

act
assessment®

Introducing the
**ACT Assessment®
Writing Test**



ACT[™]
INFORMATION FOR LIFE'S TRANSITIONS
epas ▼▼▼▼

An ACT Program for Educational Planning

Introducing the ACT Assessment® Writing Test

For over forty years, the ACT Assessment® has distinguished itself as the only comprehensive measure of educational achievement available to students for college admissions and course placement in English, mathematics, reading, and science. In fact, the ACT Assessment was founded on principles that value measuring what students have learned in high school (i.e., achievement) more highly than measuring their potential to learn (i.e., aptitude). The ACT Assessment has always reflected the essential knowledge and skills students are taught in high school that are important for readiness and success in postsecondary education, based on empirical results of ACT's National Curriculum Survey™ conducted every 3 to 4 years in grades 7–14.

Writing has always been and will continue to be one of the essential skills for college readiness and success. The ACT Assessment has always included a multiple-choice format English Test that measures students' understanding of the skills necessary for effective writing, including usage, mechanics, sentence structure, logic, organization, and style, as well as other rhetorical strategies. Research has documented the effectiveness of ACT English Test scores in college admissions and course placement decisions. However, in response to growing interest in a direct measure of writing, we have decided to add a 30-minute Writing Test as an optional component to the ACT Assessment beginning in 2004–2005.

The ACT Writing Test will provide postsecondary institutions with information to complement that already provided by the English Test. The combined information from both tests will provide information about students' understanding of the conventions of standard written English and their ability to produce a direct sample of writing.

Why are we offering the Writing Test to postsecondary institutions as an option? We have always considered it our primary mission to offer responsive services to postsecondary institutions by providing information they need and want. Surveys of postsecondary institutional practices have revealed that one-third of our nation's postsecondary institutions already have a direct writing assessment in place on their campuses; an additional one-third appear to be satisfied with the information they are currently receiving; and the remaining one-third are interested in learning more about a new standardized measure of direct writing. By offering an ACT Writing Test as an option to postsecondary institutions, we are acknowledging the varying needs of our nation's postsecondary institutions by providing them a flexible solution, rather than imposing a single approach on all students and institutions.





Postsecondary institutions will make their own decisions about whether to require the results from the ACT Writing Test for admissions and/or course placement purposes. Students will decide whether to take the Writing Test based on the requirements of the institutions they are considering. Students will not be required to take a test that they do not need to take, thus incurring unnecessary expense, and institutions will have the freedom to require the tests that best meet their information needs.

We strongly encourage postsecondary institutions that are considering the addition of the ACT Writing Test to work with admissions and writing faculty to evaluate the information provided. The ACT Writing Test will offer collection of a writing sample under standardized testing conditions, scoring of the writing sample with a high degree of technical accuracy and reliability, integration of a writing score into a single student score report, and distribution of student responses to college faculty. These valuable services may be used to complement

or replace similar services offered by local institutions. ACT's Research Services may be used in a comparative evaluation by institutions considering supplementing or replacing their locally based direct writing assessment with the ACT Writing Test.

Developing the ACT Writing Test

ACT has more than 25 years experience developing and administering writing assessments. In developing the ACT Writing Test, we are following the same methodology we have used for the other tests in the ACT Assessment.

This process begins with an inclusive, broad-based curriculum survey of the nation's high schools and colleges to determine the writing skills that are being taught in high school and those expected of first-year college students. The specifications for the Writing Test will come from the results of ACT's National Curriculum Survey that should be completed in early 2003. The prompts and scoring rubrics will then be developed by high school and college writing teachers. All materials will undergo ACT's standard fairness reviews and will be extensively field tested prior to introduction.

Like the other tests in the ACT Assessment, the Writing Test will be developed by teachers actively engaged in the classroom at the secondary and postsecondary levels, not by a small committee. The Writing Test will be a technically sound assessment, delivered in a standardized testing environment, and scored with high accuracy. Results will be reported along with scores from the other ACT tests in a single, integrated score report prepared individually for each student.

ACT Assessment Writing Test Questions/Answers

Q: When will the Writing Test be ready for administration?

A: The Writing Test will be offered for the first time during the 2004–05 testing year. The results will then be available for postsecondary institutions to consider for the class entering in fall 2006. This will allow students who are planning to enter college in fall 2006 to take the test in the spring of their junior year or in their senior year, depending on the application deadlines of the institutions they are considering.

Q: How will the specifications for the Writing Test be determined?

A: We will follow the same curriculum-based process we use for the current four-test battery. This process begins with ACT's National Curriculum Survey involving both high school English teachers and college faculty who teach entry-level composition courses. The information we obtain through the survey is considered by a national panel of educators who help us design the exact test specifications. Using this process will enable us to develop a Writing Test that will measure writing proficiencies that are taught in high school and are important for readiness to succeed in entry-level college composition courses.

Q: Isn't it a good idea to require that students be able to write well?

A: We recognize that good writing is not an option. However, there are many sound, valid approaches to the assessment of writing. These approaches vary by institutional need and focus.

The ACT English Test is designed to measure skills necessary for effective writing—including punctuation, grammar, sentence structure, organization, and style. This test alone has been effective in providing helpful information to some institutions. Other institutions have supplemented

this information with on-campus, direct writing assessments for making course placement decisions. Still others may consider replacing their locally developed writing assessment or adopting the ACT Writing Test to supplement the information they are now using. With such diversity in the need for and use of this type of information, we are providing the Writing Test as an option so that colleges and universities have the flexibility to use it in ways that best meet their needs.

Q: How much will the ACT Assessment fee be raised?

A: The fee for the Writing Test has not yet been determined, but we remain committed to keeping test fees reasonable for all students. This has been a significant factor in our decision to offer the Writing Test as an option so not all students will have to pay the increased fee when the institutions they are considering do not require or use it.

Q: What scores will be reported?

A: This depends on the final specifications for the test. It is likely that students who take the Writing Test will receive a scaled score, ranging from 1–36, that reflects their performance on the Writing Test and the English Test combined.

Q: Is the ACT Assessment Writing Test “coachable”?

A: The Writing Test is being designed as a curriculum-based test, just like the other tests in the ACT Assessment. This means that it will measure the knowledge and skills taught in high school that are important for readiness for college-level work. In this sense, all the ACT tests are “coachable,” because the best preparation for any student taking the ACT Assessment is rigorous college preparatory courses in high school. Students do not need to take commercial test



preparation courses to do well on the ACT. Taking the right courses in high school, and working hard and doing well in these courses, is enough. We provide plenty of materials to students at no charge that describe the test content and format in detail, explain what to expect on the day of the test, and provide sample items so that students can become familiar with the test prior to taking it. It is our goal that all students be familiar with the test and what it measures so there are no surprises.

Q: Can the Writing Test be scored with accuracy?

A: ACT has many years of experience developing, administering, and scoring writing tests. Therefore, raters are carefully screened and trained so they are very familiar with the type of writing that merits each particular score. Raters must pass a test after training before being certified to score the ACT Writing Test. Students' written responses will be scored by two well-trained, qualified raters. If the two raters disagree by more than a point, a third rater will also score the test. ACT has an established record of high accuracy in scoring performance assessments.

Q: Will the Writing Test be fair to all students?

A: Yes. The specifications for the test will be based on empirical data that tell us what writing skills are being taught in high school classrooms that

are important for readiness for college-level work. The test will reflect classroom assignments and expectations. The writing prompts and scoring guides will be written and reviewed by classroom teachers of writing. The writing prompts will also undergo ACT's standard fairness review by national sensitivity reviewers who will ensure that each prompt is clearly stated and focuses on a topic to which all students can respond.

Q: Is half an hour long enough to test writing skills? College students can stay up all night to do a paper.

A: The Writing Test is being designed so that the prompt can be properly addressed in the time allotted. The test will be a different type of assignment than a college paper, but it will measure skills students use when writing a college paper—such as the ability to focus on the subject at hand, to develop their ideas, and to write logically and coherently, with proper sentence structure and sound reasoning.

Q: How will Writing Test results be used?

A: Writing Test results will provide colleges with additional information that can be used to make college admissions and course placement decisions.

Critical Timelines for Introduction of the ACT Writing Test

Conduct National Curriculum Survey
Finalize test specifications
Conduct field testing
Introduce the ACT Writing Test

Fall 2002
Spring 2003
Spring 2003–Spring 2004
2004–05 Academic Year

**To find out more about the ACT Writing Test,
please contact the nearest ACT Regional Office.**



ACT National Office
2201 North Dodge Street
P.O. Box 168
Iowa City, Iowa 52243-0168
Telephone: 319/337-1000

Washington, DC Office
One Dupont Circle NW
Suite 340
Washington, DC 20036-1170
Telephone: 202/223-2318

Regional Offices

WEST

Sacramento Office
2880 Sunrise Boulevard
Suite 214
Rancho Cordova, California 95742-6549
Telephone: 916/631-9200

Denver Office
3131 South Vaughn Way
Suite 218
Aurora, Colorado 80014-3507
Telephone: 303/337-3273

MIDWEST

Chicago Office
300 Knightsbridge Parkway
Suite 300
Lincolnshire, Illinois 60069-9498
Telephone: 847/634-2560

Ohio Office
412 East Wooster Street
Suite A
Bowling Green, Ohio 43402-2926
Telephone: 419/352-5317

SOUTHWEST

Austin Office
8303 MoPac Expressway North
Suite B-228
Austin, Texas 78759-8369
Telephone: 512/345-1949

EAST

Atlanta Office
3355 Lenox Road NE
Suite 320
Atlanta, Georgia 30326-1332
Telephone: 404/231-1952

Albany Office
4 Pine West Plaza
Suite 403
Albany, New York 12205-5564
Telephone: 518/869-7378

Florida Office
1315 East Lafayette Street
Suite A
Tallahassee, Florida 32301-4757
Telephone: 850/878-2729

Visit the ACT website at www.act.org.

