

GED Testing Service (GEDTS) Statistical Study: Language Arts, Writing Test

The GED Language Arts, Writing Test measures a student's ability to write a well-constructed essay, as well as to revise and edit samples written by someone else.

Each year information is collected by the GED Testing Service to develop the data for the GED Annual Statistical Report. This report provides instructors with useful information on the types of students who took the test, as well as

information on the nation and by state regarding the test results. In 2005, an analysis of the Language Arts, Writing Test was completed. This analysis showed that the average score on the GED Language Arts, Writing Test was a 493 for those students who passed the test. The average essay score for successful passers continued to be a 2 (marginal) writing. Language Arts, Writing continues to have the second lowest scores on the GED Test.

Looking at the Study

A mean or median score on the GED Language Arts, Writing Test does not provide the type of information that is most helpful to a classroom teacher who wishes to assist students in becoming more effective writers and ultimately obtain a passing score on the test. This requires a more intensive study of those questions which are missed most often by students who do not pass the test, as well as error patterns noted on essays.

The statistical analysis completed by GEDTS in 2005 indicated specific language arts areas that gave students the most difficulty. The analysis also identified those types of questions that were most often missed by students who were within one to two standard errors of measure (SEM) from passing the test with a minimal score.

Results used in the statistical analysis were obtained from three operational test forms. The study focused on those

students who passed (410 standard score) +/- 1 SEM called the NEAR group (N=107, 163) and those candidates whose standard scores were +/- 2 SEMs below passing called the BELOW group (N=10,003).

The study used the top 40% of the most frequently missed test items. These items represented 40% of the total items on the test form. The study also assessed the types of problems noted in the essay portion of the test.

From using this data, more appropriate classroom strategies can be selected to assist students in becoming better writers.

Inside this issue:

Looking at the Study	1
And the Questions Are . . .	2
Organization and Sentence Structure	2
Usage and Mechanics	2
Challenges in Essay Writing	3
Teaching Points from GEDTS	4

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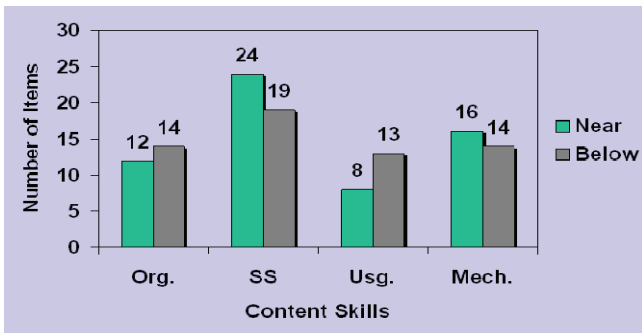
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GED Testing Service (GEDTS) Statistical Study: Language Arts, Writing—Part I

And the Questions Are ...

On Part I of the Language Arts, Writing Test, students in the NEAR group exhibited the most difficulty in the areas of organization and sentence structure. Students in the BELOW group exhibited difficulty in all areas. The analysis supports that these students exhibit a lack of knowledge regarding question types and application of the basics of grammar.

Content Skills Found Most Difficult by Both Groups



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Organization

Organization refers to the revision or reformulating of text. These types of questions require that students:

- move text;
- remove text;
- add text; or
- divide text.

The most missed organizational questions were those that required students to remove text through a construction shift style question.

Organization construction shift questions require students to combine paragraphs, separate paragraphs, insert a new sentence within a paragraph, or to select an alternate sentence structure to create a more effective sentence. Original construction shift sentences do not contain errors. Rather these question types require students to use logic to think through the process of changing a sentence or the organization of text to create a more effective sentence or passage.

Sentence Structure

Subordination using construction shift types of questions caused students the most difficulty in the area of

sentence structure. This question type requires the higher-order thinking skills of analysis and synthesis because students must analyze the existing text and create a new sentence.

Example: Subordination

Sentences 9 and 10. I propose that we hire a designer and a builder. They could develop the fenced area in the back of the building.

The most effective combination of sentences 9 and 10 would include which group of words?

- (1) Although I propose
- (2) While I propose
- (3) builder, which develop
- (4) builder to develop
- (5) build, they could

Usage

Students exhibited the most difficulty with verb form and subject-verb agreement in the usage area of the GED Language Arts, Writing Test—Part I.

Example: Verb Tense Error

My work experience and education combined with your need for an experienced landscape supervisor has resulted in a relationship that would profit both parties.

Which correction should be made to the sentence?

- (1) insert a comma after education
- (2) change combined to combine
- (3) change has resulted to would result
- (4) replace profit with prophet
- (5) replace parties with party's

Example: Subject-Verb Agreement Error

Our community know Capital City Gardening Services is a company that does excellent work and strives hard to meet the demands of its clients.

Which correction should be made to the sentence?

- (1) change know to knows
- (2) change is to are
- (3) change does to do
- (4) change strives to strive
- (5) replace its with it's

Mechanics

The correct use of homonyms was the question type most missed in the mechanics section of Part I. Examples would be using effected for affected, their for there.

GED Testing Service (GEDTS) Statistical Study: Language Arts, Writing—Part II

Challenges in Essay Writing

Students passing the GED Language Arts, Writing Test continue to exhibit marginal writing. This level of writing is not adequate for the GED PLUS student.

Problem areas that are generally noted in writing samples include:

- Inadequate editing and revision skills
- Undeveloped critical thinking skills
- Writing “why” instead of “how-to” essays
- Free-writing, the rambling instead of organized approach
- Inadequate development and details
- Poor use of word choice and grammar
- Change of focus
- Inability to clearly communicate ideas!

Research on Writing

Constructing Text

Many studies suggest that sentence-combining is an effective strategy to improve the quality of writing. The strategy helps the student see the relationships of words, phrases, and clauses as they contribute to meaning. When working with sentence-combining and organizational skills, it is recommended that the following types of materials are used.

Scrambled Sentences—Break sentences apart according to word grouping (i.e., phrases, subordinate clauses, etc.) Ask the students to read and what is the best order to produce a well-constructed, effective sentence.

Sentence Effectiveness – In this type of exercise, break a sentence apart in groupings; however, develop each of these groupings into a complete sentence. Ask the students to combine all of the sentences into a single sentence. The students must use appropriate conjunctions, phrases, and subordinate clauses to demonstrate the relationship of ideas. By using sentence kernels, students must identify grammar, usage, or mechanical rules that are necessary to construct an effective sentence. Remember, these types of activities require that students combine ideas using appropriate transition words or phrases. This is an excellent way to work in grammar, usage, and mechanics teaching points within the context of writing, rather than as a separate component.

Scrambled Paragraphs – Take sentence combining to another level. Scramble paragraphs, so that the candidates

look for transitional words, phrases, and clauses to understand the relationship among sentences in a paragraph. Break a paragraph down by sentences, rearrange the order, and ask students to arrange them in the *best order*. Students try to understand the ideas expressed in each sentence and see how transitions, phrases, and clauses help achieve coherence

Scrambled Passages – Break a piece of text or an essay down into paragraphs and/or sentences and ask students to arrange them in the *best order*. Have students identify where individual paragraphs should begin within the text.

Scrambling exercises can be used as a daily warm-up prior to beginning a writing activity. These types of exercises assist students in deconstructing sentences and passages, as well as seeing how to most effectively organize text. When providing students with scrambling exercises, you may wish to sometimes include a sentence about the subject that is not relevant to the paragraph to see if your students can identify it as a sentence not to include in the re-constructed paragraph.

Deconstructing Text

To assist students in identifying problem areas in writing and to improve writing fluency, have them deconstruct sentences. First, show students how to deconstruct a sentence into its component parts.

The first word of a sentence to identify is the Head Word. This will almost invariably be a noun and will also be the subject of the sentence. Next locate the verb which explains what action the noun takes.

More information is provided by pre-modifiers and qualifiers. The noun together with a pre-modifier and qualifier make up a noun phrase. A pre-modifier is also known as an adjective.

A determiner (such as the or a) is what is also known as an article. An adverb describes a verb.

Next students should identify the main clause and any subordinate clauses. From these clauses, students can identify the different verb tenses to ensure subject-verb agreement.

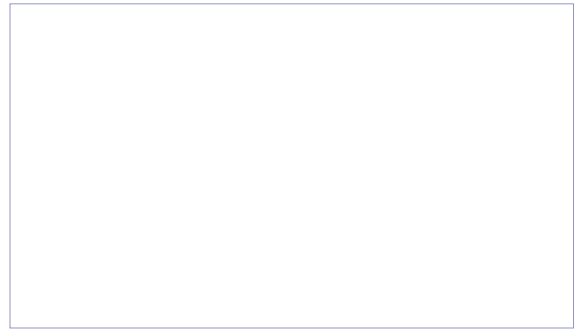
Breaking a sentence into smaller pieces assists students in understanding the complexity of a sentence and whether or not the sentence is easily understood.

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Teaching Points from GEDTS

It is important to teach effective writing skills to all students. Individuals. Students need to understand that the primary purpose of writing is to clearly communicate to the reader. This requires students to practice many different types of writing.

Some teaching points from GEDTS to assist in better written communication include the following:

- Teach grammar skills in the context of real-life writing
- Rather than teach grammar, usage, and mechanics in isolation, point out examples from the student's own writing and demonstrate how the correct use of the language conventions improves the effectiveness of writing
- Use sentence combining as an effective strategy for improving the quality of writing
- Have GED PLUS students see the articles they read as models of effective writing
- Teach writing by the inquiry approach or through the students' actual writing
- Ask the students to analyze the processes they use to write, edit, and revise

Use the Newspaper as Your Textbook

Encourage GED PLUS students to prepare for the Language Arts, Writing Test by:

- Reading articles of interest to them in their local newspapers
- Evaluating the evidence used by the writer
- Writing journals to agree, disagree, or evaluate the articles
- Responding to the articles by writing letters to the editor

Good Writing = Good Storytelling

Have students ask the following questions of their writing:

- Does my opening catch a person's attention?
- Is my narrative clear and to the point?
- Is the material presented in a logical manner?
- Does my writing have a clear beginning, middle, and end?
- Is it easy for a listener or reader to follow along?
- Have I put myself in my listener's or reader's place?
- Have I made my story interesting enough to make people want to read all the way through?
- Is my main point or "moral" to the story obvious?
- Does my conclusion satisfy readers, rather than leave them hanging?
- Would people who have heard the story be likely to want to retell it to others?