

5 Ways to Compare 2015–2016 and 2016–2017 ACT Writing Scores

With the introduction of a new way to report the overall writing test score, ACT seeks to make every effort to assist users in interpreting and comparing scores. We offer this document to help provide clarity during this period of transition.

Overview

Beginning in fall 2016, ACT will report Writing Test scores on a range of 2–12, with 12 being the highest possible score.¹ This score will be the average of four 2–12 domain scores. The writing test (task) has not changed, nor has the scoring used to obtain the four domain scores. Some language in the directions to the students has been modified to improve clarity.

The English Language Arts (ELA) score, which combines the student's achievement on the English, reading, and writing tests, will remain on a 1–36 scale. This means ELA scores from 2015–2016 and 2016–2017 are directly comparable, as are the overall ACT composite, English, math, reading, science, and STEM scores.

How to Compare Scores

Writing scores are comparable between 2015–2016 (when a 1–36 score range was used) and those reported starting in September 2016 on a 2–12 score range.

1. How do I compare 2015–2016 ELA scale scores with 2016–2017 ELA scale scores?

The ELA scores are directly comparable across years. No adjustments are needed to compare 2015–2016 and 2016–2017 ELA scores.

2. How do I compare 2015–2016 domain scores with 2016–2017 domain scores?

The four individual domain scores are directly comparable across years. No adjustments are needed to compare 2015–16 and 2016–2017 domain scores.

3. How do I compare 2015–2016 writing scale scores with 2016–2017 writing scores?

There are two ways this can be accomplished, and they may be best illustrated with an example.

Suppose Ann received the following scores in 2015–2016

ANN 2015–2016 Scores							
Ideas & Analysis	Development & Support	Organization	Language Use & Conventions	Writing	English	Reading	ELA
10	8	7	8	25	24	23	24

¹ In September 2015, ACT revised the optional writing test and began converting results to a 1–36 score scale to be consistent with the multiple-choice ACT test score scales. This change, however, caused confusion among some students who attempted to interpret their writing score in comparison to their multiple-choice test scores. Each ACT subject test measures different skills, and many students earn higher scores on some tests than on others.

To compare 2015–2016 writing scores reported on a 1–36 score scale and 2016–2017 writing scores reported on a 2–12 range, we need to either compute the 1–36 scores for the 2016–2017 data, or the 2–12 scores for the 2015–2016 data. We can illustrate both situations using Ann’s scores above.

Score reports from 2016–2017 will include English, Reading, and ELA scores. Because ELA scores are an average of the English, Reading, and 1–36 writing score, we can determine the approximate 1–36 writing score if we know the other scores.

$$\text{ELA} = (\text{English score} + \text{Reading score} + \text{Writing score})/3$$

In this example, $24 = (24 + 23 + \text{Writing score})/3$. Therefore, the writing score is approximated as $24 = (24 + 23 + 25)/3$. In this case, the approximated value happens to be the exact value, but this will not always be the case. For example, $(23+23+23)/3$ and $(23+23+24)/3$ would both provide ELA scores of 23, and it would not be possible to determine which Writing score (23 or 24) would be exact.

Because of this, and because we believe it is preferable to work with the most current scores, we suggest converting the 2015–2016 1–36 writing scores to the 2–12 score range. Recall that the 2–12 scores are computed as the rounded average of the four domain scores. Therefore it is possible to create an exact 2–12 score for Ann’s 2015–2016 test data by $(10 + 8 + 7 + 8)/4 = 33/4 = 8.25 \rightarrow 8$. This 8 would be directly comparable to any reported 2–12 writing score from 2016–2017.

4. How do I compare 2015–2016 writing scale scores with 2016–2017 writing score ranges if I don’t have ready access to the four domain scores?

Below is a concordance table that relates the 1–36 writing scores to the 2–12 reported writing scores. This concordance was created using the scores of more than 1.5 million students who took the ACT writing test between September 2015 and April 2016. Each of these students had a reported 1–36 writing score, and a new 2–12 writing score that was computed using their four domain scores. Concordant scores are defined as those having the same percentile rank with respect to this group of students.

In the case of Ann, entering the table with her 2015–2016 1–36 writing score of 24 concurs to a score of 8, the same value we computed directly by averaging her four domain scores. However, this may not always be the case, so these concorded scores should be considered approximate values.

1–36 Score	Concorded 2–12 score
1	2
2	2
3	2
4	3
5	3
6	3
7	3
8	4

9	4
10	4
11	5
12	5
13	5
14	6
15	6
16	6
17	6
18	7
19	7
20	7
21	8
22	8
23	8
24	8
25	9
26	9
27	9
28	10
29	10
30	10
31	11
32	11
33	11
34	12
35	12
36	12

5. How else might I compare 2015–2016 and 2016–2017 writing scores?

Ranks may also be compared. Based on the scores of more than 1.5 million students who took the ACT writing test between September 2015 and April 2016, the ranks associated with the 1–36 score scale and the 2–12 writing scores can be compared.

Comparing the two tables on the next page shows that 59.18% of the students would score 7 or below on the 2–12 writing score, and 58.23% would score 20 or below on the 1–36 writing score. Recall that these are the same students, and that the 2–12 and the 1–36 scores are based on the same four domain scores that each of these students received.

2–12 Score (Sept. 2016 moving forward)	Cumulative Percent
2	0.93
3	2.41
4	8.53
5	18.44
6	39.54
7	59.18
8	83.73
9	92.94
10	97.79
11	99.37
12	100.00

1–36 Score (2015–2016)	Cumulative Percent
1	0.62
2	0.68
3	0.86
4	1.14
5	1.50
6	1.94
7	2.56
8	3.18
9	6.50
10	9.02
11	10.91
12	14.80
13	18.14
14	21.26
15	25.00
16	34.30
17	39.64
18	44.39
19	52.34
20	58.23
21	63.65
22	68.07
23	77.84
24	85.65
25	87.90
26	91.39
27	93.51
28	94.60
29	97.15
30	98.02
31	98.49
32	98.92
33	99.43
34	99.50
35	99.58
36	100.00



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