



GEDTS  
Language Arts, Writing  
Frequently Asked Questions about the Essay

The following questions and answers summarize items referred to the GEDTS Writing Test Specialist regarding the essay requirements on the 2002-Series GED Language Arts, Writing Test.

*1. How are the GEDTS Language Arts, Writing Test essays scored?*

As of January 2002, GED Language Arts, Writing Test essays are 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:

- Does the paper respond to the assigned prompt--did the examinee use the topic on the test?
- Can the reader see or follow an organized plan for development?
- Are there specific and relevant details to support the paper's focus?
- Are the conventions of language (grammar, usage, and mechanics) generally followed?
- 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 an examinee receives on the essay a score of "1" or "1.5," there will be *no composite score*, and the examinee *must retake both the multiple choice and essay*.

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

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 GEDTS scale.

*2. What is the passing score for the essay? I have heard rumors that my state has a higher essay passing score?*

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

The rumors circulated about a 3 being the passing score are **wrong**. A candidate needs a **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 GED passing score of 410. The composite passing score can not be set lower than the GEDTS standard.

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*3. When I receive my score, how can I tell if I earned a 2 or higher on my essay?*

If you received a score on your transcript in the range of 200-800 (but it will be a number less than 410), you would have earned a 2 (minimum passing score on the 4-pt. scale) on your essay. However, you did not score high enough on the multiple-choice to pass to earn the composite passing score of 410.

If you received a "0" or a single (\*) or (\*\*) 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 the test.

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*4. I remember how my teachers used to score essays in school. 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.

Essay readers score approximately 30 papers in an hour; therefore, "Read and score" is the motto of an essay reader. 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.

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*5. Will a specific number of errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics lower my essay score?*

Readers spend approximately 2 minutes per essay, reading for an overall impression. The points on the scoring grid shape that overall impression.

If there are a sufficient number of errors (this number will differ from reader to reader) causing the reader to have difficulty understanding and following the writer's ideas, then those combined errors will affect the reader's score.

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*6. 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?*

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

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

Although called the "Essay Question," it is really a prompt "to prompt" 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.

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*8. Does GED 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 only develop the tests for the states and Canadian provinces and do not offer test preparation. We strongly urge you, especially if you have been away from academic writing for some time, to enroll in an adult education program and take the official GED practice test so that you can get feedback on your writing.

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

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. In fact, writers would record the number of words at points in the text.

The only requirement for the essay's length is that it *must be written* on the 2 sides of the answer sheet. Essay readers *will not read* additional pages.

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10. *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," then the writer 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 and last item. However, the comma between items one and two (in a series of three or more items) will be tested.

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11. *The GEDTS 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 1997, the

Writing Test Specifications Committee in planning for the 2002-Series GED Tests 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 allow 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, *substandard*. The change to the term EAE offsets the negative impact that an examinee may feel in interpreting his or her writing as *substandard*. The Committee wanted to remove any impediment that may negatively impact an examinee's performance.