

TESTING WRITING



What is writing?



"Writing" is the process of using symbols (letters of the alphabet, punctuation and spaces) to communicate thoughts and ideas in a readable form.

Why do we test writing?

We engage in many kinds of writing tasks.

There are distinct stages of instruction in writing such as;

- Pre-writing
- Guided-writing
- Free writing



Test variety also stems from the various applications of writing, ranging from;

- School uses such as note taking, class reports.
- Common personal needs such as letter writing, filling out forms.
- Specialized advanced applications such as translation, advertising, research reports, journalism and literature.

We also need to test writing to evaluate a great number of factors such as;

- Mechanics (Spelling & Punctuation)
- Vocabulary
- Grammar
- Appropriate content
- Dictation or word selection
- Rhetorical matters of various kinds (Organization, Cohesion, Unity; appropriateness to the audience, topic and occasion.)
- Sophisticated concerns such as logic and style

LIMITED RESPONSE

1. Sentence combining
2. Sentence expansion
3. Sentence reduction
4. Copying
5. Oral cloze

DICTATION

1. Preparing a dictation test
2. Administrating a dictation test
3. Scoring a dictation test

GUIDED WRITING


1. Testing specialized skills
2. Changing a passage
3. Building from a paragraph outline

FREE WRITING

1. Guidelines for writing tasks
2. Evaluating student writing

LIMITED RESPONSE

Limited response test items are generally used for evaluating pre-writing.

 Teaching alphabet
&
Cursive writing

Vocabulary
&
Grammar



1. Sentence combining

It is a common pre-writing task that takes many forms.

1.1. Combining by adding a connective

1.2. Combining by putting one sentence inside the another.

Combining sentences by adding a connective

- Connectives that indicate addition (and, moreover, furthermore), contrast (but, however, nevertheless) and result (so, consequently, therefore).

He likes ice cream *but* he won't eat any.

She didn't feel well today *so* she didn't go to work.

Combining sentences by adding a connective

- Subordinators expressing time (after, before, since), condition (if, whether or not, unless), and cause (since, because).

My mother didn't let me go out *because* I haven't finished my homework yet.

Clara will come to the party *if* Jason pick her up.

Combining sentences by putting one sentence inside the other

- Considerable proficiency on the part of students.
- Subordinators and conjunctions are often provided.

Some people come late. They will not get good seats.

People *that come late will not get good seats.*

I am surprised. Nobody likes her. (It _____ that)

It *surprises me that nobody likes her.*

2. Sentence expansion

- Pre-writing evaluation
- Adjectives, adverbs, phrases and clauses

The () man hurried () to the () horse.

The old man hurried out to the frightened horse.

His decision () surprised everyone ().

His decision to quit his job surprised everyone that knew him.

3. Sentence reduction

- Pre-writing proficiency
- Provide a cue word to state how to begin the new phrase

He told us about a man who had a wooden leg.
(with)

He told us about a man *with* a wooden leg.

Her father, who is certainly the stingiest man I know, wouldn't let us borrow his car. (one word)

Her *stingy* father wouldn't let us borrow his car.

4. Copying

- Sometimes timed
- Extended discourse
- Mechanics (Punctuation & Spelling)
- An early audio-lingual technique

SUBSTITUTION TABLE

(6.9) | Yesterday, | friends |
| Last week, | one of my | teachers | asked me to help
| Recently, | | brothers |

| her | plan | an activity | for the | boys |
| him | | a party | | girls | in our
| - | | a social | | students |

| class. | We | finish | until
| dorm. | The two of us | didn't | get through |
| apartment. | - | | stop |

| late that evening. | If you're | free | Saturday,
| about 6:00 p.m. | | in town |
| dinner time. | | not working |

we'd like you to | join us.
| come too. |
| go with us. |

5.Oral cloze

- Combines dictation with selected close
- High frequency deletion
- Difficult content words or grammar not covered yet can be left intact

(6.10) *(Students hear this)*

Have you ever heard of
Angel Falls?/It's the
highest waterfall/in the
world,/deep in the
jungles/of Venezuela./
Few people/have ever
seen/Angel Falls. . . .

(Students read this)

Have you ever heard of
Angel Falls? _____ the
highest waterfall _____
the world, deep in _____
jungles _____ Venezuela.
_____ people _____ ever
_____ Angel Falls. . . .¹

Advantages of Limited-Response items

- Easy to construct
- Suitable for students with limited ability in English
- Rather objective for a writing- related task except for open-ended variety

Limitations of Limited-Response items

- Do not measure actual writing skills
- Rather slow to correct – especially the open-ended variety

GUIDED WRITING

- Student ability to handle controlled or directed writing tasks
 - Text manipulation
 - Expand the outline of an article
 - Dictation

Testing specialized skills

Mechanics

Checking **SPELLING**;

□ Dictating problem words orally

In each of the following groups of four words, one word is spelled incorrectly; the other three are spelled correctly. Find which word is spelled wrong. Then circle the letter of that word.

A. believe B. all right C. because D. marriage

Checking **PUNCTUATION** and **CAPITALIZATION**;

□ Unpunctuated sentences

(6.12) on december 25 1980 doctor adams died in an automobile accident nevertheless his kind deeds will live on for a long time

(Answer: On December 25, 1980, Dr. Adams died in an automobile accident; nevertheless, his kind deeds will live on for a long time.)

Testing specialized skills

Unity and Organization

- A good unified paragraph
- A sentence (or sentences) that is unrelated.

(6.15) (1) Some people think they have an answer to the troubles of automobile crowding and dirty air in large cities. (2) Their answer is the bicycle, or "bike." (3) In a great many cities, hundreds of people now ride bicycles to work every day. (4) Some work with their hands while others depend mostly on their brains while working. (5) A group of New York bike riders claim that if more people rode bicycles to work there would be less dirty air in the city from car engines.³

UNITY

(6.16) (1) So on April 18, 1775, he started across the Charles River, where he planned to wait for a signal from a friend. (2) The American Revolution was a citizens' revolution in which ordinary men took a large part. (3) He was living in Boston when British troops arrived to keep people under control. (4) When he saw the lights, he jumped on his horse and rode through the countryside warning the people that they must fight at daybreak. (5) One such man was Paul Revere, a silver worker. (6) Like others, Revere thought the British troops would move from Boston against the villagers. (7) That night after reaching the other side, Revere saw his friend's lantern signals.

(Key: 2, 5, 3, 6, 1, 7, 4)³

ORGANIZATION

Changing a passage

- The most commonly used guided-writing test
 - No need to supply the subject matter
 - Built-in guides to grammatical structure
- Artificial paragraph

(6.17) (artificial text)

Is it twelve o'clock noon?
Is Elizabeth sitting in a
comfortable blue seat?
Through the window
beside her does she see
blue sky and sometimes
white clouds far below?

(student guided-writing test)

It is twelve o'clock noon.
Elizabeth is sitting in a
comfortable blue seat.
Through the window
beside her she sees blue
sky and sometimes white
clouds far below....⁴

□ Artificial paragraph

**‘The broken typewriter was fixed. Then a letter was typed.’
Anwar fixed the broken typewriter, *then he typed a letter.***

□ Spoken context

MRS.FARIAS: Tell me about Micheal.

JOANA: Well, he’s very tall.

Mrs. Farias said ‘Tell me about Micheal.’

‘Well,’ replied Joana, ‘he’s very tall.’

Mrs. Farias asked her daughter Joana to tell her about Micheal. Joana replied that he was very tall....

□ Specific grammatical changes

(6.19) (original text)

I was nine when my parents told me they were separating. Even my sister Meghan, then seven, and my brother, Patrick, then four, sensed that something was wrong between our parents. At first, Mom and Dad tried not to argue in front of us, but we saw that they talked to each other less and less.

(student guided-writing test)

Molly was nine when **her** parents told **her** they were separating. Even **her** sister, Meghan, then seven, and **her** brother Patrick, then four, sensed that something **was** wrong between **their** parents. At first, **their** mother and **father** tried not to argue in front of **them**, but **the children** saw that **their** parents talked to each other less and less.⁶

Building from a paragraph outline

- Testing writing controls the content and the grammar

(6.20) I / buy / new white swimsuit / I forget / bring / I / mad
/ Becky / mother / take / we / shop / Monday night / I
find / pretty blue / not expensive. / I start / pay / wallet
/ gone / I / borrow / money / Becky / mother / I / cer-
tainly / upset

I bought a new white swimsuit, and then I forgot to bring it. I was really mad. But Becky's mother took us shopping Monday night, and I found a pretty blue one. It was not very expensive. I started to pay for it, and my wallet was gone! I borrowed some money from Becky's mother, but I was certainly upset.⁷

□ Writing a paragraph beginning with a given topic sentence

‘Several things have contributed to my being an educated person.’

- (6.21) • I have lived in ____ (countries).
- I have traveled in ____ (places).
 - I have had certain responsibilities that have matured me. (Name them.)
 - I have read _____. (Give an account of reading that has given you special insights.)
 - I have talked to _____. (Tell about people from whom you have learned a lot.)
 - My parents have taught me _____.

□ Controlling the content of the writing

(6.22) *Directions:* Write a paragraph of about seventy-five words describing a store or business that you know very well. Base your paragraph on answers to the following questions:

1. What is it called?
2. When did it start to do business?
3. How many employees does it have?
4. What do the employees have to do?
5. Does it have a lot of customers/clients? Why (not)?
6. Why do you choose to go there rather than somewhere else?
7. Is it a good example of what such a store/business should be?

In my neighborhood there is a . . .

(Note: These illustrations of guided writing have been drawn from a number of recent ESL texts.)⁹

Advantages of Guided-Writing Tests

- Easy and quick to construct
- Gives the appearance of being an effective measure of writing
- Provide appropriate control for those students who are not ready to write on their own

Limitations of Guided-Writing Tests

- Do not measure ingredients such as organization found in extended writing
- Paragraph-outline variety is often rather time consuming and difficult to grade
- Paragraph-outline variety is difficult to score with real consistency.