

If you register for the ACT with writing, you will take the writing test after the four multiple-choice tests. Your score on the writing test will not affect your scores on the multiple-choice tests or your Composite score.

The **ACT writing** test is a 40-minute essay test that measures your writing skills—specifically, writing skills taught in high school English classes and in entry-level college composition courses.

The test consists of one writing prompt that describes a complex issue and provides three different perspectives on the issue. You are asked to read the prompt and write an essay in which you develop your own perspective on the issue. Your essay must analyze the relationship between your own perspective and one or more other perspectives. You may adopt one of the perspectives given in the prompt as your own, or you may introduce one that is completely different from those given. Your score will not be affected by the perspective you take on the issue.

Five scores are reported for the writing test: a single subject-level writing score reported on a scale of 2–12, and four domain scores that are based on an analytic scoring rubric. The subject score is the rounded average of the four domain scores. The four writing domains are:

1. Ideas and Analysis

Scores in this domain reflect the ability to generate productive ideas and engage critically with multiple perspectives on the given issue. Competent writers understand the issue they are invited to address, the purpose for writing, and the audience. They generate ideas that are relevant to the situation.

2. Development and Support

Scores in this domain reflect the ability to discuss ideas, offer rationale, and bolster an argument. Competent writers explain and explore their ideas, discuss implications, and illustrate through examples. They help the reader understand their thinking about the issue.

3. Organization

Scores in this domain reflect the ability to organize ideas with clarity and purpose. Organizational choices are integral to effective writing. Competent writers arrange their essay in a way that clearly shows the relationship between ideas, and they guide the reader through their discussion.

4. Language Use and Conventions

Scores in this domain reflect the ability to use written language to convey arguments with clarity. Competent writers make use of the conventions of grammar, syntax, word usage, and mechanics. They are also aware of their audience and adjust the style and tone of their writing to communicate effectively.



Tips for Taking the Writing Test

✓ Pace yourself.

Budget your time based on your experience in taking essay tests in school and in other circumstances when you have done writing within a time limit. It is unlikely that you will have time to draft, revise, and recopy your essay.

✓ Plan.

Before writing, carefully read and consider all prompt material. Be sure you understand the issue, the different perspectives on the issue, and your essay task.

Planning questions are included with the prompt that will help you analyze the different perspectives and develop your own. Use these questions to think critically about the prompt and generate an effective response. How would you best organize and support your ideas in a written argument? Use the planning space in your test booklet to structure or outline your response.

Note: The planning questions are optional and are not scored.

✓ Write.

Establish the focus of your essay by making clear your argument and its main ideas.

- Explain and illustrate your ideas with sound reasoning and meaningful examples.
- Discuss the significance of your ideas: what are the implications of what you have to say, and why is your argument important to consider?

As you write, ask yourself if your logic is clear, if you have supported your claims, and if you have chosen precise words to communicate your ideas.

Note: If you take the ACT on paper, be sure to write (or print) your essay legibly.

✓ Review your essay.

Try to make your essay as polished as you can. Take a few minutes before time is called to read over your essay and correct any mistakes.

- If you find words that are hard to read, recopy them.
- Make corrections and revisions neatly, between the lines.
- Do not write in the margins, if applicable.

✓ Practice.

There are many ways to prepare for the writing test. Read newspapers and magazines, watch/listen to news analyses online, on TV, or on radio, or participate in discussions and debates, thinking carefully about other perspectives in relation to your own.

One good way to prepare for the writing test is to practice writing with different purposes for different audiences. The writing you do in your classes will help you, as will writing a personal journal, stories, essays, editorials, or other writing you do on your own.

It is also a good idea to practice writing within a time limit. Taking the practice writing test will give you a sense of how much additional practice you may need. You might want to take the practice writing test even if you do not plan to take the ACT with writing. It will help you build skills that are important in college-level learning and the world of work.

This excerpt is from “2019-2020 Preparing for the ACT® Test”:

<https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/Preparing-for-the-ACT.pdf>