



Show-Me

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Frequently Asked Questions about GED® Test Language Arts, Writing

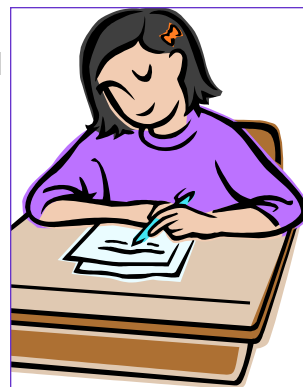
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How are the GED Language Arts, Writing Test essays scored?

Since January 2002, GED Language Arts, Writing Test (Part II) essays have been scored on a 4-point holistic scale.

Two trained essay readers read each essay and score based on the overall impression. The *overall impression* of each paper is based on five areas:

1. Does the paper respond to the assigned prompt—did the candidate use the topic on the test?
2. Can the reader see or follow an organized plan for development?
3. Are there specific and relevant details to support the paper's focus?
4. Are the conventions of language (grammar, usage, and mechanics) generally followed?
5. Is the word choice precise, varied, and appropriate?



The two readers' scores are then averaged. If the essay receives a score of **2** or higher, the essay score is combined with the multiple-choice score to form a composite. If a candidate receives a score of **1** or **1.5** on the essay, there will be no composite score, and the candidate **must retake both the essay and multiple-choice portion.**

NOTE: Please note that individual essay scores are not reported. On the composite score, the multiple-choice score results represent 65 percent of the composite, and the essay score represents 35 percent.

Essay readers may not be more than one point apart in their scoring. In those cases where the readers are more than one point apart, the Chief Reader for the scoring site will set the score by agreeing with the reader whose score follows the GED Testing Service scale.

What is the passing score for the essay?

A GED candidate must earn a score of **2** or higher on the Language Arts, Writing Test, Part II essay in order to receive a composite score and obtain a passing score.

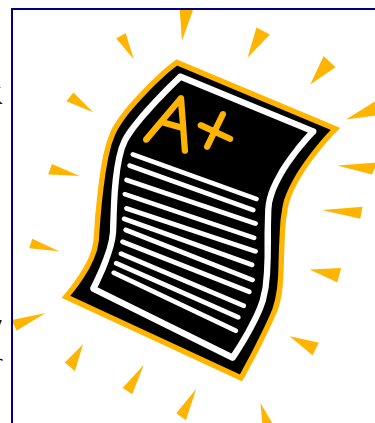
A candidate needs a score of **2** or higher to earn a passing score. States may set a composite passing score (multiple-choice and essay) that is higher than the current minimum GED passing score of 410. The composite passing score cannot be set lower than the GED Testing Service standard score.

When I receive my Language Arts, Writing Test score, how can I tell if I earned a score of 2 or higher on my essay?

If you received a score on your transcript in the range of 200-800, you would have earned at least a score of **2** (minimum passing score on the 4-point scale) on your essay.

If you received a double (**) asterisk on your transcript, then you did not earn a **2** on your essay. **Note:** A single asterisk (*) indicates that you did not write on the assigned topic, and your response was recorded as "off topic."

If it was your essay score that kept you from passing, you will still have to retake both parts of the Language Arts, Writing Test. We highly recommend that you seek some additional preparation before retaking any of the GED Tests. You may want to check the [Steck-Vaughn web site](#) or those of other commercial publishers.



GED candidates can find other preparation guides at their local libraries, bookstores, and on such commercial Web sites as www.amazon.com.

How do GED essay readers score papers? What do they consider the most important elements of good writing?

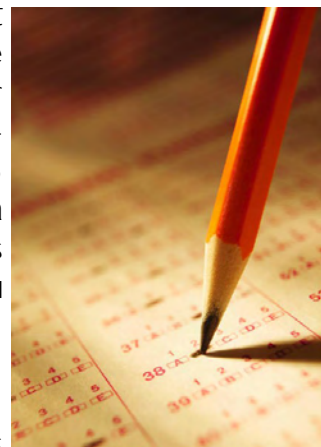
Good writing needs a focus, organization, and development with specific and relevant examples, details, explanations, etc. You'll see these elements at the top of our scoring grid. Our readers are especially concerned with the development that supports a focus. They do not, however, look for specific errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics—they don't score with the same elements in mind that a classroom teacher would.

Errors in grammar, etc. would affect a score only if they are so numerous and hinder the reader from understanding and following the writer's ideas. Consequently, writers need to minimize errors, so these mistakes don't distract the readers from the ideas in the paper.

What will the essay topic ask me to do? Can I find out what past topics have been on the writing test? Do I need any prior preparation for the essay?

Candidates will be asked to write on a topic of general interest. The topics are brief and generally ask candidates to state their views and support with examples from their own observation, knowledge, or experience.

We don't release our topics; however, Steck-Vaughn—the adult education publisher who produces our Official GED Practice Tests—offers materials to help GED teachers and candidates. For example, their *Official Practice Test Administrator's Manual* contains two GED topics, anchor papers for each topic, and 10 to 15 sample essays with commentary. Steck-Vaughn also produces a CD-ROM developed by the GED Testing Service to train teachers how to score their students' papers using the 4-point scale. You may want to check [Steck-Vaughn's web site](#).



GED candidates can find other preparation guides at their local libraries, bookstores, and through such commercial Web sites as www.amazon.com.

When I took the Official GED Practice Test, I found that the essay question was not really a question. Why?

Although called the "Essay Question," this is really a **prompt**—designed to do just that, prompt you, or help you begin to write about a topic. All of our topics are general enough that you will only need your own knowledge, experience, or observations to respond. The topics are expository in nature.

Does the GED Testing Service offer programs to help prepare GED candidates to write essays for the Language Arts, Writing Test? Where can I get help with writing essays?

We develop the tests for use in U.S. states and Canadian provinces. The GED Testing Service does not offer test preparation. We strongly urge you, especially if you have been away from academic writing for some time, to enroll in a review course and take the Official GED Practice Test so that you can get feedback on your writing. There are several study guides available in local bookstores and libraries.

You may also want to check this GED web site (also accessible via www.GEDtest.org); go to the page for "Prospective Test Takers," then click on "Preparation," then click on "Materials." Or you may call 1-800-636-9433 (1-800-62MYGED) to locate the Official GED Testing Center nearest you. The center's staff can tell you where to find an instructional program.

The older form of the GED Writing Skills Test provided a recommended word count for the essay. How long does my essay have to be now?

Your essay score is not based on a word count. So you will not necessarily fail if you have fewer than 200 words. For the 2002 Series GED Tests, the suggested word count was omitted. The word count was intended as a guide, not a requirement. However, we found examinees focusing more on the count than the presentation and development of ideas.

The only requirement for the essay's length is that it ***must be written*** on the two sides of the answer sheet. Essay readers ***will not read additional pages.***

Writing textbooks will not always agree on the same point. For example, one book will tell writers to use a comma after each item in a series (e.g. coffee, eggs, juice, and toast), but another book might tell writers to omit the last comma before the conjunction (e.g. coffee, eggs, juice and toast.). Which is correct? Will essay readers give me a lower score?

Both of the comma-use instances that you cite are correct. Most English teachers will agree that the comma before the "and" is optional; however, the writer must be consistent. If the writer omits the comma before "and," he must omit it every time there are three or more items in a series. Likewise, if the comma is used, the writer must use it in all cases. *Consistency is the key.*

When our trained readers are reading the essays for a score, they are looking for an overall impression, not individual errors. Grammar, usage, and mechanics errors will affect a reader's score if there are a sufficient number of errors that collectively make it difficult for the reader to understand or follow the writer's ideas. Therefore, the two applications of the comma for the last item in a series would not affect the reader's score.

As a side note, multiple-choice items on Language Arts, Writing, Part I will not test the comma use between the next to last item and the last item. However, the comma between items one and two (in a series of three or more items) will be tested.

The GED Testing Service essay scoring guide refers to "the conventions of EAE." What is EAE?

Edited American English (EAE) is fundamentally the same as Standard Written English (SWE), i.e., those conventions of grammar, usage, and mechanics that writers and speakers adhere to in order to communicate effectively. In planning ahead for the 2002 Series GED Tests in 1997, the Writing Test Specifications Committee aligned itself with the National Council of Teachers of English, who use EAE as the norm for the variety of English that is most used by educated speakers of the language.

For writers, the significance is that they must still employ a style, grammar, and usage that allows a mutual level of comprehension and understanding among educated speakers and writers. For example, EAE still governs when to use *who* or *whom*, *is* or *are*, pronoun forms, verb form and verb tense, adjective or adverb forms, parallel constructions, and sentence structure. Basically, only the name has changed.

One reason for the change is perception. (Any writing that is *not standard* is, therefore, perceived by many as *substandard*.) The Writing Test Specifications Committee wanted to remove any impediment that may have negative impact on a candidate's performance. The changeover to the term EAE offsets any negative impact that a candidate may feel if his or her writing is interpreted as *substandard*.

Reprinted from: http://highered.mcgraw-hill.com/sites/dl/free/0809222280/45420/22280_GEDSat_Write_Ch8.pdf



CHAPTER 8

Preparing for the GED Essay

To write a good GED essay, you need several skills. You need to know how to express yourself clearly on paper—how to make a point, support it with specific examples, organize your ideas logically, and link them smoothly. You also need a good command of standard written English—knowledge of the rules that good writers use to decide what makes a complete sentence, where commas belong, which words to capitalize, and when to use a particular word form.

Most good writers follow the steps of gathering ideas, organizing, writing, and revising when they write. Following these steps will ensure that you write a good essay in 45 minutes.

Gathering Ideas

When a writer gathers ideas, he or she thinks of specific things to write about the assigned topic. Although this is a thinking stage, it helps to write your ideas on paper. First, examine the writing assignment and decide what you want to say about it. Then, begin to jot down notes on the topic. Write words and phrases. Use your experiences to help you think of ideas. Do not worry about organizing your list, spelling words correctly, or writing complete sentences. You will take care of these details in later steps.

Organizing

In the organizing stage, the writer checks the ideas and puts them in a logical order. In this stage, the writer makes sure that there are plenty of good ideas on the list, crosses off ideas that are not about the topic, and then puts the items on the list in the order in which he or she will use them.

Writing

In the writing stage, the writer puts the ideas he or she gathered or organized into sentence and paragraph form. For instance, the paragraph about the morning of a perfect day off might look like this:

In the morning of a perfect day off I will sleep late. On most days I have to get up at 4:30. Then I have to rush to get to work by 5:30. When I have a day off I really like to sleep until 10:00 and then take my time getting up and getting ready. So on my perfect day off after I get up, I will take a long shower. Then have a cup of coffee

Good writers don't worry if they make a few mistakes while they write. They just focus on getting their ideas down on paper. Then they go back and check their work in the final step of the writing process.

Revising

In this stage, good writers check their work. They make sure that the sentences are complete, the words are spelled correctly, and there are no other mistakes.

Good writers can use the five-paragraph format to structure an essay on any topic. The five-paragraph essay is made up of the following components: an introductory paragraph, 3 body paragraphs and a concluding paragraph.

Essay Scoring Guide

	1	2	3	4
	Inadequate	Marginal	Adequate	Effective
	Reader has difficulty identifying or following the writer's ideas.	Reader occasionally has difficulty understanding or following the writer's ideas.	Reader understands the writer's ideas.	Reader understands and easily follows the writer's expression of ideas.
Response to the Prompt	Attempts to address prompt but with little or no success in establishing a focus.	Addresses the prompt, though the focus may shift.	Uses the writing prompt to establish a main idea.	Presents a clearly focused main idea that addresses the prompt.
Organization	Fails to organize ideas.	Shows some evidence of an organizational plan.	Uses an identifiable organizational plan.	Establishes a clear and logical organization.
Development and Details	Demonstrates little or no development; usually lacks details or examples or presents irrelevant information.	Has some development but lacks specific details; may be limited to a listing, repetitions, or generalizations.	Has focused but occasionally uneven development; incorporates some specific detail.	Achieves coherent development with specific and relevant details and examples.
Conventions of EAE	Exhibits minimal or no control of sentence structure and the conventions of Edited American English (EAE).	Demonstrates inconsistent control of sentence structure and the conventions of EAE.	Generally controls sentence structure and the conventions of EAE.	Consistently controls sentence structure and the conventions of EAE.
Word Choice	Exhibits weak and/or inappropriate words.	Exhibits a narrow range of word choice, often including inappropriate selections.	Exhibits appropriate word choice.	Exhibits varied and precise word choice.