

Preparing for the Writing Skills Assessment (WSA)

* THANK YOU UW BOTHELL WRITING AND COMMUNICATION CENTER FOR SHARING SOME OF THE SLIDES

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WSA FORMAT

Writing Skills Assessment Test Overview

- 90 minutes total to take two tests
- No dictionaries or calculators are allowed during testing
- Doesn't presuppose any specific business knowledge
- Includes two tasks: Persuasion and Position
- Graded on separate rubrics on a scale of 1-6
- Your overall score is the average of both scores (If you receive a Position score of 3 and a Persuasion score of 4, your final WSA score would be 3.5.)

THE TASKS

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.

Your Persuasion answer should:

- *interpret* the dilemma in a workplace scenario
- use the analysis of both numerical and verbal data *from the prompt* to persuade the reader
- address the audience provided by the prompt

Your Position answer should:

- *assert* your position on one of two statements
- demonstrate critical thinking using your own examples to defend your position
- address a general audience

WSA SCORING RUBRICS

WSA SCORING RUBRICS

- The following are the two scoring guides that are used to evaluate every test.
- Each writing task has its own set of criteria:
- The Persuasion task requires *analysis* of data to *persuade* the reader of a recommended course of action based on a given scenario.
- The Position task requires *critical thinking* about your own examples to support your *position* on a given statement.
- Every score for each task has a specific set of requirements for achieving that score. Familiarize yourself with the criteria for each score.
- Pay attention to the differences between scores to understand what exactly needs to be done to achieve a high score.

PERSUASION SCORING RUBRIC

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

POSITION SCORING RUBRIC

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
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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

WSA PROMPT EXPLANATIONS

PERSUASION TASK

The Persuasion Task requires you to read a scenario, make a choice between two options, and write a letter that uses evidence from the prompt to persuade a specific person/audience that your proposed course of action is the best one.

The main **writing task** for this test requires that you:

- demonstrate your comprehension of the scenario
- show that you understand and can utilize the numerical and verbal information in the prompt
- develop your answer fully by explaining the reasons for your option choice and, especially, how the evidence you discuss from the prompt supports your reasons
- write an essay that is clearly organized into paragraphs that uses appropriate style and tone for the audience and adheres to the standards of written English

Sample Persuasion Task 1

Below is an example of the kind of prompt you will receive for the Persuasion Task.
Read the directions and the scenario *carefully* to understand what you are being asked to write.

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.

Persuasion Task Directions Explained

The directions for every Persuasion test will be identical or similar to those on these sample prompts. Be sure to understand the *directions* for each task. Here is a brief explanation of each line in the directions.

➤ **There is no right or wrong answer.**

There is no “right” or “wrong” view on any issue. You can write persuasively about either option; your goal is to defend your ideas as a given role to a given audience. “In the role of X, write to Y.”

➤ **Your goal is to argue persuasively.**

Arguing persuasively means choosing specific data from the prompt and using it to convince your specific audience (always part of the prompt) that your choice is the best one. Letters should be addressed with a salutation such as “Dear Y” and concluded with a closing such as “Sincerely, X.”

➤ **Your writing must include analysis of both the numerical and verbal evidence given in the prompt.**

This sentence is **underlined** because it is so important. Analysis of numerical and verbal data *from the prompt* should make up the core of your response and should prove to your audience how your proposed course of action is the right choice. Numerical analysis requires discussing precisely how you are using the figures in the prompt to make your point while verbal analysis requires explaining your interpretation of the scenario and using non-numerical facts to persuade the reader.

➤ **Then you may add additional details to support your position.**

You are not required to use any additional details or other information in your answer and, in fact, you should only do so *after you have already discussed the information given in the prompt*. Do not use a lot of fabricated facts or figures just to prove your point; you can, though, use additional information if it supports or connects to the information from the prompt.

➤ **Do not simply restate the information in the problem.**

While you need to include the information from the prompt in your letter, make sure anything you quote from the prompt is followed by your own analysis, including your own explanation of the information and your own thoughts about its implications and how it supports your argument.

➤ **Consider the pros and cons of your position, and directly address objections your reader might have to your arguments.**

Be sure, at some point in your letter, to include a possible objection that someone might have to your proposal and then provide a counterargument. “Some might say...but I think...”

Persuasion Task Explained

The Persuasion Task requires you to read a scenario like this one, make a choice between two options, and write a letter that persuades a specific person/audience that your proposed course of action is the best one.

This particular prompt's writing task requires you to write a persuasive letter explaining why Becca should either:

- a) keep making and selling ornaments OR
- b) change careers and become a real estate appraiser.

Verbal data to analyze

Numerical data to analyze

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.

POSITION TASK

The Position Task requires you to choose one of two statements, explain what that statement means in your own words, and then use your *own examples* to think critically about how you agree, disagree, or would modify the language or ideas in the statement so that you can agree with it.

The main writing task for this test requires that you:

- demonstrate your understanding and interpretation of a particular statement
- show that you can generate and utilize your own examples to support your assertion, stance, or “take” on the ideas expressed in the statement
- develop your answer fully by explaining your reasons for your position and how your examples support those reasons
- write an essay that is clearly organized into paragraphs that uses appropriate style and tone for the audience and adheres to the standards of written English

Sample Position Task 1

Below is an example of the prompt you will receive for the Position Task.
Read the directions and the two statements carefully to understand what you are being asked to write.

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.

Position Outline

The directions to the position task clearly state what you need to do in your essay. They also imply an organization that follows these directions.

- Explain what you think the statement means in your own words
 - Define the key terms in the statement and how you interpret them.
 - Discuss the implications of the statement, why it is important, how it is relevant, and what debates or dilemmas it introduces.
 - Be sure to include a sentence in which you clearly explain the statement based on your definitions and discussion of the implications.

- Discuss why you would accept, reject, or alter it
 - Write a claim that clearly asserts the position you are taking and why.
 - Discuss the specific reasons you would accept or reject or the *precise* ways you would alter the statement.
 - Accepting the statement means you think it is true or valid and rejecting it means you think it is untrue or invalid. Altering the statement means you think that parts are correct but that parts of it need to be rewritten to make the statement true or valid.

- Support your position with reasons and with specific examples from current affairs, academic studies, or other sources
 - Organize your essay around the specific reasons you are accepting, rejecting, or altering the statement.
 - Use at least two concrete examples and explain exactly how they support the reasons you give for your position.
 - Think about and discuss why you are using those examples.

WSA SAMPLE RESPONSES

Outlining a Persuasion Task Response

Before you start composing your response, take a moment to brainstorm and outline your thoughts. To do so, *refer to the prompt* to answer these questions about your potential response.

- What is your *role* as the writer? Who are you asked to be?
- Who is your *audience*? To whom are you writing?
- What is the *prompt* asking of you? What is your specific *claim/recommendation*?
- What *evidence from the prompt* will you be using to support your recommended course of action?
 - Which specific points of *verbal data* do you want to analyze to support your claim?
 - What brief calculations do you need to do to analyze your chosen points of *numerical data* to support your claim?
- How do you want to *organize* your letter?

Organization Strategies

- A good, general organizational strategy for the Persuasion task is to:
 1. First, clearly **introduce** your recommendation,
 2. then **analyze** your evidence from the prompt,
 3. and then **conclude** with give a brief “wrap up” of your recommendation that discusses the implications of your evidence analysis.
- Use the table below to organize your thoughts on your proposed course of action. Whatever recommended action you choose to write about, fill out the other columns to give you some of the “cons,” or objections and counterarguments to address.

Situation 1: Selling Ornaments		Situation 2: Real Estate Appraiser	
Pros	Cons	Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creativity • Home-based/children • Flexible schedule 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No adult contact • Seasonal income 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interacting with people • Boise’s growth/demand for appraisal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lacks creativity • Travel/schedule • Learning curve/new career/need to network
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for growth/higher income • Profits might continue to double: \$60, 000 next year, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presently, lower income: \$30, 000/year • Profits double last year but sales can expect to plateau 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expected higher income \$40,000/year • Could be even higher income (if more done per week, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start up costs: \$10,000 • Income is hopeful projection of \$800/week based on \$200/appraisal

Sample Persuasion Response: High Score

Below is a sample response that received a score of 6.

Dear Becca,

Regarding your question as to whether you should continue designing and selling your gold-plated ornaments or start pursuing a residential real estate appraiser license, there are several factors to consider. First, I think you should consider which you like to do more and which career will ultimately be more satisfying for you; this is something I cannot decide for you. The artistic work you are doing now has the benefit of inspiring your creativity and also provides you a more flexible schedule than the appraisal job would. However, based on a purely financial analysis, I think you should pursue the residential real estate appraiser licensing because, in the long run, working in appraising has the potential to consistently generate more profit than your ornament business.

According to your estimates, as a real estate appraiser, you would generate an average of \$10,000 more in income than you currently receive selling ornaments. To transition to this new career, however, you'll have to invest that estimated \$10,000 difference in the 75-hour licensing course, business stationary, professional association dues, and cameras. This initial investment may seem like a big sacrifice, but your overall profit in your first year is equal to what you earned with your job designing and selling ornaments last year. Even if you net \$30,000 after your first year as an appraiser (which would be your \$40,000 salary minus the \$10,000 start-up costs), the next year you can reasonably expect to earn at least \$40,000, assuming no decrease or growth in demand. Given this relatively secure appraiser's salary, however, \$10,000 is a relatively small start-up fee, so you aren't taking on any substantive risk.

On the other hand, another financial consideration that needs to be addressed is that your profit from ornament sales this year doubled from last year. This means that you can anticipate profits for the next several years of \$60,000 or more. In fact, based on good word-of-mouth and an active online advertising campaign, there is a reasonable chance that you could even continue to double your annual sales so that in five years you could be making almost a million dollars (\$960,000 to be precise) in profit, at which point, of course, you'd have to expand your production and distribution capacity. However, I think this estimate is overly optimistic because sales of luxury items like gold-plated ornaments are unpredictable and there will almost certainly be a peak and then plateau in sales revenue.

Consider, though, that the financial forecast for the real estate appraisal market in Boise also should include a potential for growth. The "Boise boom" in population and new home construction means not only that the market for real estate appraisals will remain stable but also that any increased demand in residential real estate will come with a concomitant need for appraisals. This demand means you could easily anticipate completing more than 4 appraisals per week, even up to the 8-10, so that your weekly salary could easily double from \$800 to \$1600 or even \$2000 per week. With the boom in residential housing will also inevitably come a demand for more commercial real estate, which means you could expand your appraisal business to include commercial, which garners an even higher rate.

Finally, I understand, Becca, that the work days will be longer and the job more demanding but your kids are in school now, and are not as dependent as they once were. As I hope I've made clear, the money, at this point, is better and more consistent as an appraiser and you would be around people more often, but this should be weighed in contrast to your preference for a job that allows you to be creative and flexible with your time. Good luck and best wishes on your next endeavor and perhaps we'll work together in the future.

Sincerely,

Mei

Sample Persuasion Response: High Score Explained

In general high scores:

- Address the writing task effectively by using ample evidence from the prompt as well as original and relevant argumentation.
- Show sensitivity to what style and tone are appropriate for the intended writer, reader, and scenario.
- *Must* develop and support their proposal with both the numerical (quantitative) and verbal (qualitative) data analysis. Strong analysis will address the implications (consequences, benefits, etc.) of your proposed course of action.
 - **Analysis** uses the information in the prompt to support your position by introducing your evidence and explaining precisely how you are using it to support your persuasive argument.
 - **Verbal (or qualitative) analysis** includes non-numerical evidence such as addressing the implications of your choice, discussing pros and cons, and responding to potential objections or counterarguments.
 - **Numerical (or quantitative) analysis** means using the numerical data from the prompt to support your choice, including brief calculations that give more varied or specific economic reasons for your proposed course of action.
- Anticipate and address some of the possible objections that those choosing the other course of action might have and offer cogent counterarguments to those possible objections.

Sample Persuasion Response: High Score Explained

Salutation: To whom are you writing?

Stating your claim/recommendation

Supporting your claim with numerical analysis evidence

Addressing potential objections

Supporting your claim with verbal analysis evidence

Summary of your recommendation

Closing: What is your role?

Dear Becca,

Regarding your question as to whether you should continue designing and selling your gold-plated ornaments or start pursuing a residential real estate appraiser license, there are several factors to consider. First, I think you should consider which you like to do more and which career will ultimately be more satisfying for you; this is something I cannot decide for you. The artistic work you are doing now has the benefit of inspiring your creativity and also provides you a more flexible schedule than the appraisal job would. However, based on a purely financial analysis, I think you should pursue the residential real estate appraiser licensing because, in the long run, working in appraising has the potential to consistently generate more profit than your ornament business.

According to your estimates, as a real estate appraiser, you would generate an average of \$10,000 more in income than you currently receive selling ornaments. To transition to this new career, however, you'll have to invest that estimated \$10,000 difference in the 75-hour licensing course, business stationary, professional association dues, and cameras. This initial investment may seem like a big sacrifice, but your overall profit in your first year is equal to what you earned with your job designing and selling ornaments last year. Even if you net \$30,000 after your first year as an appraiser (which would be your \$40,000 salary minus the \$10,000 start-up costs), the next year you can reasonably expect to earn at least \$40,000, assuming no decrease or growth in demand. Given this relatively secure appraiser's salary, however, \$10,000 is a relatively small start-up fee, so you aren't taking on any substantive risk.

On the other hand, another financial consideration that needs to be addressed is that your profit from ornament sales this year doubled from last year. This means that you can anticipate profits for the next several years of \$60,000 or more. In fact, based on good word-of-mouth and an active online advertising campaign, there is a reasonable chance that you could even continue to double your annual sales so that in five years you could be making almost a million dollars (\$960,000 to be precise) in profit, at which point, of course, you'd have to expand your production and distribution capacity. However, I think this estimate is overly optimistic because sales of luxury items like gold-plated ornaments are unpredictable and there will almost certainly be a peak and then plateau in sales revenue.

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Finally, I understand, Becca, that the work days will be longer and the job more demanding but your kids are in school now, and are not as dependent as they once were. As I hope I've made clear, the money, at this point, is better and more consistent as an appraiser and you would be around people more often, but this should be weighed in contrast to your preference for a job that allows you to be creative and flexible with your time. Good luck and best wishes on your next endeavor and perhaps we'll work together in the future.

Sincerely,
Mei

Sample Persuasion Response: Low Score

Below is a sample response that received a score of 2.

It was really great to see you and your family at the barbeque last week. First of all, go with your heart, but sometimes that doesn't give clear cut answers. I guess that's why you have friends. Through the last many years we've been friends I can always tell that you are passionate about your ornament business. Stick with it. Creativity is a beautiful thing and to be able to work and making money off your own ideas is a ginormous asset, especially around the holidays with the family. According Forbes, Nordstroms sells \$1 million ornaments. Right!!!

Your kids will learn to appreciate and love what their mom does instead of working 9-5 everyday. They might be too young to appreciate it now but this is your time to see them grow up even more. Plus I can't wait to see the twins again!

Seriously though, you have to ask yourself; Am I ready to start up again? I am sure you are aware that nine of ten new businesses fail. You left the real estate because it was too demanding but from what you tell me the demands are still their if not greater. You also have to consider that tons of money has to go into real estate before money comes back trust me I know. Even as an appraisor. You say you miss being around people? People aren't that interesting anyways.

You have a great heart go with what you love. Your family or money? Profits for last year were \$30,000, about double those of the year before. Be there for your husband and your kids, the money will come. They will always remember it. And besides this way I can come up and visit. Say "hi" to the family!

Sample Persuasion Response: Low Score Explained

In general, lower scores:

- Do not engage the writing task required by offering either no solution to the prompt's scenario or underdeveloped solution.
- Offer no or very little analysis of either the numerical or verbal data given in the prompt and/or include a lot of information/unnecessary points that are not given in the prompt or go on irrelevant tangents.
- Lack development by having insufficient or inappropriate evidence or by not explaining how that evidence supports their recommendation.
- Are not written in the form or style of a letter or use an inappropriate, informal tone, too much slang, or too many clichés.
- Contain pervasive grammar/spelling errors. If you know you have issues with spelling, grammar, etc. work on these in the months before your test date.

Sample Persuasion Response: Low Score Explained

No Salutation

Not much of a recommendation.

This numerical data is a figure not mentioned in the prompt.

Verbal data/evidence is based on a few points from the prompt but is not analyzed and does not explain how and why it supports the recommendation.

Informal in style and tone

Opinion, not evidence from the prompt and this numerical data has basic analysis (just saying it's doubled).

No closing

It was really great to see you and your family at the barbeque last week. First of all, go with your heart, but sometimes that doesn't give clear cut answers. I guess that's why you have friends. Through the last many years we've been friends I can always tell that you are passionate about your ornament business. Stick with it. Creativity is a beautiful thing and to be able to work and making money off your own ideas is a ginormous asset, especially around the holidays with the family. According Forbes, Nordstroms sells \$1 million ornaments. Right!!!

Your kids will learn to appreciate and love what their mom does instead of working 9-5 everyday. They might be too young to appreciate it now but this is your time to see them grow up even more. Plus I can't wait to see the twins again!

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You have a great heart go with what you love. Your family or money? Profits for last year were \$30,000, about double those of the year before. Be there for your husband and your kids, the money will come. They will always remember it. And besides this way I can come up and visit. Say "hi" to the family!

POSITION TASK SAMPLE RESPONSE

Outlining a Position Task Response

Before you start composing your response, take a moment to brainstorm and outline your thoughts. To do so, read the statement a few times to answer these questions about your potential response.

- What is the *prompt* asking you to think and write about?
- How are you *thinking critically* about the statement and what is your interpretation of the statement?
- What specific *claim/stance* are you asserting about your chosen statement?
- What *examples from current events, history, academic studies, or your own personal observations* will you use to support your argument?
- How are you *thinking critically* about your examples, their implications, and how they support your claim?
- How do you want to *organize* your essay?

Organization Strategies

- A good, general organizational strategy for Position responses is to:
 1. First, clearly **explain** what you think the statement means in your own words,
 2. then clearly **state** what your stance is (accept, reject, or how you would alter it),
 3. then use at least **two different examples** to explain why you have taken that stance,
 4. then **conclude** briefly by explaining how the implications of your different examples have supported your position.
- Use the table below to organize your thoughts on what position you want to take and your specific reasons.

Prompt: “The opinion of the majority is not the final proof of what is right”

<u>Your Position</u>	Accept: What are the reasons you think the statement is true or valid?	Reject: What are the reasons you think the statement is not true or invalid?	Alter: How precisely would you alter the statement and why?
<u>Your Reasons</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In history, majority has been wrong • Social norms change/evolve but also devolve • Who makes up the majority? • How do we know what is right and what constitutes “final proof”? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If most people believe something, it’s probably correct. • The majority DEFINES what is right. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The opinion of the majority is <i>sometimes but not always</i> the final proof of what is right.”
<u>Your Examples</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • U.S. slavery • U.S. interment of Japanese Americans during WWII • Detention of migrant children today 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voting • Social norms or social contract/expectations • Religion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • U.S. slavery = not “what is right” • Gay marriage = changed from “wrong” to “right” in 1990/2000s • Murder laws

Sample Position Response: High Score

Below is a sample Position response that received a score of 6.

To explain what the statement “The opinion of the majority is not the final proof of what is right” means one needs to define the terms in the quote. Principle among those are the terms “majority” and “right,” although we also need to investigate what is meant by “opinion” and “final proof.” My interpretation is that this statement discusses the way that society comes to a moral consensus. Given that, while the word “majority” means “most” or “more than half,” when talking about the majority of a society, it most often refers to those who have the power to represent their views, since there are always subgroups of people whose opinions are not solicited or valued. “Opinion,” then, in this context refers not just to a set of individual points of view but, instead, to the reasoned thinking about what constitutes the moral definition of what is “right,” or what is defined as morally good. The point of debating moral issues is that there is a pluralism of moral systems and attitudes that can be used as the “final proof,” or arbiter, of what is “right.” I would argue that any given society is always working towards a consensus on what is right, even though that doesn’t mean that every member subscribes to those views. It also doesn’t mean that a consensus doesn’t evolve or, sometimes, devolve. Based on my interpretation, I accept this statement and will use examples from American history to support my position.

The first example that provides a valid argument to support the assertion that the majority opinion is not proof of what is right is America’s history with slavery. The majority of people who had the authority to articulate their opinions during the 18th and 19th centuries argued that increased productivity from slave labor was essential to a growing nation and that African peoples were better off being managed by land-owning whites than trying to live and work on their own. In hindsight, a majority of Americans would argue that the majority was not right in perpetuating policies and practices of slavery. This shows that the U.S. “evolved” on the issue of African slavery immediately after Emancipation, however, this history was marked by “Two steps forward, one step back.” We saw a course of “devolution” in the Plessy v. Ferguson decision in which the majority opinion of the Supreme Court codified segregation. About sixty years later the majority of the Supreme Court then voted in Brown v. Board of Education that segregation was unlawful. What this shows is that the majority opinion is often not “right” even though it may be the law of the land and that majority opinions shift over time.

The second example of the majority opinion not being right is the internment of Japanese Americans during WWII. In this case the majority of white citizens with authority to shape public opinion argued that Japanese Americans were incapable of more loyalty to their country of citizenship than to the country of their cultural heritage, despite the fact that there was a division in the U.S. army air force of Japanese fighting against Axis. This is also evidenced by the fact that no Germans or Italians were incarcerated despite the fact that the U.S. was at war with those two countries at the same time. The majority now acknowledges that this was not right and that the internment was based in stereotypical thinking about a specific social group. While the end of the Chinese Exclusion Act and the Japanese internment in the 1940s indicates an “evolution” of notions of what is right when it comes to the treatment of Asians in America, there is still no “final proof” of this evolution because continuing antipathy toward Asians and Asian Americans also indicates a devolution for some parts of the “majority” on this topic.

Majority opinions shift back and forth over time and in this case we are now seeing a resurgence of political support for detaining immigrants who enter the U.S. illegally. Should the majority of lawmakers or the majority of those polled be a valid indicator of what is right on this issue? In fact the politician most in favor of detention camps is one who lost the popular vote but won the presidential election based on electoral college votes, which did not represent the majority of Americans. What this means is that a minority decided on what is “right.” The opinion of the majority is often a poor indicator of what is right in most historical scenarios.

Sample Position Response: High Score Explained

In general, high position scores:

- Define the chosen statement and explain clearly how it is being interpreted.
- State a clear claim that discusses how the statement is being accepted, rejected, or altered and a brief explanation of why that choice was made.
- Provide ample, insightful examples:
 - Don't use two personal life examples; use at least one historical, current event, or other example.
 - Explain explicitly how each example supports the particular stance taken on the statement.
- Display critical thinking by explaining the reasons for the chosen position and analyzing the examples and their implications to support those reasons.
- Organize the essay around the stated requirements of the prompt – first explaining, then discussing, and then supporting the position with examples.

Sample Position Response: High Score Explained

Explain the statement and define its terms in your own words.

Discuss position taken

Example 1 to support position

Example 2 to support position

Conclusion

To explain what the statement “The opinion of the majority is not the final proof of what is right” means one needs to define the terms in the quote. Principle among those are the terms “majority” and “right,” although we also need to investigate what is meant by “opinion” and “final proof.” My interpretation is that this statement discusses the way that society comes to a moral consensus. Given that, while the word “majority” means “most” or “more than half,” when talking about the majority of a society, it most often refers to those who have the power to represent their views, since there are always subgroups of people whose opinions are not solicited or valued. “Opinion,” then, in this context refers not just to a set of individual points of view but, instead, to the reasoned thinking about what constitutes the moral definition of what is “right,” or what is defined as morally good. The point of debating moral issues is that there is a pluralism of moral systems and attitudes that can be used as the “final proof,” or arbiter, of what is “right.” I would argue that any given society is always working towards a consensus on what is right, even though that doesn’t mean that every member subscribes to those views. It also doesn’t mean that a consensus doesn’t evolve or, sometimes, devolve. Based on my interpretation, I accept this statement and will use examples from American history to support my position.

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Sample Position Response: Low Score

Below is a sample Position response that received a score of 2.

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

I accept this statement. Each person has a different opinion about a story, a joke, or a poem. Essentially no one has the same opinion. Opinions are never wrong or right. You are the one who can decide whether the opinion is strong or not. For instance, if you are a boss of a company, what do you do to perform others to work well in your company? You have to listen to their opinions, but sometimes you have to share your opinion with them. You may accept their opinions or you may not accept their opinions. The final decision may decide by you or your employees. Opinion is a key strategy to the future success to your firm. This exercise is to identify your key employees and create a development plan for them. Moreover, you need to make a shift and learn how to support them by sharing the majority opinions, but the opinion of the majority is not the final proof of what is right. You must understand that successful companies don't limit development to their key employees, and use opinion as a tool to recruiting and retaining the best employees in all categories. So opinion should be share with each other and feel free to have your opinion all the time. You should remember that opinion is never right or wrong.

Sample Position Response: Low Score Explained

In general, low position scores:

- Do not address the writing task either by not defining the statement in their own words or not clearly stating how or why they would accept, reject, or alter the chosen statement.
- Use too few or irrelevant examples that don't act to substantively support the position taken by the author.
- Have thin development of their examples, meaning that they don't fully describe their examples or analyze how their implications support their position.
- Are not written in the form or style of an essay or use an inappropriate, informal tone, too much slang, or too many clichés.
- Contain pervasive grammar/spelling errors. If you know you have issues with spelling, grammar, etc. work on these in the months before your test date.

Sample Position Response: Low Score Explained

States the acceptance of the statement but does not discuss *why* position is taken

Does not explain the statement or define its terms in the writer's own words, except to informally discuss some points of view about one word ("opinion") from the statement.

Analysis of the one example ("boss of a company") is thin and limited in development because it doesn't explain the example or how it supports the assertion.

The organization is inadequate and the style and tone is inappropriate and overly casual for a general audience.

The reasoning is obscure and confusing and demonstrates a limited understanding of the nuances of the statement.

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

I accept this statement. Each person has a different opinion about a story, a joke, or a poem. Essentially no one has the same opinion. Opinions are never wrong or right. You are the one who can decide whether the opinion is strong or not. For instance, if you are a boss of a company, what do you do to perform others to work well in your company? You have to listen to their opinions, but sometimes you have to share your opinion with them. You may accept their opinions or you may not accept their opinions. The final decision may decide by you or your employees. Opinion is a key strategy to the future success to your firm. This exercise is to identify your key employees and create a development plan for them. Moreover, you need to make a shift and learn how to support them by sharing the majority opinions, but the opinion of the majority is not the final proof of what is right. You must understand that successful companies don't limit development to their key employees, and use opinion as a tool to recruiting and retaining the best employees in all categories. So opinion should be share with each other and feel free to have your opinion all the time. You should remember that opinion is never right or wrong.

IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

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** your 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.

Preparing for the WSA

Preparation and practice will definitely help to improve your score on the WSA test.

In the weeks leading up to your exam date, prepare yourself in these 5 ways.

1. 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 a lack of paragraph structure, a lack of support for your assertions, vague topic sentences, spelling errors, word choice/misuse of vocabulary, a lack of transitions between paragraphs, and broad over-generalizations. As you write your practice essays check for those errors and edit them.

Meet with a tutor or take a WSA workshop at a writing center on your campus to discuss ways to improve your writing.

2. 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.

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3. 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 introducing your evidence and explaining 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.

Preparing for the WSA

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In the weeks leading up to your exam date, prepare yourself in these 5 ways.

4. Review The Rules Of Grammar: Work on the grammar, spelling, syntax, etc. that you need to improve and 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.
- Search the web for additional writing resources, such as Purdue University's Online Writing Lab, to review the rules of grammar and persuasive writing in the weeks leading up to your test day.

5. 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.

Time Management Suggestion

Here is a suggestion for how to spend your time during the 90-minute test. For most students, reading the scenario and selecting, processing, and organizing the data from the the Persuasion prompt takes a bit more time than analyzing their own examples for the Position essay. For some students, though, developing their own Position examples takes more time, so plan according to your own skills.

	Persuasion Task	Position Task
Reading and Thinking	10	5
Outlining	5	5
Writing	35	20
Editing	5	5
Total	55 minutes	35 minutes

WSA PRACTICE PROMPTS

One of the best ways to prepare for the WSA is to write your own response to the provided WSA Practice Prompts.

Remember to:

- ***Read the directions*** for each task!
- Take a *total* of **90 minutes** to write ***both*** the Persuasion and Position test in total. Time yourself!
- Ask a friend or family member to proctor you, reminding you when you are at 45 minutes and when you have 5 minutes left, or set a timer to proctor yourself.
- Talk about your practice responses with other students who are taking the test or a writing tutor or an instructor to see how you might improve.

Sample Persuasion Task 1

You've read a sample response to this prompt, now write your own response to this Persuasion Task prompt.

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 toying with 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

Write a response to this practice Persuasion prompt in the time allotted.

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% 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.

Sample Position Task 1

You've read a sample response to this prompt, now write your own response to this Position Task prompt.

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

Write a response to this practice Position prompt in the time allotted.

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.

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