

# **Creating Strong Report Card Comments**



## **A Handbook for Jr / Sr High Teachers**

**April 2011**

## Creating Strong Report Card Comments

Try to...	Try Not to...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain a focus on the child</li> <li>• Relate comments to the outcomes</li> <li>• Focus on what was learned/achieved</li> <li>• Use “parent friendly” language and maintain a focus on that audience – remind yourself of what you would like to read about your own child.</li> <li>• Give examples to help clarify the broad statements</li> <li>• Identify strengths, challenges</li> <li>• Connect next step(s) to the challenge(s) identified</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• List what was taught</li> <li>• Include comments about attendance, homework, behaviour, attitude (this information can – and should – be included in the Learner Profile section of the report card)</li> <li>• Use teacher jargon</li> <li>• Over-emphasize the negative (challenges)</li> <li>• Mix speaking to parents and students interchangeably by inserting comments such as “Good Job, Jason!”, or “Bravo!” etc. (These comments should be reserved for the additional space at the end of the report card.)</li> <li>• State what will be the focus for the whole class instruction during the next term.</li> </ul>

**Throughout the report card, for each comment that is written, maintain a student-centred focus.**

Keep these questions in mind:

Will a parent reading these comments

- understand clearly how his/her child is doing in your class/subject?
- understand that his/her child has areas of strength?
- know what is being done to address any areas of weakness? (This might also include ways the child can take some responsibility for his/her improvement and/or ways the family can support.)
- be aware of your interest in his/her child as an individual learner?

The report card comments should reflect the child’s achievement relative to the outcomes. Teachers should avoid a reiteration of the outcomes taught during the reporting period, but rather focus on the child’s experience with them.

## Creating Strong Report Card Comments – Grades 7-12

### Grades 7&8: Target and A

1. First, think about the learning targets for that term. What should the student know and be able to do?	2. Next, write a generic comment for the student who is meeting expectations (A).
e.g., from Grade 8 ELA, Speaking and Listening contributes to a group discussion invites others into a discussion listens attentively and can identify main idea and key points actively listens ( <i>rephrases, clarifies, extends the discussion</i> ) is respectful of other ideas and contributions	Student regularly contributes to small and large group discussions and seeks to involve others. (S)he listens attentively and is able to pick out the main ideas and key points from a discussion. (S)he does more than listen quietly. (S)he helps to extend conversations and asks for clarification when needed. Showing respect for others’ ideas and thoughts is also a strength. (378)

NOTE: Once this generic or starter comment is made, it can be tailored to specific students.

### From A to B

3. Think about those students who are meeting most of the expectations (B). From the list of targets, which ones are students most likely to struggle with ( <i>in italics below</i> )?	4. Adjust the generic A comment to reflect challenges in these areas. This is your generic B comment (changes in bold below).
contributes to a group discussion <i>invites others into a discussion</i> listens attentively and can identify main idea and key points <i>actively listens (rephrases, clarifies, extends the discussion)</i> is respectful of other ideas and contributions	Student regularly contributes to small and large group discussions <b>but needs to involve others more in the conversation.</b> (S)he listens attentively and can pick out the main ideas and key points of a discussion. Showing respect for other ideas and thoughts is also a strength. <b>(S)he is a quiet listener but does not consistently extend the conversation or ask questions of others for clarification.</b> (398)

NOTE: Once this generic or starter comment is made, it can be tailored to specific students.

### From B to C

5. Think about those students who are meeting some of the outcomes (C). What is the next layer of targets most likely to pose a challenge for these students ( <i>in italics and underlined below</i> )? Adjust the comment to reflect these challenges. This is now your generic C comment.	6. Adjust the generic B comment to reflect challenges in these areas. This is your generic C comment (changes in bold below).
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<p>contributes to a group discussion  <i>invites others into a discussion</i>          listens attentively <u>and can identify main idea and key points</u>  <i>actively listens (rephrases, clarifies, extends the discussion)</i>          is respectful of other ideas and contributions</p>	<p>Student <b>regularly</b> contributes to small and large group discussions but needs to involve others more in the conversation. (S)he listens <b>attentively quietly but is often not</b> able to pick out the main ideas and key points from a discussion <b>and (s)he rarely</b> extends the conversation or asks questions of others for clarification. Showing respect for others' ideas and thoughts is also a strength.          (394)</p>
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NOTE: Once this generic or starter comment is made, it can be tailored to specific students.

## Grades 9-12

When assigning percentage grades for grades 9-12, rather than the letter grades applicable to grades 1-8, teachers could employ a similar process to the one outlined above. Thinking of students in “ranges” of achievement related to outcomes could result in generic or starter comments being formulated and then edited as necessary for specific student needs. Given the six “levels” shown on the grades 9-12 report cards (i.e., “Excellent or outstanding”, “very good”, “good”, “satisfactory”, “minimally acceptable”, and “has not met minimum requirements”), teachers may want to create starter comments for those six ranges rather than just four.

## Another Approach

<p>Identify the targets for the term. For each, write strength statements and challenge statements. Choose the strengths and challenges that best represent the student's level of achievement.</p>	
<p>regularly contributes to small and large group discussions          seeks to involve others.          listens attentively and is able to pick out the main ideas and key points from a discussion.          does more than listen quietly; helps to extend conversations and asks for clarification when needed          shows respect for others' ideas and thoughts</p>	<p>requires prompting and reminders to participate in small and large group discussions          rarely involves others in discussion          is a quiet listener but often struggles to understand the key points of what others are saying          just becoming a more active listener and building on what others say          only occasionally questions others for clarification at times needs to be reminded to be respectful of others' opinions</p>

## Creating Strong Report Card Comments *Sample Two*

Structure of a Comment		Example
<b>*Opening / anchor sentence</b>	* State the level of overall achievement related to the subject area.	Jane is meeting some of the expectations in math. Using manipulatives she is able to add and subtract integers (positive and negative numbers) and is just beginning to understand how to multiply and divide integers. This is a concept Jane will continue to work on next term in class. Solving problems related to integers using symbols/numbers is something else that Jane struggles with. In algebra, Jane can identify the rules for the order of operations; however she has some difficulty applying this when solving linear equations. Next term, Jane will work in a small group to practice working on linear equations. (616)
<b>State the strengths</b>	What the evidence shows the student achieved/ learned.	
<b>Identify challenges</b>	What the evidence shows the student has not yet achieved/ learned.	
<b>Next steps</b>	Plans to address the student's challenges	

\*optional: If space is a problem, it is not necessary to include an opening anchor sentence as it is described by the assigned grade

## Useful Words and Phrases to Consider when Writing Report Card Comments

Strengths	Needs	Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Able to construct, Able to determine, Able to extend, Able to research, Able to respond, Able to support</li> <li>- Can accurately ....., Can adapt, Can consistently ....., Can easily ..., Can effectively ....., Can explain, Can identify, Can solve, Can successfully ....</li> <li>- Consistently makes</li> <li>- Continues to</li> <li>- Demonstrates a clear understanding</li> <li>- Demonstrates effective</li> <li>- Displays strong, Displays exceptional</li> <li>- Has achieved</li> <li>- Has a good grasp of</li> <li>- Has successfully</li> <li>- Has learned</li> <li>- Has very good insight</li> <li>- Improved tremendously</li> <li>- Is able to</li> <li>- Is capable of</li> <li>- Is developing</li> <li>- Is consistently able to</li> <li>- Recognizes the importance</li> <li>- Shows commitment</li> <li>- Is competent in</li> <li>- Is proficient at</li> <li>- Is skillful at</li> <li>- Is very good at</li> <li>- Often uses</li> <li>- Recognizes that</li> <li>- Successfully interprets</li> <li>- Skillfully uses</li> <li>- Understands how, Understands that</li> <li>- Uses a variety of</li>   <li>Some Action Verbs to Consider Using:</li>   <li>- Applies</li> <li>- Builds</li> <li>- Compares</li> <li>- Completes</li> <li>- Constructs</li> <li>- Creates</li> <li>- Describes</li> <li>- Evaluates</li> <li>- Experiments</li> <li>- Explains</li> <li>- Expresses</li> <li>- Extends</li> <li>- Illustrates</li> <li>- Interprets</li> <li>- Knows</li> <li>- Organizes</li> <li>- Operates</li> <li>- Participates</li> <li>- Performs</li> <li>- Produces</li> <li>- Shows</li> <li>- Solves</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attempts to, Makes attempts</li> <li>- Continues to need help with</li> <li>- Could profit by</li> <li>- Demonstrates a limited ability to</li> <li>- Does not always</li> <li>- Does not demonstrate</li> <li>- Encouragement with</li> <li>- Experiences difficulty with, Has difficulty with</li> <li>- Finds it difficult at times to , Has difficulty</li> <li>- Has not yet demonstrated the ability</li> <li>- Has not yet demonstrated understanding</li> <li>- Has trouble with</li> <li>- Is seldom able to</li> <li>- Is encouraged to</li> <li>- Is benefiting from practice with</li> <li>- Is learning to/that</li> <li>- Is receiving additional help with</li> <li>- Is working at</li> <li>- It is important that</li> <li>- Lacks a clear understanding</li> <li>- Needs more opportunities to</li> <li>- Needs ongoing help with, Needs ongoing assistance with</li> <li>- Needs support</li> <li>- Needs to clarify</li> <li>- Needs to develop</li> <li>- Often lacks</li> <li>- Rarely uses, Rarely able to</li> <li>- Requires adult support for</li> <li>- Requires more time</li> <li>- Seems to use few</li> <li>- Tries to, Makes attempts to</li> <li>- Struggles to, Struggles with</li> <li>- Unable to explain</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can practice/apply at home by</li> <li>- Greater focus on</li> <li>- Is encouraged to</li> <li>- Is encouraged to be more</li> <li>- Is encouraged to seek</li> <li>- Is encouraged to strive to</li> <li>- Is not always willing to</li> <li>- It is recommended that</li> <li>- It is suggested that</li> <li>- Needs more time to develop</li> <li>- Needs to ask</li> <li>- Needs to be more open</li> <li>- Needs to consider</li> <li>- Needs to continue to</li> <li>- Needs to develop</li> <li>- Needs to expand on</li> <li>- Needs to improve, Needs improvement in</li> <li>- Needs to refer to</li> <li>- Needs to review</li> <li>- Needs reinforcement in</li> <li>- Needs to spend more time on, Should spend more time on</li> <li>- Needs time to</li> <li>- Needs to work on</li> <li>- Requires additional effort</li> <li>- Requires additional practice</li> <li>- Requires further understanding</li> <li>- Requires guided instruction</li> <li>- Should continue to</li> <li>- Should do further practice</li> <li>- Should take the time to</li> <li>- Should utilize options for</li> <li>- Should work towards</li> <li>- Would benefit from</li> <li>- Will have opportunities to</li> </ul>

## Language Suggestions for Descriptors in Report Card Comments

<b>A*</b>	<b>B*</b>	<b>C*</b>	<b>D*</b>
The student demonstrates achievement of the expected learning outcomes addressed during the current reporting period.	The student demonstrates achievement of most of the expected learning outcomes addressed during the current reporting period.	The student demonstrates achievement of some of the expected learning outcomes addressed during the current reporting period.	The student demonstrates achievement of few of the expected learning outcomes addressed during the current reporting period.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consistently</li> <li>• to a high degree</li> <li>• without prompting</li> <li>• is skilled at</li> <li>• has fully demonstrated</li> <li>• clear(ly)</li> <li>• confident(ly)</li> <li>• independent(ly)</li> <li>• is proficient</li> <li>• comprehensive</li> <li>• easily</li> <li>• excellent</li> <li>• comprehensive understanding</li> <li>• sometimes exceeds</li> <li>• is able to</li> <li>• is very good at</li> <li>• skilfully uses</li> <li>• understands how/that</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• most of the time</li> <li>• is able to</li> <li>• for the most part</li> <li>• often can</li> <li>• usually</li> <li>• demonstrates</li> <li>• demonstrates some understanding of</li> <li>• understands most of</li> <li>• competent</li> <li>• capable</li> <li>• general(ly)</li> <li>• common(ly)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sometimes</li> <li>• with support</li> <li>• with prompting</li> <li>• occasionally</li> <li>• is beginning to</li> <li>• has some difficulty with</li> <li>• is developing</li> <li>• is aware of... but is not applying independently</li> <li>• is approaching</li> <li>• strives to</li> <li>• has a basic understanding of</li> <li>• understands some of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is not able to</li> <li>• does not yet</li> <li>• is unable to</li> <li>• needs a great deal of assistance</li> <li>• seldom</li> <li>• has not yet demonstrated</li> <li>• with repeated assistance</li> <li>• rarely</li> <li>• has difficulty with</li> <li>• struggles to</li> <li>• has a limited understanding of</li> </ul>
<b>Strengths and Needs:</b> Give specific examples (e.g. for example, for instance, such as)		<b>Suggestions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• needs to continue to</li> <li>• will have opportunities to</li> <li>• can practice/apply at home by</li> <li>• would benefit from</li> </ul>	

**\* Note that teachers of grades 9-12 may want to think of percent marks in these four ranges also, so this language would apply**

## A Selection of Sample Comments for Grades 7-12

### ELA 7

Student has demonstrated achievement of some of the learning outcomes for this term. Student usually uses few strategies to develop effective writing and is just beginning to integrate interesting effects in written work. For example, student understood and followed only some of the writing process to produce a friendly letter. With support, he can read and understand a range of literature, information, and visual texts. Student is approaching independence in selecting appropriate texts. Student should practice listening attentively to grasp the main ideas and details of a message at home, e.g. by summarizing the evening news on radio or television. Student would benefit from inviting others into discussions and thinking about what others have said. (759 characters with spaces)

### Math 8

Student has achieved most of the learning outcomes this term. Student is able to represent numbers written in scientific notation in standard form, and vice versa with some assistance. She sometimes struggles to explain and demonstrate the meaning of negative exponents for base ten. Student consistently demonstrates the ability to recognize perfect squares between 1 and 144 and is usually able to apply patterns related to them. She can often distinguish between an exact square root of a number and its decimal approximation and sometimes selects appropriate methods to find the square root of a number. Student is beginning to develop an understanding of the Pythagorean relationship when using models but sometimes needs support to apply the relationship in problem situations. (783 characters with spaces)

### Science 9

Student demonstrated excellent performance this term. Student consistently performs experiments using WHMIS standards that demonstrate knowledge of material properties. He shows a good understanding of atomic theory and the periodic table. He clearly describes and illustrates cellular processes such as mitosis and asexual reproduction. He communicates well in words, drawings, tables, and graphs. (399 characters with spaces)

### Math Foundations 10

Student achieved most of the expected learning outcomes in Data Management, and Numbers and Operations. For example, she can create various graphs following models but has some difficulty interpreting graphs. She struggles with the outcomes in Geometry, such as the relationship of surface area to volume. She is encouraged to refer to whole-class sample problems when working independently. (391 characters with spaces)

### BIO 11

Student has a basic understanding of most BIO 11 outcomes such as the development of cell theory and basic cellular structures and functions. Student is developing an understanding of homeostasis and organ systems, namely circulatory and digestive systems. He is developing the skills necessary to use a microscope to study living organisms. Regular review of the text and notes would be beneficial. (400 characters with spaces)



## HGS 12

Student demonstrated very good achievement this term. He effectively used the skills and methods in the discipline of history to describe the beginning of the Cold War and how tensions between East and West influenced the present. He also demonstrated an understanding of forces that contribute to economic disparity between North and South. He is encouraged to continue to strive for excellence. (396 characters with spaces)

## Character Counts

Grade Level	ELA	FLA	Math	Other Subjects
7-9	800	800	800	400
10-12	400	400	400	400

## Using Smart Pronouns

Smart pronouns can be used to ease the process of creating comments for students. For example, below is a comment that a grade 10 English teacher wishes to use for several students.

*John can use a variety of materials and representations (e.g., graphs, tables) to get his message across.*

Rather than editing the underlined words for each individual student, smart pronouns can be used to automatically populate the comment with the appropriate name or pronoun. When using smart pronouns, the comment would be written as follows:

*<first\_name> can use a variety of materials and representations (e.g., graphs, tables) to get <his/her> message across.*

## Examples of Smart Pronouns Grades 7-12

<He/She>	<first_name>
<he/she>	<last_name>
<His/Her>	<lastfirst>
<his/her>	<grade_level>
<him/her>	<home_room>
<son/daughter>	