

Writing Skills Assessment

Scoring Rubric & Practice Guide

The ability to communicate ideas in writing clearly and concisely is a key skill for success in college and in your career. For your Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration application to be considered for any of the University of Washington's three campuses, you may need to take the Writing Skills Assessment (WSA).

The Writing Skills Assessment:

- must be completed before the application deadline for the quarter for which you are applying
- must be taken at one of the three UW campuses, or arrangements can be made to take it at off-campus sites
- can only be taken once per test period, and there are two test periods per year:
Test Period One: December 1 to May 31 **Test Period Two:** June 1 to November 30
- can be taken more than once; the highest total score will be used for admissions
- scores are valid for two years

The Proctored Test:

- consists of two essays:
 - The **Persuasion Task** asks the writer to persuade the reader of a recommended action based on a workplace scenario.
 - The **Position Task** asks the writer to explain and then defend a position on a given statement to the reader.
- is 90-minutes total for both tests
- is handwritten (no computers are used)
- does not allow dictionaries or calculators
- does not presuppose any knowledge of business or specific content areas

Evaluation:

- Each task is scored on a six-point scale and has its own separate rubric.
- There are no right or wrong answers, scores are based on the degree to which each essay:
 - addresses the writing task effectively and insightfully, and provides a well-reasoned solution that displays analysis of data (numerical and verbal)
 - is well organized with a clear overall strategy
 - is a fully developed argument with pertinent supporting evidence
 - is appropriate in style and tone for the intended reader
 - has consistent facility with written English (grammar, syntax, vocabulary, punctuation, and spelling)
- You will be notified of your WSA results with your admission decision.
- You may obtain your score by contacting any of the three UW Business Schools you are applying for after:
 - June 1 for Test Period One, or after December 1 for Test Period Two (if tests have been scored by then)

Test-Taking Tips:

- **Read the prompt carefully**, including the directions for each writing task. Make sure you have taken all parts of the prompt into account before you begin responding to it.
- Pay special attention to the verbs used in the directions that identify **the type of writing you should do**. In the sample Persuasion Task, you are asked to “persuade,” “consider pros and cons,” “address objections,” and “include analysis of both numerical and verbal data.” In the sample Position Task, you are asked to “discuss,” “accept, reject, or alter,” and “support” your position on the given statement.
- Take a few minutes to think about the writing task and plan a response before you begin to write. On the cover of the test booklet, you may find it helpful to:
 - jot down some **ideas** about the scenario or statement given in the prompt
 - write a brief **outline**
 - do some brief **calculations** using the numerical data
- Take care to **organize** your ideas in paragraphs and develop them fully using ample analysis of your evidence.
- Leave time to **reread** your response, check it against the directions for the task, and make **revisions** that you think would improve it in the time allowed.
- Avoid using **clichés** and language that is considered **slang**, too informal, or overly casual.

SCORING GUIDE FOR PERSUASION TASK

General Directions for Scoring: The guide below explains the criteria the scorers will use to evaluate your Persuasion essay.

Score of 6: Outstanding

A paper in this category stands out because it demonstrates clear and consistent competence, although it may have occasional errors. Such a paper exhibits most or all of the following strengths:

- addresses the writing task effectively and insightfully, providing a well-reasoned solution that clearly displays analysis of data (both numerical and verbal)
- is well organized, with a clear overall strategy
- is fully developed, with pertinent support for ideas presented
- is easy to read and appropriate in style and tone for the intended writer, reader, and situation
- displays consistent facility with written English (grammar, syntax, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling)

Score of 5: Strong

A paper in this category demonstrates reasonably consistent competence, although it may have occasional errors or lapses in quality. Such a paper exhibits most or all of the following strengths:

- addresses the writing task effectively, providing a reasonable solution that displays analysis of data (both numerical and verbal)
- is generally well organized
- is generally well developed, using appropriate examples to support ideas
- is easy to read and appropriate in style and tone for the intended reader
- displays facility with written English (grammar, syntax, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling)

Score of 4: Adequate

A paper in this category demonstrates adequate competence, although it may have occasional errors and lapses in quality. Such a paper exhibits most or all of the following characteristics:

- addresses the writing task and displays analysis of data (numerical and/or verbal)
- is organized and adequately developed
- is generally easy to read and appropriate in style and tone for the intended reader
- displays adequate but inconsistent facility with written English (grammar, syntax, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling)

Score of 3: Limited

A paper in this category demonstrates developing competence. Such a paper either does not address the writing task effectively or addresses the writing task but exhibits one or more of the following weaknesses:

- is inadequately organized
- is limited in development
- is inconsistent or inappropriate in style and tone
- displays limited facility with written English (grammar, syntax, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling)

Score of 2: Flawed

A paper in this category demonstrates some incompetence. Such a paper does not address the writing task effectively. In addition, such a paper is flawed by one or more of the following weaknesses:

- has poor organization
- has thin development
- is generally inappropriate in style and tone
- displays a lack of facility with written English (grammar, syntax, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling)

Score of 1: Fundamentally Deficient

A paper in this category demonstrates incompetence. Such a paper provides little evidence of the ability to address the writing task effectively. In addition, such a paper is flawed by one or more of the following weaknesses:

- has very poor organization
- has very thin development
- is inappropriate in style and tone
- contains a pervasive pattern of errors in written English (grammar, syntax, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling) so severe that meaning is obscured

Score of 0: Off Topic or Illegible

SAMPLE PERSUASION TASKS

Sample Persuasion Task 1

Becca Johnston is at a crossroads. She has been working out of her home in Boise, Idaho, making gold-plated holiday ornaments for the past three years, ever since she gave up work as a real estate agent. That job had been too demanding for the mother of pre-school twins. "You have to work at it all the time," she complained to a friend and real estate agent, Mei Nguyen. The pace of the holiday ornament business is more predictable, and she loves the creativity it requires. In the spring Johnston solicits custom orders and works on designs. In the summer she communicates with a supplier on the East Coast. In the fall she advertises her ornaments and processes orders. In November she and her husband, who works full time at his own automobile repair shop, pack and ship ornaments out of their basement. Profits for last year were \$30,000, about double those of the year before.

But Johnston misses being around people and would like to earn more money. Now that her kids are in school, she is considering the idea of becoming a residential real estate appraiser. Estimating the value of residential property at various times (such as prior to a sale, when getting insurance, in the event of a loss, or during a divorce or bankruptcy), she would be in frequent contact with other adults. Johnston estimates start-up costs at about \$10,000—to cover a 75-hour licensing course, business stationery, professional association dues, and cameras. She has read an estimate of typical annual revenues (gross income before expenses) of \$40,000, based on completing four appraisals a week at \$200 each. The city of Boise has recently experienced a growth in population and a subsequent rise in demand for the construction of new homes.

Johnston asks Nguyen for advice. Should she stick with the ornaments or make the career change into real estate appraisal?
In the role of Mei Nguyen, write a letter to Becca Johnston persuading her of the direction you think she should take.

There is no right or wrong answer. Your goal is to argue persuasively. Your writing must include analysis of both the numerical and verbal evidence given in the prompt. Then you may add additional details to support your position. Do not simply restate the information in the problem. Consider the pros and cons of your position, and directly address objections your reader might have to your arguments.

Sample Persuasion Task 2

Kathy Edwards and Ellen Randall own an upscale infant's and children's clothing boutique, *Mes Enfants*, located near an exclusive residential district. They are supplied by both wholesale warehouses and a number of independent crafts people who weave, knit, crochet, and sew to order. Although expensive, these orders have created loyal customers, and the shop is gaining in reputation. Sales revenue has increased, on average, by 12 percent in each of the last four years when sales reached \$200,000. Last week the partners learned that their lease is not being renewed and they will need to find a new location for the store within six months.

Recently they were approached by a large national chain *Kidswear* that sells children's clothing and is eager to establish a store at one of the large malls in the area. They sell many of the same brands as *Mes Enfants* but do not work with special orders. *Kidswear* is offering \$400,000 for the business. The contract would also stipulate that Edwards and Randall would be hired on as managers with a base salary of \$40,000 each (about 15 percent less than they made last year), plus 3 percent of the profit. The chain would require *Mes Enfants* to adopt its corporate business plan and it would provide the shop space and be responsible for advertising.

Randall, however, wants to keep the boutique as it is and to rent space in another nearby shopping center, although the monthly rent for the new space would go from their current \$1,100 to \$2,000, and they would have to pay about \$10,000 to remodel. She feels the special orders draw people into the shop. Although these orders account for less than 20 percent of the profit, special-order customers make additional purchases, and she does not want to lose their talented craftspeople. Edwards, though, who manages the daily operations of the store and does the bookkeeping, feels that connecting with the larger company would be a wise business move. Besides providing financial stability, the chain has promised to allow them to keep their three part-time employees.

The partners cannot agree on what to do. They have sought the services of a business consultant, Julia Simmons. Simmons asks each of them to write her a letter persuading her that their ideas and concerns provide the best solution to their problem.

In the role of either

Kathy Edwards write a letter to Julia Simmons persuading her that accepting the offer from *Kidswear* is the best option for *Mes Enfants*
or

Ellen Randall write a letter to Julia Simmons persuading her that reopening their own small business in the new space is the best option.

There is no right or wrong answer. Your goal is to argue persuasively. Your writing must include analysis of both the numerical and verbal evidence given in the prompt. Then you may add additional details to support your position. Do not simply restate the information in the problem. Consider the pros and cons of your position, and directly address objections your reader might have to your arguments.

SCORING GUIDE FOR POSITION TASK

General Directions for Scoring: The guide below explains the criteria the scorers will use to evaluate your Position essay.

Score of 6: Outstanding

A paper in this category stands out because it demonstrates clear and consistent competence, although it may have occasional errors. Such a paper exhibits most or all of the following strengths:

- addresses the writing task effectively and insightfully, providing a well-reasoned position that displays critical thinking
- is well organized, with a clear overall strategy
- is fully developed, with pertinent support for ideas presented
- is easy and compelling to read and appropriate style and tone for a general audience
- displays consistent facility with written English (grammar, syntax, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling)

Score of 5: Strong

A paper in this category demonstrates reasonably consistent competence, although it may have occasional errors or lapses in quality. Such a paper exhibits most or all of the following strengths:

- addresses the writing task effectively, providing a well-reasoned position that displays critical thinking
- is generally well organized
- is generally well developed, using appropriate examples to support ideas
- is easy to read and appropriate in style and tone for a general audience
- displays facility with written English (grammar, syntax, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling)

Score of 4: Adequate

A paper in this category demonstrates adequate competence, although it may have occasional errors and lapses in quality. Such a paper exhibits most or all of the following characteristics:

- addresses the writing task, providing a well-reasoned position that may display critical thinking
- is organized and adequately developed
- is, for the most part, easy to read and appropriate in style and tone for a general audience
- displays adequate facility with written English (grammar, syntax, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling)

Score of 3: Limited

A paper in this category demonstrates developing competence. Such a paper either does not address the writing task effectively or addresses the writing task but exhibits one or more of the following weaknesses:

- is inadequately organized
- is limited in development
- is inconsistent or inappropriate in style and tone for a general audience
- displays limited facility with written English (grammar, syntax, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling)

Score of 2: Flawed

A paper in this category demonstrates some incompetence. Such a paper does not address the writing task effectively. In addition, such a paper is flawed by one or more of the following weaknesses:

- has poor organization
- has thin development
- is generally inappropriate in style and tone for a general audience
- displays a lack of facility with written English (grammar, syntax, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling)

Score of 1: Fundamentally Deficient

A paper in this category demonstrates incompetence. Such a paper provides little evidence of the ability to address the writing task. In addition, such a paper is flawed by one or more of the following weaknesses:

- has very poor organization
- has very thin development
- is inappropriate in style and tone for a general audience
- contains a pervasive pattern of errors in written English (grammar, syntax, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling) so severe that meaning is obscured

Score of 0: Off topic, Illegible

SAMPLE POSITION TASKS

Sample Position Task 1

Choose one of the two statements below. As soon as you have made your choice, copy the letter “A” or “B” and the first three words of the statement in the “Topic Title” blank on the front of the Position booklet. Then plan and write an essay according to the specific directions following the two statements.

A. The opinion of the majority is not the final proof of what is right.

B. There is no rule without an exception.

Directions: Compose a unified essay analyzing one of the two statements above, in which you do the following: Explain what you think the statement means. Discuss why you would accept, reject, or alter it. Support your position with reasoning and examples from history or current affairs, academic studies, or your own observations.

There is no right or wrong position. Your response will be evaluated on overall quality, including the strength of your analysis; how insightfully you support your position; your organization; and how clearly you express your ideas following the conventions of standard written English.

Sample Position Task 2

Choose one of the two statements below. As soon as you have made your choice, copy the letter “A” or “B” and the first three words of the statement in the “Topic Title” blank on the front of the Position booklet. Then plan and write an essay according to the specific directions following the two statements.

A. The citizen’s first duty is to obey the laws of the nation.

B. Dependability and predictability are synonymous with creative stagnation.

Directions: Compose a unified essay analyzing one of the two statements above, in which you do the following: Explain what you think the statement means. Discuss why you would accept, reject, or alter it. Support your position with reasoning and examples from history or current affairs, academic studies, or your own observations.

There is no right or wrong position. Your response will be evaluated on overall quality, including the strength of your analysis; how insightfully you support your position; your organization; and how clearly you express your ideas following the conventions of standard written English.

The University Of Washington School Of Business Administration gratefully acknowledges precedents set by Educational Testing Services, Princeton, N.J., in scoring standards for tests of writing ability

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PREPARING FOR THE WSA

Preparation and practice will definitely help to improve your score on the WSA test. Approximately one month before you take the exam, prepare yourself in the following ways.

Reflect On Your Own Writing: Think about the comments you've gotten on your papers in your writing classes and work on those specific issues. These will often include common errors such as lack of paragraph structure, lack of support for your assertions, vague topic sentences, spelling errors, word choice/misuse of vocabulary, lack of transitions between paragraphs, and broad over-generalizations. As you write your practice essays check for those errors and edit them.

Read Relevant Materials: Read **articles** that focus on business-related issues in magazines and other media such as *The Economist* or *Business Weekly*, etc. Reading written material on a given subject will help you learn the language used in that field and understand how to structure your own writing. Once you've read an article:

- **Summarize** the **argument** of the essay, including the main claim, key points, and how its **evidence** supports the main thesis.
- Note the **style, tone, and language** used in the article.
- Trace the essay's **organization**. Note how **transitions** connect ideas and paragraphs to each other and back to the main claim.
- **Respond** to the article. Take a position that agrees or disagrees with the article's argument/claim or find a point in the essay about which you can write a persuasive essay. The topic is less important than the writing practice this will provide.

Practice Your Analysis: Both writing tasks require you to demonstrate critical thinking through analysis. **Analysis** requires you to use the information given in the prompt to support your position by explaining what your evidence is and precisely how you are using it to support your persuasive argument or position. Strong analysis will address the implications of your proposed course of action.

For Persuasive Tasks:

- Use **verbal analysis** to explain how your proposed course of action engages the dilemma in the prompt, including addressing the implications of your choice, discussing both pros and cons, and responding to any potential objections or counterarguments.
- Use **analysis of the numerical data** in the prompt to support your proposal with quantitative reasoning and perform calculations to give more varied or specific economic reasons for your proposed course of action.
- Do not use any outside information until you have used the numerical and verbal data given in the prompt.

For Position Tasks:

- Make sure to **explain** what you think the statement means in your own words.
- Make sure your essay's main claim discusses *exactly* why you **accept or reject** the statement or *precisely* how you would **alter** it.
- Make sure to choose at least two **examples** and analyze why they **support** your position on the statement.

Review The Rules Of Grammar: Be aware of these common grammatical issues:

- Use complete sentences. Avoid both run-on and fragment sentences.
- Make sure each sentence's subject agrees with its verb in number and that your pronouns agree in number with their referents.
- Watch for common punctuation issues: comma placement, misuse of apostrophes, and the use of colons and semicolons.
- Beware of the misuse of similar sounding words such as there/their/they're, your/you're, and it's/its.

Plan Your Essay Organization: Both tasks should be organized using paragraphs with topic sentences and transitions.

- The Persuasion Tasks asks you to write a letter persuading an individual of a particular course of action. Letters should be addressed to the recipient with a salutation such as "Dear X" and concluded with a closing such as "Sincerely, Y."
- The directions for the Position Tasks suggest a specific organization, so organize your essay around explaining, discussing, and then supporting your position with your examples. Do not omit any of these steps.

Take A Practice Test: Use the **Test-Taking Tips** on the first page and the **sample tasks** to practice writing a Persuasion and a Position response in the allotted time of 1 ½ hours.

Consult These Additional Resources:

- Read through the online WSA study guides and sample tasks that can be found on all three UW Business School websites.
- Talk to a writing center/lab tutor or one of your writing instructors about your practice test to give you some writing tactics.
- Search the web for additional writing references, such as Purdue University's Online Writing Lab.