

International Affairs, MIA

Program Description

The Master's Program in International Affairs educates principled leaders in public and international affairs by introducing students to theoretical and practical concepts and knowledge regarding international affairs and preparing them to be able to produce policy-relevant analysis and communicate that analysis in written and oral form.

Outcome 1 – Written Communication

Students will be able to prepare a written product for the target audience that presents the bottom-line up front.

Measure 1.1 – Measure #1 BLUFs in Briefs

Data Collection: This measure assesses a student's ability to prepare message-driven documents, i.e., long, or short briefs, using a rubric that emphasizes formats, organization, and writing style for decision makers. Message-driven documents include an executive summary for the intended reader, emphasizing the bottom-line up front, also known as BLUF.

The department will designate at least two INTA courses from which 10-15 artifacts will be collected from graduating students. The two courses selected for this assessment are INTA 613 "Diplomatic Negotiations," in which students submit a 2-page policy briefing memorandum for the Secretary of State's meeting with the UN Secretary General, to include a strategic objective for the meeting, key topics to raise, and, space permitting, any "if raised" points; and INTA 689 "The Indo-Pacific and American Diplomacy," in which students submit a 5-page policy memo to the President on a topic of importance in the Indo-Pacific region requiring U.S. action.

The department graduates approximately 80 students each year, thus we believe that 10-15 artifacts will provide a representative sample for our assessment purposes. Artifacts will include papers prepared in both courses, each beginning with an executive summary and designed for decision makers. Artifacts will be evaluated according to how well each communicates the bottom-line up front. These artifacts will be evaluated by a committee of faculty (not including the instructor), using the MIA Briefing BLUF rubric, which describes 5 standards for assessing BLUF. Each artifact will receive 3 reviews. Faculty will receive guidance and resources prior to beginning the review process to ensure inter-rater reliability.

Methodology or data analysis strategy: The department head will analyze the results from the reviewing committee using their scores and feedback on assessing BLUFs in both briefing papers (Measure #1) and in book reports (Measure #2), all of which assess using a BLUF rubric. Results from both measures will be disaggregated to allow comparison between the two types of artifacts. Analysis of combined and disaggregated data will help us identify weaknesses and areas for improvement in student learning when using BLUF in writing for different audiences and in different formats.

This is a new measure for the MIA degree program; therefore, AY 2023 is the first year we collected data using this metric. From that information and with the input of faculty, the department head will draft a plan for student learning improvement to implement and will report

findings to MIA faculty before the next academic year to close the loop on assessment and to seek additional insights with interpretation and action plans.

[See MIA Briefing BLUF Rubric under *Supporting Documentation*.]

Target 1.1

The target is a score of 6.5 or better on the 8-point scale (or 32.5 or better out of 40) set out in the attached MIA Briefing BLUF Rubric. The minimally acceptable student performance is 5 out of 8 (or 25 out of 40). It is expected that all students will attain the minimally acceptable performance and that two-thirds of the students will attain the target score.

Finding 1.1: Not Met

MEASURE #1 BLUFs in Briefs

Based on the analysis of results given in the attached summary tables and the scores in the attached Excel spreadsheet, it appears that the average overall score for the 2-page and 5-page briefs at 5.79 falls below the target score of 6.5. For the minimum acceptable performance of 5 out of 8, 14 out of 18 achieved this score (approx. 75 percent) and 5 out of 18 achieved the target of 6.5 or better (approx. 25 percent), both below our targets for this measure.

For the 2-page briefs, the average overall score is 5.77, which is slightly below the minimally acceptable performance of 5 out of 8. This suggests that while the performance is not exceptionally poor, there is room for improvement in all categories of the brief. The highest scoring category is the Executive Summary, with an average score of 6.27, while the lowest scoring category is Organization, with an average score of 5.60. Overall, there is a need for students to demonstrate a better understanding of context and purpose, stronger organization, improved design, and better attention to style and mechanics.

Similarly, for the 5-page briefs, the average overall score is 5.6, also falling below the minimally acceptable performance. The highest scoring category is the Context & Purpose category, with an average score of 5.78, while the lowest scoring categories are Organization and Design, both with an average score of 5.44. This indicates a need for improvement in organization and design structure, as well as attention to style and mechanics.

Implications of findings are discussed in the next section.

Average Scores for 2-page briefs, n=10

Context & Purpose	Executive Summary	Organization	Design	Style & Mechanics	Overall Total Score	Average Artifact Category Score
5.93	6.27	5.60	6.30	5.77	29.87	5.97
out of 8	out of 8	out of 8	out of 8	out of 8	out of 40	out of 8

Average Scores for 5-page briefs, n=8

Context & Purpose	Executive Summary	Organization	Design	Style & Mechanics	Overall Total Score	Average Artifact Category Score
5.78	5.72	5.44	5.44	5.61	28	5.6
out of 8	out of 8	out of 8	out of 8	out of 8	out of 40	out of 8

This PLO and measure are new this 23-24 assessment cycle. Therefore, there is no data for comparison purposes.

However, Implications of current 22-23 findings regarding **BLUFs in briefs** include the following: (1) For the 2-page briefs there is a need for students to demonstrate a better understanding of context and purpose, stronger organization, improved design, and better attention to style and mechanics. (2) For the 5-page briefs there is a need for improvement in organization and design structure, as well as attention to style and mechanics.

Overall, given the goal of achieving a score of 6.5 or better and the expectation that all students should meet the minimally acceptable performance, it is clear that further work is required to enhance the overall quality of both the 2-page and 5-page briefs. Focus should be placed on improving context and purpose, organizing the content effectively, enhancing the design elements, and ensuring attention to detail in terms of style and mechanics. By addressing these areas, it is possible to improve the scores and meet the desired target of 6.5 or better on the 8-point scale.

Measure 1.2 – Measure #2 BLUFs in Book Reports

Data Collection: This measure assesses a student’s ability to use BLUF in papers prepared for more academic audiences, e.g., essays or book reports. The BLUF criteria for academic writing are the same as those for the message-driven briefs; however, the criteria definitions for the academic papers, in this case, book reports, more precisely align with the written product assigned.

The department will designate at least one INTA course from which 10-15 artifacts will be collected from graduating students. The course selected for this assessment is INTA 689 “Covert Action,” in which students prepare a 5-7 page analysis on a book of their choosing from the intelligence and covert action literature. The rubric is designed to assess how well the student can communicate the effects of covert action on foreign policy, emphasizing BLUF in the organization, design, and writing style in a book report.

The department graduates approximately 80 students each year, thus we believe that 10-15 artifacts will provide a representative sample for our assessment purposes. These artifacts will be evaluated by a committee of faculty (not including the instructor), using the MIA Book Report BLUF rubric, which describes 5 standards for assessing BLUF. Each artifact will receive 3

reviews. Faculty will receive guidance and resources prior to beginning the review process to ensure inter-rater reliability.

Methodology or data analysis strategy: The department head will analyze the results from the reviewing committee using their scores and feedback on assessing BLUFs in both briefing papers (Measure #1) and in book reports (Measure #2), all of which use a BLUF rubric. Results from both measures will be disaggregated to allow comparison between the two types of artifacts. Analysis of combined and disaggregated data will help us identify weaknesses and areas for improvement in student learning when using BLUF in writing for different audiences and in different formats.

This is a new measure for the MIA degree program; therefore, AY 2023 is the first year we collected data using this metric. From that information and with the input of faculty, the department head will draft a plan for student learning improvement to implement and will report findings to MIA faculty before the next academic year to close the loop on assessment and to seek additional insights with interpretation and action plans.

[See MIA Book Report BLUF Rubric under *Supporting Documentation*.]

Target 1.2

The target is a score of 6.5 or better on the 8-point scale (or 32.5 or better out of 40) set out in the attached Book Report BLUF Rubric. The minimally acceptable student performance is 5 out of 8 (or 25 out of 40). It is expected that all students will attain the minimally acceptable performance and that two-thirds of the students will attain the target score.

Finding 1.2: Not Met

Measure #2 BLUFs in Book Reports

Based on the analysis of results given in the attached summary tables and scores in the attached Excel spreadsheet, it appears that the average overall score for the book reports at 4.37 out of 8 falls below the target score of 6.5. For the minimum acceptable performance of 5 out of 8 (or 25 out of 40), 5 out of 18 achieved this score (approx. 28 percent) and 0 out of 18 achieved the target of 6.5 (or 32.5) or better, both below our targets for this measure.

The average overall score for the book reports is 4.37, which is significantly lower than both the minimally acceptable performance of 5 out of 8 and the target score of 6.5. This indicates that there is significant room for improvement in all categories of the book reports.

Given the individual categories, the highest scoring category is Style & Mechanics with an average score of 4.79, while the lowest scoring category is Design with an average score of 3.77. This suggests that attention to style and mechanics, while better than other categories, can still be improved, and there is a particular need for enhancing the design aspect of the book reports.

Further, the context and purpose, executive summary, and organization categories all have average scores between 4.13 and 4.58. This indicates that there is room for improvement in these areas to provide a clearer context, more concise summaries, and better organization of the book reports.

Further discussion about implications of findings is discussed in the next section.

Average Scores for Book Reports, n=18

Context & Purpose	Executive Summary	Organization	Design	Style & Mechanics	Overall Total Score	Average Artifact Category Score
4.58	4.13	4.58	3.77	4.79	21.85	4.37
out of 8	out of 8	out of 8	out of 8	out of 8	out of 40	out of 8

Implications of Measure #2 BLUFs in book reports

This PLO and measure are new this 23-24 assessment cycle. Therefore, there is no data for comparison purposes.

However, implications of current 22-23 findings regarding BLUFs in book reports include that meeting the target score of 6.5 or better, significant enhancements are required in all aspects of the book reports. Attention should be paid to improving the understanding of context and purpose, crafting more concise and effective executive summaries, organizing the content in a logical and coherent manner, enhancing the design elements, and refining style and mechanics. By focusing on these areas of improvement, it is possible to raise the overall scores and meet the desired target of 6.5 on the 8-point scale.

Comparing findings from all 3 data sets—the 2-page briefs, 5-page briefs, and book reports—show that all 3 fail to meet the target scores (see table below). This suggests a need for improvement in areas such as context and purpose, executive summaries, organization, design, and style and mechanics in order to meet the desired scores. Further efforts should be made to raise the overall quality of the submissions and meet the targets set out in the respective rubrics.

Average Scores for all 3 artifacts: 2-page brief, 5-page brief, book report, n=36

Context & Purpose	Executive Summary	Organization	Design	Style & Mechanics	Overall Total Score	Average Artifact Category Score
5.28	5.14	5.11	4.93	5.22	25.68	5.14
out of 8	out of 8	out of 8	out of 8	out of 8	out of 40	out of 8

Use of Results

The MIA assessment committee, after analyzing the 22-23 assessment scores and feedback, has developed an action plan aimed at enhancing writing skills across all rubric categories. This plan includes teaching students how to use the Bottom Line Up Front (BLUF) approach in both brief and expository writing.

The action plan introduces a new graduate-level writing course for MIA students. The course will focus on improving students' BLUF writing skills, aligning its objectives with the criteria outlined in the rubric used for scoring in the 22-23 assessment plan. The course will emphasize:

- Framing a message suitable for the intended audience, purpose, and context.
- Writing an executive summary that presents crucial information upfront using the BLUF approach.
- Organizing information in a document and within each paragraph in descending order of importance, using topic sentences to convey the paragraph's BLUF.
- Designing a document that effectively highlights critical information.
- Using a high-impact writing style for effective communication with busy readers

This elective course is scheduled for a pilot run in the spring semester of 2025. Artifacts produced in this course may also be used in the AY 24-25 assessment cycle to evaluate the impact of the new teaching and learning strategies on the students' ability to apply BLUF writing skills.

The assessment results will help identify best practices for enhancing BLUF writing skills. These include effective teaching strategies, engaging learning activities, and appropriate assessments that can be implemented on a broader scale. Once best practices are identified from the assessment results, adjustments will be made to the degree program to ensure all students have the opportunity to learn and practice these skills.

Timeline

This elective course will be offered to MIA students, with a pilot run scheduled for the spring semester of 2024.

Responsible parties

The individuals responsible for this course are Cindy Raisor, the course instructor (MIA lecturer, Bush School Writing Program director, and MIA assessment committee chair), and Dr. David Bearce, the MIA department head and assessment program coordinator.

Rationale for improving student learning

The course will be designed to address the BLUF writing skills as discussed by the assessment committee based on their analysis of the 22-23 assessment scores and feedback. It will apply best practices for teaching and assessing these BLUF writing skills. The faculty member teaching the course will evaluate progress on student learning at the end of the course using the same BLUF rubric used for assessment. This course summative assessment should identify which criteria on the rubric demonstrated improved student learning and which may need further attention. The instructor will also

assess the course design and instructional strategies to determine what is working and what changes are needed to improve student learning for the next course offering.

Artifacts produced in the new course may be also used in subsequent assessment cycles (AY 23-24 and 24-25) to evaluate the impact of the teaching and learning strategies introduced in the new course on the quality of those submissions. The assessment results will help identify best practices for enhancing students' BLUF writing skills, including effective teaching strategies, engaging learning activities, and appropriate assessments that can be implemented on a broader scale. Once the committee has identified best practices for improving writing skills from their assessment results, they will determine how the degree program will need to be adjusted so that all students have the opportunity to learn and practice these skills.

The MIA assessment committee consists of 5 MIA faculty members who met with the department head (10.3.23) to discuss findings and propose action plans for improving student learning, particularly BLUF writing skills. The committee chose an action plan that includes piloting a course dedicated to improving students' writing skills. The course (described above) will serve to identify best practices for teaching, learning, and assessing these skills, practices that can later be implemented in the degree program on a broader scale.

Status Update on a Previous Action

Previous program assessment plans created to improve our students' communication skills included measures, artifacts, rubrics, and action plans applied through capstone reports and W-courses. Both of these assessment efforts have been overhauled to help us focus on a more strategic plan for teaching and assessing BLUF writing. The scores from previous rubrics, including different rubric criteria, don't permit a cross-comparison analysis. However, we are continuing to develop workshops and resources for our students on using BLUF writing skills in their coursework and projects.

Supporting Documentation

Measure: Measure #1 BLUFs in Briefs

MIA Briefing BLUF Rubric

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Fully Meets Standard (Proficient) (8-7)</i>	<i>Meets Standard (Developing) (6-5)</i>	<i>Partially Meets Standard (Novice) (4-3)</i>	<i>Needs Improvement (2-1)</i>	<i>No Evidence (0)</i>	<i>Reviewer Notes</i>
<p>Context & Purpose</p> <p>Score:</p>	<p>The paper is appropriately framed for the audience, context, and purpose surrounding the issue or policy it addresses. The paper demonstrates a clear sense of reader purpose in its development, organization, and design. The strategic objective stated at the top aligns with the reader’s purpose for the information.</p>	<p>The paper demonstrates some sense of reader purpose in its development, organization, and design. The strategic objective stated at the top aligns with the reader’s purpose for the information.</p>	<p>The paper’s development, organization, and/or design could more clearly align with the reader’s use of the information.</p>	<p>Details or information needed for the intended reader and relevant to the context are vague or are missing.</p> <p>The paper’s development, organization, and/or design do not align with the reader’s use for the information.</p>	<p>No evidence is provided that supports this criterion.</p>	<p><i>Has the writer accurately assumed what the reader needs to know and how the reader will use the information?</i></p>
<p>Executive Summary</p> <p>Score:</p>	<p>The summary represents approximately 10% of the entire paper. It is comprehensive and clear enough to stand apart from the longer report; i.e., it is self-contained or could serve as a brief. It emphasizes and expands the bottom line (the news, issues, explanations, options, solutions, findings,</p>	<p>The summary presents important information contained in the longer report. It does not prioritize and expand the bottom line, what a reader needs to make informed decisions. Strategic and key objectives appear to align.</p>	<p>The summary presents important information in the paper, though its contents does not provide enough information for the reader’s use. It does not clearly prioritize key findings. Strategic and key objectives don’t clearly align.</p>	<p>The summary merely forecasts what the longer paper develops in more detail, requiring the reader to read the entire report to learn what he needs to know. It lacks key information the reader needs to move forward. Strategic and key</p>	<p>No evidence is provided that supports this criterion.</p>	

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	<p>implications, or recommendations) presented in the longer paper—i.e., the points most relevant to the reader. The key objectives stated in the body clearly align with (support) the strategic objective stated at the top. The summary provides only the most important evidence or details that led to the conclusions and recommendations. Thus, it does not fully explain methodology, background, definitions, etc., though these may appear in the full report.</p>			objectives don't align.		
<p>Organization Score:</p>	<p>Organization reflects an <i>inverted pyramid</i>, i.e., information is presented in descending order of importance within each section and each paragraph.</p> <p>Paragraphs begin with the BLUF, i.e., <i>topic sentences</i>, which present the most important information up front.</p>	<p><i>Most sections</i> and paragraphs present information in a descending order of importance and include topic sentences.</p>	<p>Some sections and paragraphs lack clear <i>topic sentences</i>, ones that present the most important information up front.</p>	<p>Most paragraphs and sections lack clear topic sentences. The bottom line <i>is not explicitly stated</i> or is buried.</p>	<p>No evidence is provided that supports this criterion.</p>	
<p>Design Score:</p>	<p>Signposts (headings, subheadings, and other typography) are used to</p>	<p>Some signposts are used to <i>set apart sections</i> and key information.</p>	<p>Signposts <i>are not used</i> strategically to communicate hierarchy</p>	<p><i>Few if any</i> signposts are used.</p>	<p>No evidence is provided that</p>	

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	<p><i>display the structure and hierarchy</i> of information in the summary and the longer paper. Signposts <i>promote access</i> to the most important information. Signposts are <i>meaningful</i>, advancing key points of the document succinctly and precisely.</p>		<p>of and access to information.</p>		<p>supports this criterion.</p>	
<p>Style and Mechanics</p> <p>Score:</p>	<p>Sentences <i>flow gracefully</i>, presenting information in a logical order, from most to least important, and use clear connectors and transitions to increase coherence and cohesion.</p> <p>The message is expressed in a <i>high-impact style</i>, i.e., uses active voice, strong verbs, few nominals and prepositional phrases, concrete language, and varied sentence length.</p> <p>The message is <i>free from numerous errors</i> in proofreading or grammatical errors including punctuation, spelling, tense, agreement between</p>	<p>Sentences <i>flow</i> without awkward shifts in logic or coherence.</p> <p>The style is <i>mostly</i> high-impact.</p> <p>Few if any errors impede meaning or compromise readability.</p>	<p>The style is <i>adequate</i> for the context, but careful editing would improve readability.</p>	<p>The style <i>hinders readability</i> either through awkward sentences, errors, or language. It calls attention to itself.</p>	<p>No evidence is provided that supports this criterion.</p>	

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	nouns and pronouns or subjects and verbs.					
	Sources are appropriately attributed.					

Total Score: _____ (Please write any additional comments on the back.)

Reviewer Tips

1. Include the paper's title, topic, or subject line at the top of the rubric.
2. Review each paper you are assigned for BLUF, i.e., assessing how effectively the paper presents the bottom line in its content and organization. Thus, most of your effort will focus on the summary, headings, and topic sentences.
3. Rank the papers to help distinguish "proficient/exemplary" from "standard/acceptable."
4. If needed, include the reason for your score for each category, rather than relying on the definition provided in the category.

Measure: Measure #2 BLUFs in Book Reports

MIA Book Report BLUF Rubric

Criteria	Fully Meets Standard (Proficient) (8-7)	Meets Standard (Developing) (6-5)	Partially Meets Standard (Novice) (4-3)	Needs Improvement (2-1)	No Evidence (0)	Reviewer Notes
<p>Context & Purpose</p> <p>Score:</p>	<p>The report’s development, organization, and design clearly align with the reader’s use for the information, i.e., the instructor’s ability to assess how well the student can communicate the effects of covert action on foreign policy. It effectively presents an analysis in line with the learning objectives in the course: knowing how covert action has been used as a tool of US foreign policy, both effectively and ineffectively, and resulting implications on National security.</p>	<p>The report describes to some degree how covert action has been used as a tool of US foreign policy, both effectively and ineffectively, and resulting implications on National security and foreign policy.</p>	<p>The report’s development, organization, and/or design do not clearly align with the learning outcomes of the course.</p>	<p>Details or information needed for the intended reader and relevant to the context are vague or are missing.</p> <p>The report’s development, organization, and/or design do not align with the learning outcomes of the course.</p>	<p>No evidence is provided that supports this criterion.</p>	<p><i>Has the writer accurately assumed what the reader needs to know and how the reader will use the information?</i></p>

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<p>Executive Summary</p> <p>Score:</p>	<p>The summary represents approximately 10% of the entire paper. It is <i>comprehensive and clear enough to stand apart</i> from the longer report; i.e., it is self-contained or could serve as a brief. It emphasizes and expands <i>the bottom line</i>: the results from analyzing the covert actions and operations and their impact on National security and US foreign policy. The key points developed are clearly and succinctly stated in the summary. The summary provides only the most important evidence or details that led to the conclusions. Thus, it does not fully explain methodology, background, definitions, etc., though these may appear in the full report.</p>	<p>The summary <i>presents important information</i> contained in the longer report, including results from the analysis and relevant conclusions. More details, reasons for conclusions or key supporting evidence, are needed for the summary to be fully self-contained.</p>	<p>The summary presents important information in the paper, though its content does not provide enough information for the reader's use, i.e., determining how well the student understands the implications of covert action on foreign policy.</p>	<p>The summary merely <i>forecasts</i> what the longer paper develops in more detail, requiring the reader to read the entire report to learn what he needs to know. It <i>lacks key information</i> the reader needs to understand the analysis and its implications on foreign policy.</p>	<p>No evidence is provided that supports this criterion.</p>	
<p>Organization</p> <p>Score:</p>	<p>Organization reflects an <i>inverted pyramid</i>, i.e., information is presented in descending order of importance within each section and each paragraph.</p>	<p><i>Most sections</i> and paragraphs present information in a descending order of importance and include topic sentences.</p>	<p>Some sections and <i>paragraphs lack clear topic sentences</i>, ones that present the most important information up front.</p>	<p>Most paragraphs and sections lack clear topic sentences. The bottom line <i>is not explicitly stated</i> or is buried.</p>	<p>No evidence is provided that supports this criterion.</p>	

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	Paragraphs begin with the BLUF, i.e., <i>topic sentences</i> , which present the most important information up front.					
Design Score:	Signposts (headings, subheadings, and other typography) are used to <i>display the structure and hierarchy</i> of information in the summary and the longer paper. Signposts <i>promote access</i> to the most important information. Signposts are <i>meaningful</i> , advancing key points of the document succinctly and precisely.	Some signposts are used to <i>set apart sections</i> and key information.	Signposts <i>are not used</i> strategically to communicate hierarchy of and access to information.	<i>Few if any</i> signposts are used.	No evidence is provided that supports this criterion.	
Style and Mechanics Score:	Sentences <i>flow gracefully</i> , presenting information in a logical order, from most to least important, and use clear connectors and transitions to increase coherence and cohesion. The message is expressed in a <i>high-impact style</i> , i.e., uses active voice, strong verbs, few nominals and prepositional phrases, concrete language, and varied sentence length.	Sentences <i>flow</i> without awkward shifts in logic or coherence. The style is <i>mostly</i> high-impact. Few if any errors impede meaning or compromise readability.	The style is <i>adequate</i> for the context, but careful editing would improve readability.	The style <i>hinders readability</i> either through awkward sentences, errors, or language. It calls attention to itself.	No evidence is provided that supports this criterion.	

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	<p>The message is <i>free from numerous errors</i> in proofreading or grammatical errors including punctuation, spelling, tense, agreement between nouns and pronouns or subjects and verbs.</p> <p>Sources are appropriately attributed.</p>					
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Total Score: _____ (Please write any additional comments on the back.)

Reviewer Tips

1. Include the paper's title, topic, or subject line at the top of the rubric.
2. Review each paper you are assigned for BLUF, i.e., assessing how effectively the paper presents the bottom line in its content and organization. Thus, most of your effort will focus on the summary, headings, and topic sentences.
3. Rank the papers to help distinguish "proficient/exemplary" from "standard/acceptable."
4. If needed, include the reason for your score for each category, rather than relying on the definition provided in the category.