

Frequently Asked Questions About the Georgia Grade 11 Writing Assessment

Controlling Idea

What is an implied controlling idea in persuasive writing?

An implied controlling idea is one that is not directly stated or announced in an essay. The writer's position may be implied or suggested by all of the evidence presented in the body paragraphs rather than explicitly stated in the introduction. The persuasive essay should have a clear focus as stated in the rubric, but an announcement of the focus or a thesis statement is not required.

Cursive Writing

Are students required to write in cursive?

No. Students taking the Georgia writing assessment at all grade levels (3, 5, 8, and 11) may either print or write in cursive.

Dictionaries

Can students use dictionaries during the Georgia writing assessments?

No. Because Conventions is now assessed at all grade levels, it would not be appropriate to allow students to use dictionaries during the writing test. ELL students may use a word to word translation dictionary if specified in the TPP.

ELL/Students with Disabilities

Are papers written by students with disabilities scored by the same standards?

Yes. All Georgia students are scored by the same grade level rubric. Raters who score student writing do not have access to any demographic information about the students whose papers are being scored. Raters do not know the writer's name, school system, or SRC, if applicable.

Evaluating Errors

What kinds of errors have the most impact on a writer's score in each domain?

Raters are trained to read for competence in each domain, not to tally errors. A writer may demonstrate consistent competence in a domain even though the paper contains errors in some of the components. Remember that the writing samples are essentially first drafts not polished, ready-to-publish classroom assignments. A rater does not begin with an ideal student paper in mind and "knock off" points as he or she notices student errors. A rater examines the essay for what the writer can do *right*. Basically, the rater's task boils down to three questions in each domain: How much of this is correct? Did the writer attempt anything complex? Does the writer demonstrate variety in the components?

Making the same specific error multiple times throughout the entire paper (e.g., the same word misspelled several times) counts as only one error. A writer may misspell the same word several

times but still correctly spell all the other words in the paper. In this case, the writer still demonstrates control of the element of spelling.

The severity of an error is determined by whether or not it interferes with the reader's ability to understand the writer's meaning.

Nearly every student paper contains errors. It is the degree of control – the proportion of correct to incorrect instances and the complexity of what is attempted - that determines the score in each domain.

Five Paragraph Essays

Are five paragraph essays rewarded or penalized? I have heard both statements.

In scoring student essays, raters are not looking for a specific number of paragraphs or a specific type of organizational plan. Student writers in all grades need to demonstrate that they understand the purpose of an introduction, body, and conclusion (or beginning, middle, and end) as well as how to group, sequence, and link ideas with transitions. A five paragraph essay could receive the highest scores on the scoring scale or very minimal scores depending on how effectively the writer's ideas are developed and organized.

Formulaic Writing

Is instruction in formulaic writing sufficient preparation for the Georgia Writing Assessments?

In general, no. It is important for writers to understand that they need to organize their ideas, and formulas can be effective instructional scaffolding for beginning writers and struggling writers, but the formula should only be the starting point not the goal for all writing students. The repetition in many formula writing programs can severely limit a writer's scores in Ideas, Organization, Style, and Conventions. Student writers need to know that there are many ways to effectively introduce, develop, and conclude an essay regardless of the assigned genre or topic. They need to be taught that repeating ideas is not the equivalent of developing ideas. Repeating ideas does not demonstrate more than a minimal understanding of the need for an overall plan. Repeating ideas does not demonstrate control of language to engage the reader, and repeating ideas does not demonstrate more than minimal control of the sentence formation, usage, and mechanics (conventions).

Length

How long does a paper have to be to receive a score of "5?"

There is no length requirement for achieving the highest score. In Ideas, we look at both the depth of development and the fluency (amount) of development. However, a paper that consists of only a paragraph or two rarely demonstrates enough variety and/or complexity to receive more than a minimal score in Ideas, Organization, Style, or Conventions. Likewise, filling both pages of the test document does not guarantee a higher score. A two-page paper without a focus and relevant supporting ideas could still receive a score of "1."

Making Corrections

How should students correct a mistake on the final draft?

Simply draw a line through a mistake and neatly write the correction above or next to the error. A mistake that is crossed out and corrected is considered correct when evaluating the paper. Correction fluid should not be used on the test document.

Makeup Administrations

What happens if a student is absent on the day of the main administration?

A makeup administration is offered the day following the main administration. The makeup administration will include a writing prompt that is different from those used during the main administration. If a student is not able to take the scheduled makeup writing assessment, re-test opportunities are available in the spring and summer. There is no make-up for the summer administration.

Responding to the Assigned Task

How much leeway do students have in responding to persuasive and informational/expository prompts?

While the paper must be some form of a response to the prompt, the writer is allowed latitude in how to respond as long as the paper addresses the assigned genre and topic. There is no right answer. The topic of each prompt must be accessible to over 100,000 Georgia students. The writing topics were designed by the advisory committees to allow for variation in responses which is evident in the cues contained within each prompt. In a persuasive essay, students may redefine the issue stated in the prompt, negate the assertions contained in the prompt, or write a satirical response to the prompt. In an informational/expository essay, students must explain some aspect of the topic, but the focus may be narrow or broad and factual accuracy is not assessed. In a narrative essay, students may write a reality based story or an imaginative story.

Scale Scores

How is a student's scale score determined?

After the scores from two raters are added together and weighted, this "raw" score is scaled to adjust for small differences in prompt difficulty across various editions of the test. The scale score and the corresponding performance level ("Does not Meet," "Meets, Exceeds") are included on the student report.

Student Reports

What information will be contained in student reports for the writing assessments in grades 5, 8, and 11?

Each individual student report will contain the student's scale score, the performance level, domain descriptor statements for Ideas, Organization, Style, and Conventions, and the genre assigned to the student.

PLEASE SEND ANY ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE TO THE GaDOE TESTING DIVISION.