



Enhanced Writing Test FAQ

COMMENCEMENT 2015

INFORMATION PROVIDED BY: ACT

While the enhancement and evolution of The ACT continue and additional scores will be provided, The ACT will remain a curriculum-based achievement exam, and the well-respected 1-to-36 score scale will not change.

Enhancements to the Writing Test

Why are you enhancing The ACT writing test?

Based on these rich sources of research and our ACT College and Career Readiness Standards, we have developed a Writing Competencies Model that will guide our continuum of writing assessments from elementary school to career.

The enhanced ACT writing test and the expanded score reports will ultimately provide more insights to help students become college and career ready. Students will receive scores for four critical writing competencies:

ideas and analysis

development and support

organization

language use

What will the enhanced ACT writing test look like?

While the current ACT writing test is an exercise in classic persuasion, the enhanced ACT writing test presents students with a rhetorical purpose that is more broadly argumentative.

Each prompt will present a paragraph that introduces and gives context to a given issue, and three perspectives on the issue. Included in the test booklet are two pages of planning space, which introduce a series of critical questions that support writers as they develop and express their ideas in response to the rhetorical situation.

The writer's task has three subcomponents. The writer is asked to "evaluate and analyze" the given perspectives; to "state and develop" his or her own perspective; and to "explain the

The familiar 1-to-36 score scale used on The ACT will not change. We will be providing additional scores and indicators to give students, parents, and educators more detailed information so they may better plan for future success.

relationship" between his or her perspective and those given. Writers may adopt a perspective from the prompt, partially or fully, or may generate their own.

Taken as a whole, these pieces constitute a rich argumentative task that draws from subgenres including evaluative argument and rhetorical analysis, and that also calls upon the tools of expository writing.

How does the enhanced ACT writing test connect to the tasks expected of people in postsecondary education and the workplace?

This task finds many real-world corollaries. At its core, this task asks students to thoughtfully consider multiple perspectives and ideas. It also prompts them to respond meaningfully, leveraging their own knowledge, experience, and worldview as they build a sound, substantiated argument. This fundamental exercise in thinking and writing lies at the heart of many forms of argument. By asking students to enter into rhetorical dialogue with a number of alternative perspectives, the task elicits from them a skill that is necessary in the many social contexts in which they will participate as students, employees, and citizens.

What scores will students receive?

In addition to a subject-level score which will be on the familiar 1–36 scale, The ACT writing test will provide scores for four important domains of writing competency reflected by the ACT Writing Competencies Model: ideas and analysis, development and support, organization, and language use. The test will measure students' ability to evaluate multiple perspectives on a complex issue and generate their own analysis based on reasoning, knowledge, and experience, enabling them to more fully demonstrate their analytical writing ability. Assessing these critical writing competencies separately will enable ACT to better identify and reward the strengths students exhibit in their writing, while also noting specific deficiencies.

Students will also receive a new score that combines the scores from the English and reading tests with the writing subject-level score (called an ELA Score). As is the case today, the writing score does not affect the 1–36 ACT Composite score.

Can you tell us more about the four domain scores and what they will evaluate?

The enhancements to The ACT writing test will provide scores for four domains of writing competency outlined in the ACT Writing Competencies Model.

There will be an expanded number of reporting categories compared to the current subscore categories, and breakdowns will be provided for every subject. The reporting categories are based on the ACT College Readiness Standards and are aligned to the Common Core State Standards.

Ideas and Analysis

Scores in this category represent a student's ability to comprehend the rhetorical situation; generate productive ideas in response; think critically about the task; evaluate and analyze multiple perspectives; and employ effective rhetorical strategies.

Development and Support

Scores in this category reflect a student's ability to illustrate, explain, and substantiate claims and ideas. Strong writers discuss and explore their ideas, making clear their pertinence by way of detailed, persuasive examples and sound reasoning. They bolster their claims by marshaling evidentiary support, drawing from their knowledge and relevant experience.

Organization

Scores in this category indicate a student's ability to structure an argument logically, sequence ideas strategically, and organize writing clearly.

Language Use and Conventions

Scores in this category denote a student's ability to use standard written English in service of a persuasive purpose. Competent writers demonstrate control over the conventions of grammar, syntax, word usage, and mechanics. Stronger writers make effective rhetorical choices in voice and tone, and express nuanced ideas by way of precise word choice.

What insights will the new writing scores provide?

The move to analytic scoring allows for a fine-grain evaluation of students' writing abilities. We will continue to link reported scores to our ACT College and Career Readiness Standards for Writing and Ideas for Progress.

The additional information offered by reporting four separate domain scores can be acted upon by all stakeholders—students, educators, and postsecondary institutions.

For students, analytic scores are important diagnostic information. ACT research shows that students often take the test more than once, and they use the scores they receive to help build on strengths and improve weaknesses in their skillsets. Because our test serves a diagnostic function for many students, our enhanced test reports will provide them with information that can help in their development as writers.

Educators also benefit from the new writing scores. Schools can work closely with individual students to cultivate a deeper understanding of their skill in academic writing, using the score report and a student's essay as tools. For State and District testing clients,

The additional information will make it easier for students, parents, and educators to understand the makeup of any subject score and see students' strengths and areas for improvement.

Reporting categories will be added in 2016.

aggregated data can identify trends at school, district, and state levels, allowing educators to develop plans to help students improve their weaknesses and leverage their strengths. Furthermore, all student essays are available for schools to review at no cost via ACT Essay View.

Postsecondary institutions gain a fuller picture of student readiness in writing. Institutions have more information at their disposal, allowing them to make admissions or placement decisions based on the writing competencies that are most valuable within their programs. For example, some colleges may desire matriculating students to demonstrate facility with rhetorical strategies; these colleges might weigh the first domain, Ideas and Analysis, more heavily than the others. Other institutions may want to make placement decisions based on a student's control over the conventions of standard written English; these schools may do so by emphasizing students' scores in Language Use. Still others may use this test as a means of allowing students to opt out of entry-level writing courses; these schools may want to see evidence of exemplary performance in all four domains.

What will the score reports look like from students who took the current ACT writing test?

Scores for the current ACT writing test will be reported as they are currently, a single score on the 2–12 scale.

For more information and resources go to:

<http://www.act.org/actnext/faq.html>
<http://www.actstudent.org/testprep/>
www.number2.com