

Tennessee Writing Assessment Frequently Asked Questions

What are the requirements of the essay?

The writing assessment is an essay completed within a designated time period. The student writes a rough draft essay because time constraints do not allow for revision. Students are expected to respond to the prompt in an organized, developed format using standard language, but the response is **not** expected to be a final polished essay.

What is a prompt?

A prompt defines the topic for the student's writing. Prompts have two basic parts: the writing topic and the directions for writing.

How are prompts selected?

Prompts are developed by Tennessee teachers and reviewed for appropriateness by the State Writing Advisory Committee. Draft prompts are field tested, using a sample of Tennessee students who represent the state demographic population are tested using potential prompts. All prompts used for the TCAP Writing Assessment are proven successful in field tests in Tennessee.

How long is the Writing Assessment?

Fifth and eighth grade students have thirty-five minutes to respond to the prompt. Eleventh grade students have twenty-five minutes to respond to the prompt.

How is the Writing Assessment scored?

The Writing Assessment is scored holistically. Holistic scoring goes beyond mechanical correctness to focus on the overall impact of the writing. It measures the effectiveness of the communication. Trained readers evaluate the student's essay using the criteria of the scoring rubric and anchor papers. Readers are trained not to focus on any one aspect of the writing, but to look at the entire essay. Neatness and handwriting are not considered in the scoring process.

What is a [scoring rubric](#)?

A scoring rubric is a set of scoring criteria used to measure performance levels. Each score is defined by descriptors or characteristics. The TCAP Writing Assessment Scoring Rubric uses a six-point holistic scale.

Does each grade have its own scoring rubric?

No. The rubric is the same for all three grades (5, 8, and 11).

How can a fair assessment be provided using the same scoring criteria for a fifth grader as for an eleventh grader?

The scoring rubric defines six broad categories that may be applied to any writing assignment. It can be used with any range of skills or grade level of students.

Should students be allowed to see the scoring rubric?

Definitely! Students should be allowed to see the scoring rubric and should practice using the scoring rubric to score their own writing samples.

Where did we get the scoring rubric used in the TCAP Writing Assessment?

The TCAP Writing Assessment scoring rubric is very similar to the other rubrics used by large-scale assessments in other states. An Advisory Committee made up of Tennessee teachers and administrators, reviewed the various scoring rubrics and developed the Tennessee rubric. The current scoring rubric defines each score point: 6-Outstanding, 5-Strong, 4-Competent, 3-Limited, 2-Flawed, and 1-Deficient.

Who decides what is "competent"?

Seventy-five teachers from East, Middle, and West Tennessee meet for two days in Nashville to read and score essays from a sample group each year. The teachers discuss the papers and choose anchor papers for each score point of the scoring rubric to be used as guides in the scoring process.

What are anchor papers?

They are papers chosen to typify the characteristics of a particular score point on the scoring rubric. The anchor papers are guides that set the standard for the current year's scoring and represent the range of responses within each score point.

Who scores the papers?

All papers are scored by professional readers. Tennessee consultants train the readers to score the essays using the Tennessee six-point scoring rubric and the current Tennessee anchor papers. Each person involved with the scoring of the Tennessee writing project is required to qualify as a reader by passing a test on six different sets of essays.

How is quality maintained throughout the scoring process?

Two qualified readers score each paper independently. If the two scores are different but adjacent, the paper receives the higher of the two scores. If the two readers' scores differ by more than one point, the paper is scored by a team leader. In addition, two hundred papers each week are chosen at random and are read by Tennessee's consultants to monitor consistency. State consultants review the statistics daily to ensure that the readers are using the full scale of the scoring rubric. Readers and their scoring are monitored daily throughout the scoring process to ensure reliability.