

West Virginia Writing Assessment Parent's Guide: A Holistic Assessment with Analytic Results

FOREWORD

Since 1984, the West Virginia Department of Education has administered a holistic assessment of writing to elementary and secondary school students. This performance assessment is based on written responses to a writing prompt and provides information to teachers, students, administrators and the public regarding the writing ability of public school students. This test is given in March of each school year.

This brochure, *West Virginia Writing Assessment Parent Guide*, is a resource for parents. It contains strategies for effective writing, as well as instructional strategies and general tips for improving student writing.

David Stewart
State Superintendent of Schools

TIPS TO PARENTS AND STUDENTS

Parents can encourage their child to use the five-step writing process, the effective paragraph tips and the transition words detailed in this brochure.

WRITING PROCESS

1. Prewriting

- Choose or work from assigned topic
- Explore, gather, and organize ideas
- Identify the audience for which the composition is written
- Identify the purpose of the writing activity

2. Drafting

- Turn ideas and information into sentences and paragraphs to form a rough draft
- Emphasize ideas rather than mechanics
- Give sufficient details

3. Revising

- Rearrange words for effective sentences
- Restructure ideas for smooth transition
- Upgrade vocabulary – check for vivid diction
- Review and refine

4. Editing

- Proof to eliminate spelling, punctuation errors
- Proof capitalization and comma errors
- Read composition to check for organization

5. Publishing

- Format composition to share with desired audience

ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS AND STUDENTS

A well-written composition must have the elements of effective paragraphing. These strategies will aid in paragraph development.

Paragraphing

- Effective opening paragraphs usually:
 - Open with questions
 - Provide a story or anecdote
 - Present unusual facts
 - Use pertinent quotations
- The opening paragraph should aim to:
 - Gain the reader's interest in the subject
 - Identify the focus of the essay
 - State the main idea (thesis, topic sentence, theory)
- Developmental paragraphs should aim to:
 - Have an effective topic sentence that states the main idea
 - Select and arrange details in a definite order
 - Use transitional words to arrange details, to connect paragraphs and for emphasis
- Methods of development usually include:
 - Concrete and sensory details
 - Facts and statistics
 - Examples such as cause and effect, definition, reasons, or incidents to make a point
- Concluding paragraphs should aim to:
 - Point out important ideas or emphasize the guiding theme of the composition
 - Connect the important points together in a logical way
 - Draw a final conclusion

Transitional Words

A well-written composition uses transitional words to make the composition flow from one idea, place or person to another. Typical transitional words and phrases with their usage are listed below:

- **Consequence:** accordingly, as a result, consequently, hence, otherwise, therefore, thus, thereupon
- **Summarizing:** after all, briefly, in any case, in any event, in brief, in conclusion, in summary, in the final analysis, on balance, to summarize, finally
- **Generalizing:** as a rule, as usual, for the most part, generally, ordinarily, usually
- **Restatement:** in essence, in other words, namely, that is, in brief
- **Contrast and Comparison:** by contrast, conversely, instead, likewise, on the contrary, rather, similarly, yet, but, however, still, nevertheless, in contrast
- **Sequence:** at first, at the same time, for now, the next step, in time, in turn, later on, meanwhile, next, then, soon, in the meantime, later, while, earlier, simultaneously, afterward, in conclusion
- **Diversion:** by the way, incidentally
- **Illustration:** for example, for instance
- **Similarity:** similarly, moreover
- **Direction:** here, there, over there, beyond, nearly, opposite, under, above, to the left, to the right, in the distance

Sub-standard English

A well-written composition does not use sub-standard English. Overused, meaningless phrases and double negatives are two of the most common errors to be avoided.

• **Some examples of clichés to be avoided include:**

after all is said and done
beat around the bush
believe it or not
see eye to eye
last, but not least
grin and bear it

• **Some examples of double negatives to be avoided include:**

don't hardly ever
don't hardly know
never let no one
don't know nothing

FINAL WRITING CHECKLIST FOR STUDENTS

Parents are urged to encourage their child to use this checklist in order to help ensure writing proficiency.

- √ My composition has a beginning, middle and an end.
- √ My ideas are developed in a logical way.
- √ I have included details.
- √ I have used transitional words.
- √ I have used a variety of sentence types.
- √ I have used vivid language.
- √ My handwriting is neat and easy to read.
- √ I have corrected spelling and punctuation errors.
- √ I have written a 1 – 2 page composition that addresses the topic.

COMPONENTS OF A WELL-WRITTEN AND EFFECTIVE COMPOSITION

Parents should encourage their child to review the following criteria in order to achieve high quality writing.

- √ Has a beginning, middle and end. (Organization)
- √ Focuses with logical progression of ideas. (Organization)
- √ Uses varied transitional words. (Organization)
- √ Addresses the topic. (Development)
- √ Incorporates sufficient details. (Development)
- √ Has sentences that are complete, varied, and to the point. (Sentence Formation)
- √ Contains vivid diction with clear word choice. (Word Usage)
- √ Errors in Standard Written English are intentional and do not detract from the composition. (Mechanics)