Writing Skills Test (WST) Workshop: Essay

San Jose State University
Peer Connections
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Agenda

- Introduction
- The Essay Section
  - planning time
  - understanding the prompt
  - brainstorming strategies
  - essay structure and practice
- Preparation for the WST
Introduction to the WST

- GWAR (Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement)
- Taken prior to enrollment in 100W (after passing English 1B)
- Two Parts
  - 60 minute Essay
  - 45 minute Multiple Choice test (72 questions; 1 and 3 point questions)
- Score report within 4-5 weeks

Photos from thewaytocollege.com and superstock.com
What do I need?
(Refer to Information Bulletin)

- Pens for the essay section (black or blue)
- Pencils with eraser top for Multiple Choice
- Paper Dictionary for Essay

Photos from montrealphens.com and keetsa.com
## Scores

Objective scores are reported in standard score terms.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Essay</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Status</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Waiver Eligible (depending on major)</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>69</td>
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<td>8-11</td>
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<td>Pass</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>Pass</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Other Combination of Scores</td>
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<td>Fail</td>
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Scoring Guidelines

- Six point scale for essay
  - 6 is the highest
  - 1 is the lowest

- Two readers

- Readers’ scores are added to make essay out of 12.
Your essay score...

- Is determined by 2 readers who grade your essay from 1-6
- Is graded on the following:
  - Organization
  - Ability to address the topic (relevance and thoughtfulness)
  - Coherence and cohesiveness (clear and focused)
  - Appropriate details and support
  - Appropriate language and word choice
  - Variety of sentence structure and vocabulary
  - Frequency of errors

WST Scoring Guideline from the English Department
Scoring Guidelines: Passing Essays

- **6 – SUPERIOR** A perceptive, intelligent paper reflecting a sophisticated analytical response to all parts of the writing assignment. Well-written, organized, and detailed. Uses complex and varied sentence structure and effective language.

- **5 – COMPETENT** A thoughtful analytical response to all parts of the writing assignment. Clearly organized and developed. Skillful in sentence construction, variety, and word choice.

- **4 – ADEQUATE** An adequate analysis of the writing assignment. Reasonably developed and focused. May have minor weaknesses, but uses appropriate sentence structure and diction.

WST Scoring Guideline from the CSU Long Beach WPE Workbook
3 – INADEQUATE  An inadequate analysis of the writing assignment. Either fails to develop a focused response or is weak in structure, syntax, or mechanics.

2 – INCOMPETENT  A minimal analysis of the writing assignment. Lacks focus, direction, coherence, or completion. Often characterized by persistent errors in grammar, sentence structure, spelling, or usage.

1 – INFERIOR  Shows little understanding of the writing assignment. Provides no analysis or development. Fails to express even the most basic ideas comprehensibly.

WST Scoring Guideline from the CSU Long Beach WPE Workbook
Direct or Guided Prompt

For this type of prompt, the essay structure is given or suggested.

- Multi-part question
- Argument

“Describe a special skill that you have acquired on your own. How did you first become interested in acquiring this skill, and how have you been able to utilize it in your life?”

“College students should have the liberty to choose their own coursework. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?”
Open-Ended Prompt

In this type of prompt, students

- may have few guidelines
- determine the structure/organization

“Describe the ideal work environment.”

“Describe a pastime that has helped you persevere through a difficult time in your life.”
Quote Prompts

In this type of prompt, you will read a quotation and might be asked to

- interpret it in your own words
- agree or disagree
- apply it to your own life

“It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.”
– John F. Kennedy

“It is not the hours we put in on the job, it is what we put into the hours that counts.”
– Sidney Madwed
15 minute planning phase

- You have 15 minutes to prepare before writing your essay. How do you use this time?
  - Read and **reread** the prompt.
  - **Mark** the prompt.
  - Brainstorm and outline.
Marking the prompt

- Prompt Analysis

- There is often *background* information to help you understand the topic. Read this carefully
- Find key words that tell you what to do
- Underline or circle them
- Number each task you are asked to do
Many skills are used daily, and others skills are only used in special situations. In fact, it is often said that the less we use a particular skill, the more this skill deteriorates. Conversely, those skills we practice often, tend to improve. Some people even say “Use it or lose it.” Describe a special skill that you have learned. How did you first acquire this skill, and to what extent have you been able to utilize it in your life?
Many people learn skills that they use daily, and others learn skills and only use them in special situations. In fact, it is often said that the less we use a particular skill, the more this skill deteriorates. Conversely, those skills we practice often, tend to improve. Some people even say “Use it or lose it.”

Describe a special skill that you have learned. How did you first acquire this skill, and to what extent have you been able to utilize it in your life?
Brainstorming Strategies: Outlining

Describe a special skill that you have learned. **How did you first acquire this skill, and to what extent have you been able to utilize it in your life?**

I. Intro
   A. First Aid is a useful skill
      1. good for jobs
      2. helpful in an emergency

II. My experience
   A. Applied for a lifeguard job in the summer of 2010.
   B. First aid was one of the first things I learned in the lifeguard training program.
      1. Read manual
      2. Learned CPR
      3. Passed written test
   C. Used my first aid skills after Paul had his car accident.
Brainstorming Strategies: Listing

Describe a special skill that you have learned. How did you first acquire this skill, and to what extent have you been able to utilize it in your life?

• First Aid/CPR/AED
  • Applied for job in summer 2010
  • Lifeguard job training
  • Read manual
  • CPR – practiced on mannequin
  • Had to pass written test

• Used it during lifeguard job
• Used it during a car accident
(Paul)
• Developed my confidence
• Able to work under pressure
Brainstorming Strategies: Clustering

Describe a special skill that you have learned. How did you first acquire this skill, and to what extent have you been able to utilize it in your life?

- First aid (skill)
  - Learned from lifeguard job 2010
  - Help others and feel confident
  - Work under pressure (calm)
    - CPR/AED
    - Basic first aid
    - Helped during a car accident – Paul last July
Choose a brainstorming technique and practice it with this topic:

“Many people learn skills that they use daily, and others learn skills and only use them in special situations. Describe a special skill that you have learned. How did you first acquire this skill, and to what extent have you been able to utilize it in your life?”
Thesis Statements

- A sentence (or two) that summarizes the main point of your essay and previews your supporting points.

- **TOPIC** + **COMMENT** = **THESIS**

- Dancing showed me how to appreciate music, other art forms, and my health.
I. Intro
   A. First Aid is a useful skill
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II. My experience
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   B. First aid was one of the first things I learned in the lifeguard training program.
      1. Read manual
      2. Learned CPR
      3. Passed written test
   C. Used my first aid skills after Paul had his car accident

The first aid skills that I learned in lifeguard training are a useful skills that allow me to be helpful in an emergency like my friend Paul’s car accident.
Use the items you wrote down during brainstorming to write a thesis for this prompt:

“Many people learn skills that they use daily, and others learn skills and only use them in special situations. Describe a special skill that you have learned. How did you first acquire this skill, and to what extent have you been able to utilize it in your life?”

**Remember:**

**TOPIC + COMMENT = THESIS**
Tips for Body Paragraphs

- Write topic sentences.
- Use the *tell and show* method
  - Tell the reader something.
  - Give an example to ‘show’ the reader what you mean.

**Tell:** I became a much healthier person after taking the stress management class.

**Show:** In fact, since taking the class I have lowered my blood pressure, started an exercise plan, and reduced my stress level tremendously.

- What else can I write...?
  - Why is this important?
  - What were you thinking during the event/process?
  - What changed? What stayed the same?
  - What do you think will happen in the future?
Thesis: The first aid skills that I learned in lifeguard training are useful skills that allows me to be helpful in an emergency like my friend Paul’s car accident.

- Paragraph 1: I applied for a lifeguard job in the summer of 2010.

- Paragraph 2: First aid training was one of the things that I learned in the lifeguard training program.

- Paragraph 3: I was able to use my first aid skills when my best friend Paul was in a car accident.
Tips for Body Paragraphs

- Use imagery and detail
  - 5 senses
  - Set the scene
  - Dialog, thoughts

- Use personal examples
  - Life experience
  - Experience of others
  - Who, what, where, when, why, how

- Vocabulary
  - Use a variety of vocabulary
  - Avoid repetition
I applied for a lifeguard job in the summer of 2010.

- **Why?** Wanted to find a job to earn money for a car.
- Have loved to swim my entire life.
- My friend Miso was applying for the lifeguard job, too.

- **Where?** Local swim and racquet club.
  - Used to swim there as a kid, never imagined working there.

- **What?** Had to fill out application and give references.
  - Had to pass a swimming test.
  - Was very happy to get phone call from manager saying that I was hired.

**Transition to next paragraph:** The day after I was hired my lifeguard training began.
Practice!

Pick one of your topic sentences and make a list of details that you will include in your paragraph. You might answer the following questions:

Who?
What
Where?
When?
Why?
How?
Funnel Format - Introduction

- **Universal Truth or Hook**
  - Related to the topic
  - Applicable to most people

- **General**
  - Informs the reader about your topic and your experience

- **Thesis**
  - Presents your main idea(s) and argument(s)
Funnel Format - Introduction

- **Universal Truth or Hook**
  - Emergencies can occur at any time and any place.

- **General**
  - When an emergency happens, a person with first aid skills can be the difference between life and death.
  - I never thought about the importance of knowing basic first aid until I became a lifeguard.

- **Thesis**
  - The first aid skills that I learned in lifeguard training are very useful skills that allow me to be helpful in an emergency, like my friend Paul’s car accident.
Funnel Format - Conclusion

- **Summarize Main Points**
  - Summarize the focus of the essay

- **Expand your ideas and offer analysis**
  - What did you learn from experience?
  - How has the topic proven to be significant?

- **Closing Statement**
  - Leave the reader with something to think about
Funnel Format - Conclusion

- **Summarize main points**
  - My friend Paul’s accident made me grateful that I was taught basic first aid skills during my lifeguard training.

- **Expand your ideas and offer analysis**
  - This experience taught me how important it is for everyone to know basic first aid skills.
  - Since I used my first aid skills to help Paul, I’ve encouraged all my friends to take a first aid skills course.

- **Closing statement: Make a recommendation**
  - I think our community would be a much safer place if everyone learned first aid skills and was as prepared as I am to help out in an emergency.
Linguistic Etiquette and Norms for Writing

Things to avoid:

- 2nd person
  - Avoid using “you”
- Slang, jargon
- Abbreviations, acronyms (CIA, MIA, etc.)
- Contractions (‘do not’ instead of ‘don’t’)
- Starting sentences with ‘it’ or coordinating conjunctions (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so)
- Asking questions without answering them
- Writing to the reader
How to Prepare

Barron’s

How to Prepare for the California State University Writing Proficiency Exams

- Time yourself and take the sample multiple choice tests (A-C).

- Correct your answers using the answer keys and explanations.

- Identify what area(s) of writing you want to improve (i.e. punctuation, tenses).

- Practice speed and rhetorical reading strategies with textbook chapters and news articles.
How to Prepare

- Practice 15 minute pre-writing and outlining ideas
- Practice 1 hour for pre-writing and writing the essay
- Practice turning ideas into developed paragraphs
- Practice annotating and analyzing the prompt
How to Prepare

- Practice WST multiple choice online at http://www.evccit.info/wst/
- The Everyday Writer Exercise Central:
- Purdue's Online Writing Lab: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/
- How to Study: http://www.how-to-study.com/study-skills/
- Study Guides & Strategies: http://www.studygs.net/
- 501 Writing Prompts published by Learning Express
- Elements of Style by William Strunk and E.B. White
- Rules for Writers by Diana Hacker
- The Goof Proofer by Stephan J. Manhard
Multiple Attempts

- You can enroll in ENGL or LLD 100A, and pass, to meet the WST requirement.
- Continue practicing and taking writing courses to assist you in meeting University writing standards.
- Visit tutors to review specific test taking/writing skills.
Handling Text Anxiety

- **Review** preparation materials for the exam in advance. **Practice** online.
- **Breathe.** Taking deep breaths can help calm anxiety.
- **Walk** by the testing location before the exam day to know where it will take place.
- **Pre-pack** all materials, relax, and sleep well the day before the exam.
- The morning of the exam, take 10 minutes to write down your fears and thoughts to **clear your mind** and to focus.

SJSU Campus Resources

- Peer Connections
  - SSC 600: www.peerconnections.sjsu.edu
- Writing Center
  - Clark 126: www.sjsu.edu/writingcenter
- Testing Office
  - IS 228: www.testing.sjsu.edu
- Disability Resource Center
  - Admin 110: www.drc.sjsu.edu
- Counseling Services
  - Admin 201: www.sjsu.edu/counseling/
  - Spartan Success Series Workshops