
According to Rankin, the 4-point scale was adopted
because the committee felt it was important to
make really fine distinctions in the upper ranges. The
committee was primarily interested in eliminating
those candidates who are clearly unable to handle the
written idiom at all.
Because different editions of the test may vary in
difficulty, raw scores are converted to scales that take
differences in the difficulty of test questions into
account. The passing score on each section of the test
is a scaled score of 41, which means that a total score
(the sum of reading, mathematics, and writing scaled scores) of 123 is required for passing status. It is not possible to pass the CBEST if any section score is
below 37, no matter how high the total score may be.
The test performance standards for passing were
established by the Superintendent of Public Instruction.
To pass the writing section, applicants must receive
at least a score of 12 (a score of 3 from both
readers on each of the two essay questions). Roughly
70% of those who take the writing section make a
scale score of 41 or above and pass. The pass rate for
the other two sections is also roughly 70%.
Applicants who do not pass the CBEST may retake
the examination as many times as they choose, and if
they have obtained a passing score (41 or higher) on
any particular section of the test, they do not have to
retake that section. When tests are retaken, all sections
that were not passed on previous tests must be
taken.
In concluding his discussion, Rankin commented
that he is generally impressed with the quality of the
prospective teachers who take the test, saying that
their performance is superior to that of the average
undergraduate. According to Rankin, the test helps to
ensure that students will only be admitted to the pro-
fession if they are above the median in their disciplines.

HOLISTIC SCORING AND READER TRAINING

Speakers: Bob Christopher, Ramapo College, New Jersey
           Carol Sweedler-Brown, San Diego State University
           Agnes Yamada, California State University, Dominguez Hills
           Introducer/Recorder: Dick Worthen, Diablo Valley College

Bob Christopher opened the session with a description of holistic scoring. Holistic scoring of students' writing forces the evaluator to focus on the rhetorical aspects of the paper and encourages the designing of assignments that set up rhetorical contexts for tasks. It encourages consensus on standards and discourages idiosyncratic evaluations of essays. Papers are compared to each other in terms of the whole rhetorical performance.

The holistic process contrasts with criterion-referenced essay reading. Here papers are evaluated against a scoring guide. This insures somewhat more consistency from test administration to test administration. Theoretically, with criterion-referenced reading, all students could earn the highest score or all could get the lowest score. Actually the two methods are not mutually exclusive and in practice the two often merge.

The training of readers in a department affects more than the scoring procedures. It requires a commitment to achieving agreement. This in turn is a commitment to a means of achieving agreement. It is important that all readers know about and participate generously in preparation for the reading, in effect taking part in the "research" on composition. Reader training, the commitment to subjecting student writing to evaluation, is a precursor to evaluation of the curriculum, raising such questions as "How does the rating process affect course goals, content, and pedagogy?"

While faculties which have adopted holistic scoring
as a means of determining success at the test from the
basic composition course tend to develop indigenous peripheral practices, most use something like the following as the core procedure. A Leader brings together the Table Leaders, experienced readers who are familiar with the procedure, for an intensive tuneup. Table Leaders will supervise a table of four or five readers. The holistic reading's preliminary activities consist of two stages: 1) the training of Table Leaders and 2) the training of readers.

Carol Sweedler-Brown and Agnes Yamada discussed these two activities in detail. At the first stage, the Leader brings the Table Leaders together and they read a large corpus of papers all written for the same assignment. Assuming the papers are to be graded on a scale of 1-6, all papers are read by each Table Leader and given a ranking number. The reader, of course, does not know the score given by other readers. Those papers that evoked the most consistent scores become candidates for the smaller group of prototype papers for each score. The group then discusses these papers and their characteristics. These six groups of prototype papers become the (Continued on page 8)
NEW APPROACHES TO PRIMARY TRAIT SCORING

In addition to the primary trait for the specified type of writing, secondary traits can also be identified and scored. The "evaluating a short story" essays were classified according to the type of evidence (content of the story and personal associations) used in elaborating criteria. In the expressive narrative about an unforgettable experience, secondary traits measured were presenting details about people in the scene and integrating expressions of feeling. These primary and secondary trait scales provide specific instructional information, unlike common analytical scales categories such as focus, coherence, and elaboration.

Mary Barr discussed the effects and goals of writing assessment in San Diego public schools. Teachers thought that prior forms of assessment were not measuring what was important to teach. To provide more useful writing assessment, and to avoid teaching to tests aimed at a limited portion of the curriculum (the business letter, for example), the following goals were identified:

1) To encourage more purposeful writing,
2) To encourage more writing instruction,
3) To link thinking with writing,
4) To show student growth,
5) To pinpoint program needs.

Primary trait scoring tasks and guides tied to the curriculum at each grade level were developed. In addition, an "Attitudes Toward Writing" survey was conducted during the assessment. A district sampling of each grade level's tasks was scored and the data compiled for the district report. Then teachers at each site were trained to score all the papers at their site. Thus each site could compare its results with the district-wide results.

In future years the San Diego school district plans to use different writing tasks and scoring guides over a four year cycle so that sixteen types of writing currently being taught will be assessed. One of the negative effects of assessment, the narrow focus on a single or limited type of writing, will thereby be reduced or avoided.

Both speakers concluded that if one believes that writing assessment should reinforce current knowledge about what constitutes good writing instruction, and if one thinks that different types of writing possess definable characteristics, primary trait scoring should be a useful tool.

HOLOGISTIC SCORING (continued)

papers for the second stage, the training of readers.
Each table of four or five readers is given a duplicated set of five papers so that each table does a common reading. Readers are asked to rank them and then the Head Reader announces the scores previously given those papers by the Table Leaders. After time to absorb the implications of the first reading by the readers, they are given another set and the process is repeated. There follows a general discussion of the papers and their grading. Then the process continues.
The readers are asked to adapt their reading toward the emerging norms.
All this is preliminary to the actual reading of the exit papers. Each paper is read by two readers and a difference of more than two points calls for a third reader. The Table Leader's job is to check for erratic scoring, call it to the attention of readers, and generally encourage consistency and rigor at his or her table.