



Assessing the Writing Process

ABE Academy II, Session 3
The Struggling Writer: Writing for Real-Life
Far West GREAT Center

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ASSESSING THE WRITING PROCESS	3
GED Language Arts, Writing Test.....	3
Analytical Versus Holistic.....	3
Holistic Scoring.....	4
Sample Prompts	8
Analytical Scoring	9
Ideas for Coaching Students in the Writing Process	10
Analytical Scoring - Assessing the Writing Process	12
Analyzing the Conventions of EAE	14
Instructional Writing Plan.....	15
Assessing the Writing Process on an Ongoing Basis	16
A Short Analytical Overview.....	17
Think Like Your Students!	18
Sample Writings.....	21
GEDTS Holistic Rubric Scoring Guide	26

Assessing the Writing Process

Success on the GED Language Arts, Writing Test requires the student to compose an essay. Unlike earlier versions of the GED Tests, the 2002 Series GED Language Arts, Writing Test does not prescribe the length of the essay. The essay should be well planned, drafted, and polished. The essay should use the following format: introductory paragraph, developmental paragraphs, and a conclusion.

Although students generally enter the GED program with an understanding of the basic rules of English grammar and writing, some remediation may be required in specific areas. It is recommended that the teacher use one of the many commercially printed or computer-based materials.

Effective writing programs involve the complete writing process. Many adults have never been skilled writers; thus they are unaware that writing is a process that is broken up into manageable steps. The stages many teachers focus on are:

- Selecting or becoming involved in a topic
- Pre-writing that includes considering an approach and gathering one's thoughts, information, or ideas
- Drafting which includes organizing materials and getting the words down on paper

Revising which focuses on polishing the meaning and proofreading the writing sample

While students need to understand the basic conventions of English, such as grammar, punctuation, and spelling, one of the most important things the teacher can do is help the student develop a comfort level with writing. This can only occur if the student is provided ample opportunities to write. Writing should occur during each classroom session and should be integrated into the learning process. Students can write on topics that encompass the entire GED curricula. It is important to remove the artificial barrier between other subjects and writing. Remember, not all written work needs to be graded. Students need to be comfortable in the writing process and have opportunities to write real life assignments.

- Provide writing opportunities for students each day that they are in class. Teachers may wish to start their GED classes with a timed writing activity of 3-5 minutes. Have students write on an assigned topic chosen by the teacher or by the students.
- Have students keep writing journals. Journals can provide a non-threatening environment for writing. Do not grade the journals, but rather read them on a regular basis and respond to comments the students have made. Do not mark errors in spelling or grammar. Allow the student to develop a comfort level with writing. Save the grading for other writing assignments.
- Have students write when they are working with other subjects. Students can summarize what they learned in Social Studies, Science, or any other subject. Have students write about their reactions to political cartoons, expressing their opinions about whether they agree or disagree with the cartoonist. This can serve two purposes: (1) improve writing and (2) improve skills in interpreting graphic-based material.

There are two ways to assess writing. First, there is the analytical approach which requires that the teacher and student working together basically deconstruct the writing and identify specific patterns of errors. Analytical assessment focuses on the parts that make up the whole. Second, there is the holistic approach that judges the body of work in total – not just the individual parts.

Teachers must use both methods of assessment to ensure that students have the feedback they need to steadily improve their writing. Teachers should become familiar with the unique aspects of each type of assessment. In this chapter, you will find detailed descriptions of both methods of writing assessment.

Holistic Scoring

The GED writing sample is assessed by a technique called holistic scoring. The principle underlying the holistic scoring process is that a writing sample should be evaluated on the basis of how effectively it communicates a whole message. This type of scoring can be used in the classroom for writing projects, as well as for the GED writing sample. The important thing is to set up a rubric or scoring guide on which to judge the overall effectiveness of the writing sample, rather than considering separately the individual aspects of writing.

GED essay readers use the following specific characteristics of effective writing on which to base their holistic score:

- Response to the Prompt
- Organization
- Development and Details
- Conventions of EAE
- Word Choice

These characteristics are used to obtain a final score for a writing sample based on the overall effectiveness of the essay in communicating the writer's expression of ideas. The GED 2002 uses a four-point rubric or scoring guide on which to base the final score. Essays are scored as:

Score	Identifier	Description
1	Inadequate	Reader has difficulty identifying or following the writer's ideas.
2	Marginal	Reader occasionally has difficulty understanding or following the writer's ideas.
3	Adequate	Reader understands writer's ideas.
4	Effective	Reader understands and easily follows the writer's expression of ideas.

So, how do you begin the holistic scoring process? Although you may choose to use different types of rubrics, a good place to begin is to use the GEDTS four-point rubric and their guides for holistic scoring. This guide provides you with guidelines for holistic scoring from the GED Testing Service, a copy of the GEDTS rubric, and a blank rubric to use in the classroom with your students.

General Educational Development Testing Service
Language Arts, Writing Test – Part II
Guidelines for Holistic Scoring

Accurately scoring the Official GED Practice Test essays is important. When reading an essay holistically, teachers should follow some basic procedures in estimating an essay score.

1. Become familiar with the GED Essay Scoring Guide. Notice that certain elements are missing from the scoring guide. These include handwriting and length. Handwriting is not a criterion used for judging the effectiveness of a candidate's writing. Although effective development and details often result in greater length, the mere length of the essay is not a criterion of effective writing. Both effective and ineffective papers can be either short or long. All papers should be judged on the reader's ability to understand the writer's ideas, not on their appearance or length.
2. Read the student's essay for an overall impression and score the essay immediately. Scoring a paper holistically is very different from grading a paper analytically or in the traditional manner. Holistic readers do not make marks on essays they score, nor do they enumerate any errors. Although errors will influence your overall impression of the paper, keep in mind that you are reading the paper to get a general impression of the writer's ability to effectively communicate his/her ideas.
3. Do not change your score. Rely on your first impression and try not to reread an essay. Each essay should take no more than one to two minutes. Assign the paper a score of a 1 to 4 based on your initial impression. Remember, candidates have only 45 minutes to read the prompt, to write a first draft, and to write a final draft. Do not compare the finished product with assignments that allow candidates more time to prepare.
4. When in doubt, refer to the scoring guide criteria. Do not compare one essay to another essay or order essays in terms of quality. Instead, refer to the essay scoring guide and your internalized concept of the four different score points. After numerous experiences with holistic scoring, your initial impression will become increasingly reliable.
5. Be aware of and attempt to overcome the potential influence of personal bias on ratings. Bias can affect one's entire scoring pattern or may occur only in specific instances. A number of factors can bias or unknowingly influence a reader's perception of a paper in a positive or negative direction. Some of the characteristics of the paper, such as handwriting, neatness, format, presence or absence of a title, and length of a response can unknowingly influence a reader's perception. Other factors may be more difficult to identify since they are personal reactions. Be aware that a paper's overall quality can be influenced by the reader's:
 - expectations for writing performance based on the population being scored;
 - personal reactions to the tone or content of the composition;
 - prejudices in style or usage; or
 - assumptions about the writer or the testing conditions, such as the writer has potential but ran out of time.
6. Score only what is on the paper. Avoid making assumptions about the writer's potential, why the writer omitted an idea, possible intended bridges between concepts, etc.
7. Be careful not to slip into an analytical scoring process. For example, five spelling or grammatical errors do not necessarily mean that a paper will be scored lower. To isolate any single feature as the dominant reason for assigning a score is scoring according to an analytical not a holistic method.

GED Language Arts Writing Test
Holistic Scoring Guidelines and Sample Prompt

The following guidelines for holistic scoring are adapted from the instructions that the GED Testing Service readers follow.

Read and score the essay immediately. Read for an overall impression rather than for specific errors or error patterns.

Do not mark on the essays. Each paper should be scored within one or two minutes. This does not allow time to mark a paper. Also, marking errors distracts you from the overall effectiveness of the writing.

Once you have scored an essay, do not change the score unless you have recorded a number incorrectly.

Use the GED Essay Scoring Guide as your reference rather than other essays.

Within each score point, there are ranges. A 2 essay may be in the high, medium, or low range of a 2.

Avoid the tendency to give out a certain number of 1s, 2s, 3s, or 4s in a given set up essays.

Be aware of personal biases. When scoring an essay, perceptions of a paper may be influenced by a person's expectations, reaction to the content or tone of a paper, handwriting, neatness, length of the response, or preferences or prejudices. Be careful.

Score only what is on the paper. Do not make assumptions regarding the writer or the testing conditions.

Remember, this is only a 45-minute test. What you are reading is a final draft rather than a composition written over a longer time frame. This is not enough time to produce a flawless piece of work.

If your score is not consistent with the GEDTS Writing Committee Score, attempt to understand and internalize the scoring rationale. Disagreeing with assigned scores is counterproductive. The goal of discussion is to clarify the rationale for each paper's score, not to reassign a score.

Spend approximately 1 to 2 minutes per essay.

Sample GED Essay Writing Prompt: Topic C

What is one important goal you would like to achieve in the next few years?

In your essay, identify that goal. Explain how you plan to achieve it. Use your personal observations, experience, and knowledge to support your essay.

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General Educational Development Testing Service
Language Arts, Writing Test – Part II
Guidelines for Holistic Scoring

1. **Read and score.** Read for an overall impression of the essay. Record your score immediately. Avoid the temptation to reread the essay to justify your score in terms of specific errors.
2. **Red pens down.** Holistic readers do not make marks on essays they score. There are two major reasons for this. First, there is not time to mark papers in this fashion. Each paper should be scored within a minute or two. Secondly, marking errors directs too much attention to one trait, while allowing the reader to ignore other positive features.
3. **Do not change your score.** Avoid second-guessing yourself. Make changes only if you made a recording error.
4. **When in doubt, refer to the scoring guide criteria.** Do not compare an essay to another essay or order essays in terms of quality. Instead refer to the scale and your internalized concept of the score points.
5. **Be aware that there can be a range of essays with a score point.** (i.e., all 2s are not created equal). There are "high," "medium," and "low," essays within each score point.
6. **Avoid the tendency to adjust the number of 1s, 2s, 3s, and 4s in a given set of essays.** You may have an entire packet of 2s or 3s.
7. **Be aware of and avoid potential biasing factors.**
8. **Score only what is on the paper.** Avoid making assumptions about the writer's potential, why the writer omitted an idea, intended bridges between concepts, etc.
9. **This is only a 45 minute test.** Remember, candidates had only 45 minutes to read the prompt, to write a first draft, and to write the final draft. Do not compare the finished product with assignments that allow students more time to prepare.

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Sample Prompts

The following are sample prompts that are similar in format to those used on the GED Language Arts, Writing Test.

TOPIC C

What is one important goal you would like to achieve in the next few years?

In your essay, identify that goal. Explain how you plan to achieve it. Use your personal observations, experience, and knowledge to support your essay.

Part II is a test to determine how well you can use written language to explain your ideas.

In preparing your essay, you should take the following steps:

- Read the **DIRECTIONS** and the **TOPIC** carefully.
- Plan your essay before you write. Use the scratch paper provided to make any notes. These notes will be collected but not scored.
- Before you turn in your essay, reread what you have written and make any changes that will improve your essay.

Your essay should be long enough to develop the topic adequately.

TOPIC F

If you could make one positive change in your daily life, what would that change be?

In your essay, identify the change you would make. Explain the reasons for your choice.

Part II is a test to determine how well you can use written language to explain your ideas.

In preparing your essay, you should take the following steps:

- Read the **DIRECTIONS** and the **TOPIC** carefully.
- Plan your essay before you write. Use the scratch paper provided to make any notes. These notes will be collected but not scored.
- Before you turn in your essay, reread what you have written and make any changes that will improve your essay.

Your essay should be long enough to develop the topic adequately.

Analytical Scoring

A good test for what you are doing in teaching grammar and mechanics is implied in the motto often used in language pedagogy courses - "Focus on making better writers, not just a better piece of writing." This motto helps the teacher realize that students need to be responsible for their own writing rather than merely as recipients of papers in which all errors have been corrected for them. An analytical scale, or checklist, is commonly used to determine whether the student provided specific information.

What is analytical scoring? Analytical scoring is when a one's performance or assignment is judged using specific criteria. To provide for consistency, generally a teacher uses a scoring guide to define the specific criteria on which he/she will critique student performance and will then use this information to help the student to improve his/her writing. An example would be to read a student's essay and score it for use of grammar and punctuation.

The important things when using analytical scoring is to let the student know what you are looking for and then to follow a consistent pattern when reading the student's written work. It's sometimes easy to read a work and want to mark all of the errors that are found. Think for a moment how you would feel if you had worked very hard on a project only to get it back with lots and lots and lots of red marks! Many adult students have met with great failure in the writing craft. When analyzing their work, focus on one or two error patterns. The student will be more likely to want to revise his/her work and will be less likely to "give up" because there is just too much to fix.

Remember, good assessments must:

- Be aligned with specific standards and learning objectives
- Affect what is important for students to know and be able to do
- Be aligned with instruction
- Have appropriate scoring criteria or rubrics attached that assist students in understanding what they need to do in order to improve their written product

Ideas for Coaching Students in the Writing Process

Assessment requires that teachers provide students with effective feedback on their writing. The following are questions that you may wish to use when “coaching” your students through the writing process.

The Writing Coach Checklist

Introduction

- Tell me about your writing. Where you are in the process and which trait(s) you would like to talk about.
- Where did you get the ideas for your paper?
- How would you describe your paper (e.g., story, expository essay, persuasive argument, description)?
- What are you planning to work on next?
- What would you like me to listen for as you share your writing?

Ideas & Development

- What do you see as your main idea?
- What do you want your reader to learn or think about?
- Which part of your paper comes closest to saying what you think is really important?
- Is there one detail you are really proud of including because other people might not have thought of it?
- Do you feel you have plenty of information to keep writing on this topic? If not, do you know how/where to get the information you need?
- This is the main thing I learned from your paper. (Explain)

Organization

- How did you think to begin where you did?
- Did you write more than one lead, or were you happy with the first one?
- For expository/persuasive writing: what is the most important point you make in this paper? Is it close to the beginning, middle or end? Why?
- For narrative writing: does your story have a turning point or most important moment? Does it come close to the beginning, middle or end? Why?
- Read just your conclusion out loud to me and talk to me about it. Tell me why you ended the paper the way you did.
- I did/did not have any trouble following your paper. (Explain)

Voice

- How would you describe your voice in this piece?
- Who do you see as your main audience?
- What would you like a reader or listener to feel?
- Here is how I feel when I listen to your paper. (Explain)

Word Choice

- Do you have favorite words or expressions in this piece? Show me.
- Are there any words you used for the first time? Which ones?
- Are there any words you were not sure of? Which? Shall we look them up?
- Did you use a thesaurus or dictionary? Tell me about that.

- Are there any words or phrases you are not happy with?
- Shall we brainstorm some other way to say it?
- The word or expression which caught my attention was: (Explain)

Sentence Fluency

- You seemed to have an (easy/not so easy) time reading your paper aloud. Am I right about that? Why do you think that might be?
- My impression was that your sentences (did/did not) tend to begin the same way. Do you agree?
- Would you like me to read all or a piece of your work so you could be the listener? (If yes, then tell me what you hear as I read.)

Conventions/Editing

- Have you edited your paper yet? Show me how much of the paper you are editing (e.g., first line, first paragraph, two paragraphs).
- Do you have any editing questions you would like to ask me?
- Is there a handbook you feel comfortable using? Show me.
- Do you feel comfortable using a dictionary (spell checker)? Do we need to talk about that?
- Tell me about this mark of punctuation (choose one from the student's paper to indicate). Why did you use that just here? What does it tell your reader?
- Talk to me about your editing procedures. What do you do? (Read over, read aloud, talk to a friend, use a dictionary, refer to editing practice sheets, etc.)

Closure

- Are there any questions you would like to ask me about your writing?
- Do you know where to get the help or information you need?
- What will you do next with your writing?

Vicki Spandel and Richard Stiggins. 1997. *MMSD Instructional Technologies, 98/99 Creating Writers*. Revised edition. White Plains, N.Y: Longman. Retrieved from the World Wide Web at:

Analytical Scoring - Assessing the Writing Process

Assessing	Problems/Questions	No Problems
Focus		
Does the essay stay on the topic assigned?		
Are the central points or questions clear to the reader?		
How is each section/paragraph related to the central point?		
Development		
Is there a good beginning sentence?		
Is there a good ending sentence?		
Can the reader understand the basic points or is additional information needed?		
Where might the reader raise questions or challenges?		
Organization		
What is the general pattern of organization?		
How are ideas grouped? Is there a logical sequence of subtopics or events?		
At any point does the organization become unclear?		

Style and Mechanics		
Is the tone appropriate?		
What sentences appear most effective?		
What sentences could use the most work?		
Are there persistent grammatical/mechanical error patterns?		
Vocabulary		
Are words used appropriately in the essay?		
Do the words chosen add to the reader's understanding of the writer's ideas?		
Does the writer use vivid and descriptive words?		

Analyzing the Conventions of EAE

Convention	Strengths	Error Patterns
Capitalization		
Punctuation		
Sentence Structure (fragments, parallelism, modification, etc.)		
Usage (agreement, tense, reference, etc.)		
Spelling		

Instructional Writing Plan

Patterns of Errors (List the patterns of errors noted in the essay. Do not worry about order. You may or may not need to use the entire space.)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Priority 1	
Reason for Choice	
Strategies for Change	
Materials to Use	
Priority 2	
Reason for Change	
Strategies for Change	
Materials to Use	

Assessing the Writing Process on an Ongoing Basis

	Strengths	Weaknesses
Focus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stays on topic • Central points are clear • Sentences relate to the main idea 		
Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good beginning • Good ending • Includes adequate information • Answers reader's questions 		
Organization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General pattern of organization • Ideas are grouped • Logical sequence 		
Style/Mechanics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate tone • Effective sentences • General control of grammar 		
Vocabulary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate level for student • Words add to understanding • Varied word choice • Vivid and/or descriptive words 		

	Strengths	Error Patterns
Capitalization		
Punctuation		
Sentence Structure (fragments, parallelism, etc.)		
Usage (agreement, tense, reference, etc.)		
Spelling		

A Short Analytical Overview

The following is a short form that you may wish to use with students. It provides space for the reader to respond to his/her overall impression of the writing, as well as identifying specific strengths and areas for improvement.

Complete the following chart regarding the writing that you just read.

Overall Impression	
Strengths	
Areas for Improvement	

Think Like Your Students!

Where might your students go off topic while writing essays on the following?

1. The media is a powerful form of communication in today's society. Identify one change you would personally make to the news media – the press, television, radio, and the Internet – and the reasons for making the change. Use your personal observations, experience, and knowledge to support your essay.
2. Studies say that most children spend three hours watching television for every hour they spend in school. Discuss one consequences of this behavior and one way in which television-watching habits may impact a child's life.
3. Computers have influenced today's world. Describe one way in which computers have influenced your personal life and how you have reacted to the change. Use examples from your personal experiences, work, or community situations.
4. On the average, an American family moves every 4.5 years. Think of someone, maybe you, who's moved three times or more. Write an essay describing one of the moves and why it was made. Explain some of the most important changes resulting from the move.
5. People born since 1970 will change jobs at least six times during their working lives, if current patterns continue. Think of someone, maybe you, who's changed jobs three times or more. Write an essay describing at least one job changes and why it was made. Explain one of the most important results of the job changes.
6. Most people can remember times during their childhood when some adult was a very strong influence. Think of a time when that happened to you or think of a time when a child you know was strongly influenced by an adult. Write an essay explaining the results this influence.
7. Advances in technology will shape the 21st century. Write an essay describing how new technology will bring about change.
8. Identify someone you consider to be a modern hero or heroine. Write an essay explaining why.
9. Each year, many young people run away from home. Write an essay describing what you think is the one thing that most convinces as young person to run away from home.
10. Many people are described as leaders. Write an essay discussing the one essential characteristic of an effective leader and why.
11. Crime is increasing in many major urban areas. Write an essay describing the steps that you would take to decrease crime in your community.
12. Our world would be very different if a person had the power to change any event in history. If you had the power to change one event in history, which would choose to change and why?
13. The role of parenting is one that many people undertake without any training. Write an essay describing what you view as the one most essential characteristic of a good parent and why it is important.
14. Most high school students are required to take a course in government or civics. Write an essay explaining how taking such a course can help students become better citizens.

15. Each stage of life has similarities and differences. Apart from chronological age, write an essay describing some of the major differences between an adolescent and an adult.
16. Suppose you were asked to teach a subject, sport, or activity of your choice. Write an essay describing what you would teach and how you would teach it.
17. Television programming is an important job. Write an essay describing what changes in programming you would make if you were made the programming director of a major television network.
18. Each historical period in time has pros and cons. Pretend that you could live in some other historical period other than today. Write an essay explaining which period you would choose and why.
19. It has been proposed that American presidents be elected for one six-year term and not be eligible for reelection. Write an essay regarding your stance on this proposal and the reasons for your viewpoint.
20. Many people eat at fast food restaurants four to five times a week rather than at home. Write an essay explaining why this change in eating habits has occurred.
21. People learn many important skills and values in their lives. Write an essay identifying an important skill or value that you would like to teach your children and how you would go about teaching that skill.
22. Most people consider themselves part of a particular generation. Write an essay discussing what you consider the most important values of your generation and why.
23. Scientific discoveries are being made every day. Write an essay describing a scientific discovery that you would like to make in your lifetime and the impact the discovery would have on society.
24. People are living longer. Write an essay explaining how society would change if the average life span were increased to 150 years.
25. When we return to places we knew as children, we are often surprised at how different these places seem. Compare and/or contrast your impression of some place you knew as a child with your current impression of the same place.
26. Time-capsules provide information to future generations. Write an essay explaining what you would place in a time-capsule to allow people opening the capsule 1,000 years from now to understand life today. Use your personal observations, experiences, and knowledge to provide reasons for placing each item in the capsule.
27. There are many laws on the books. Write an essay describing a law that you would pass and why that law would be important to society.
28. One often sees large amounts of litter along the highways and in the countryside. Write an essay of how you would decrease littering.
29. Whether we want them or not, many of us get tagged with one or more nicknames during our lives. Write an essay about the positive and/or negative aspects of the practice of nicknaming.
30. Public education is a common topic in the news media. Write an essay explaining one step that should be taken to improve the quality of public education and why that step is important.
31. Most of us receive advice. Write an essay describing the best advice that you ever got and why.

32. As Americans age, health care is increasingly important. Write an essay on how you would make health care in America more available to everyone.
33. Presidential greatness is often debated by professional historians. Write an essay about the U.S. president that you consider the most important. Justify your selection.
34. Which do you believe has been more influential in your life -- good luck (chance) or good decisions? Explain.
35. Select one quality or characteristic of childhood that we should strive to preserve throughout our lives?
36. If you could make one resolution and follow through with it no matter what the difficulties, what would you choose and why?
37. Many states have lotteries that provide capital for specific programs. Write an essay explaining how you think lottery money should be spent and why.
38. Write an essay describing how a decision that you made was particularly significant in your life.
39. Have you ever witnessed a special place being ruined by pollution, whether by a company or by individuals? Discuss that example in an argument against that form of pollution.

Sample Essays from High School Students

Michelle (grade 11) develops this eyewitness account by answering the "5 Ws and H" about her parents becoming American citizens. The writer also shares her sensory impressions.

Anticipating the Dream

"And we are scatterlings of Africa
On a journey to the stars
Far below we leave forever
Dreams of what we were."

—Johnny Clegg

I am sitting with my grandparents in the spectators' section of the echoing auditorium, my baby brother on my lap. I'm not sure what I expected this morning, but thus far it has been an incredibly boring experience. The judge is half an hour late, and to add to that, Graeme, my brother, is tired and fussing, and would evidently much prefer his mother's lap to mine. Unfortunately for him, my parents and older brother are sitting on the other side of the room with almost 200 others. Thirty-one countries are represented here today.

This is a citizenship ceremony. My parents, my older brother, and I were all born in South Africa. After living in the United States for 13 years, they are finally becoming citizens. I am not yet 18; consequently, I have to wait for my parents to obtain citizenship before I am eligible. All my younger siblings were born here, and are therefore Americans by birth.

Graeme was only momentarily distracted by the book we brought along to amuse him. He is now struggling noisily to climb off my lap. It's time to bring out the secret weapon: candy. I just hope my supply doesn't dwindle too quickly.

In our particular situation, it seems rather odd that the citizenship process works this way. Having lived here since I was two, I have always been more American than anything else. I don't speak Afrikaans, but my parents do (as well as English). I am the one who briefed my mother on American history and government before she took the citizenship test. Not only that, but I am always having to remind my parents that the word is flashlight, not torch, and that here in America we have a tooth fairy, not a mouse, who comes to fetch our teeth. After today, my parents will be Americans, and I will be the unique one, the alien, the only South African remaining in our house. How bureaucratic of the American government to work that way.

The judge has arrived, and now that everyone has stopped talking, Graeme has started to cry. I make a hasty retreat up the slanted aisle to the back of the room. Maybe I can rock him to sleep.

I have often asked my parents why we moved here from our homeland, and from what I've gathered, there are several reasons. Foremost is apartheid, the total segregation of South Africa, whereby whites held all power and blacks were not even allowed to vote. The government established separate buses, bathrooms, even public lawns. My parents, who are by no means radical, were very strongly against apartheid and were arrested for protesting. They were released in the next moment because they were white, while their black friends were hauled off to jail. The atmosphere was growing more volatile every day, and when the building across the street from where my mother worked was bombed, my parents decided that it was no longer safe to stay, especially with two small children. Consequently, my father took advantage of the first opportunity to get a job here in America. It must be incredibly difficult to live in a country that is so immoral, where people are looked down upon simply because their skin happens to be a different shade. How can you pledge allegiance to a government responsible for the obvious evil around you every day? America was segregated at one point also, but at least the government called it "separate but equal." In South Africa, the government did not even attempt to bring about equality. Can anyone take pride in a government like that?

Graeme is finally asleep, drooling on my shoulder, and I can return, victorious, to my seat. The judge has been giving a speech about the privileges and responsibilities that come with being an American citizen. I'm beginning to understand why my parents are so excited about this day. At first I expected nothing of great importance to occur in this ceremony. I imagined we would arrive here, say the Pledge of Allegiance, and my parents would receive a piece of paper declaring them "American citizens." As it turns out, a lot more is involved than the mere title. Today my parents will not only become eligible to vote and serve on jury duty, but they will automatically become part of American history, culture, and society. The United States becomes their country; a land that kindles pride. All of a sudden, they have a duty to serve this country and to be loyal to it above all others. It is a colossal decision for them to make.

South Africa is a beautiful nation. My parents grew up there and have many fond recollections. They remember visiting game preserves and finding lions in the middle of the road. They remember going to school with their friends and tormenting substitute teachers. The different snacks they ate—biltong, Chappie gum, and Bovril—could never be found in the United States. My parents remember getting married in the city of Florida on February 2, 1980. I'm certain it must have been difficult to leave everything, including family, and move to America. Now, at this ceremony, everything is becoming finalized. They will no longer be a part of South Africa, but South Africa will always be a part of them. They have given up the past in anticipation of the future, one filled with hope for greater peace, prosperity, and happiness: the American Dream.

I scan the room, the many different faces of my fellow spectators: grandparents, parents, and children of various races. Anyone can read the pride in their eyes as they watch their loved ones from across the room. I snap to attention. People are rising. This is the moment; they are about to take the oath. Now I have grown just as excited as my parents seemed to be this morning. My mother's smile tells me she is enjoying herself. Right hands raised, the would-be citizens repeat after the judge the words that will change their lives forever. Piles of paperwork and months of waiting are now fulfilled in a few simple words. As the final echoes of the judge's words die out, I hardly hear his congratulations. One fact only is the focus of my thoughts: my parents and another brother are Americans. All my older brothers and my sister are Americans. Soon it will be my turn, and I can hardly wait.

This cause/effect essay opens with a brief explanation of a case in which a herd of elephants is spared from death, but then goes on to explain how that is not typical—that, in fact, elephants are headed toward extinction. Michelle, the author, clearly establishes the main causes of this situation, as well as their sad effects.

Save the Elephants

What should be done with a herd of marauding elephants? This was the problem recently confronting officials at Pilanesberg National Park in South Africa. A number of orphaned male elephants had been transported to the park in order to provide them with a safe and nurturing environment. However, this step to protect the elephant population soon threatened another endangered species.

The young elephants had entered musth, like puberty, a state of heightened hormonal activity and increased aggression. The elephants went on a killing spree, slaying almost 40 rhinoceros—including incredibly rare black rhinos. The park officials did not want to kill the young elephants, but they could not afford to have any more rhinos slaughtered.

Oddly enough, the solution to this disastrous situation was to bring more male elephants into the park. This time, however, they were full-grown bull elephants. In almost no time at all, a previously impossible hierarchy had been established, and the orphaned males fell right into place. As of yet, no rhino killings have been reported.

The Pilanesberg story has a positive ending, but many elephants are not as lucky. The elephant population in Africa has been drastically reduced by loss of habitat to cultivation and urbanization, and many have been orphaned by poachers cashing in on the ivory trade. Some biologists believe that if elephant numbers continue to drop, it will soon be impossible to save the species.

Elephants are amazing creatures. As well as holding the title of "largest land animal," they are also among the most intelligent. An elephant has 150,000 muscle units in its trunk, can swim long distances without tiring, walks almost silently despite weighing about 7 tons, can travel up to 6,000 miles in a year while searching for food, and can live 60 years. Full-grown elephants have no natural enemies, other than humans.

Like most animals, elephants have an enormous effect on the other animals in their habitat. Eating 165-330 pounds of food a day, an elephant can clear thick brush into open savannah in no time, creating an open habitat for other animals. Several tree species rely almost solely on the elephant to scatter their seeds. If the elephant were to disappear, these life-forms would bear the consequences.

With only 2 elephant species left out of 600, the danger of extinction is imminent. If the population in any particular area drops below 100 individuals (as it has in several parks), that population is virtually doomed, having entered an "extinction vortex." Continued inbreeding leads to genetic deterioration, which results in fewer reproductive males and females being born. The numbers begin to drop, and the cycle continues until the population completely dies out. Evidence of this genetic deterioration can be seen in elephant tusks, which are gradually becoming smaller. All elephants with exceptionally large tusks have already been poached.

Humans have always taken advantage of the incredible strength and endurance of elephants. Hannibal, the Carthaginian general, used elephants to carry his supplies across the Alps in the third century. Elephants have been ridden onto the battlefield, have been trained to carry heavy logs, and were even used during World War II to drag military equipment up steep slopes. We have used elephants to our advantage for more than 2,000 years.

Now we are destroying them. Poaching is the chief reason that elephants are brought closer to extinction every day. From 1986 to 1989, 300,000 African elephants were killed for their ivory tusks. In 1986 alone, 75 percent of raw ivory came from illegal poaching—the equivalent of 89,000 elephants. Recently, laws have been instituted that completely ban any hunting of the endangered elephants. However, this has only made poaching easier; without professional hunters carefully patrolling their favorite hunting blocks, park rangers alone are left to deal with poachers. Carrying outdated World War II rifles, the rangers are no match for ruthless poachers with AK-17's, who have been known to kill rangers, local farmers, and even tourists to avoid capture.

The poaching trade began in earnest in 1971, when a severe drought killed 9,000 elephants in a Kenyan game reserve. Neighbors of the park moved in to collect ivory. They found it was very profitable, and when the supply dwindled and they could no longer simply pick it up from the ground, they turned to the living elephants. In 1973 there were 167,000 elephants in Kenya. By 1987, there were only 20,000 left.

Raw ivory is shipped by smugglers to factories where it is either carved into sculptures or converted into Chinese medicines (which may actually have very little medicinal value). Before President Bush's 1989 ban, the United States was one of the largest importers of worked ivory in the world. Major consumers of ivory today include China, Hong Kong, India, Taiwan, and Japan. The demand for ivory in these countries—as well as the price paid to poachers—has increased over the years, in some places by 1000 percent. Weapons are also more available due to the civil wars and political unrest in certain African countries. These factors have contributed to increased poaching and will ultimately contribute to the demise of elephants.

Many attempts have been made to stamp out poaching in African game reserves, but law enforcement has proved extremely difficult. Lack of funding for conservation projects and for staff to patrol the parks is a major obstacle in the quest to protect threatened species. In addition, many poachers are not the professionals seen on TV, with trucks full of supplies, traps, and technologically advanced weapons. Instead, they come from poor communities adjacent to major parks. The people in these communities have to put up with harassment from wild animals, and they rarely get anything in return. Consequently, they do not object to making some money at the expense of an elephant or two. The scenario is common in the poor countries of Africa, such as Kenya, where 30 million hungry people are crowded into an area the size of Texas.

Officials in Zimbabwe and Botswana have tried to remedy this problem in an interesting fashion. They granted ownership of all the wild animals in a certain area to the nearest village or community. Contrary to public expectations, this method was relatively successful. The communities managed resources carefully, monitored their animals well, and even earned money from safari expeditions. As it turns out, a trophy hunter spends 100 times more to shoot a single animal than an average tourist spends to just look. Unfortunately, community ownership of animals seemed to work only in areas with large areas of land and few people.

Another approach taken to prevent peasants from turning to poaching was to use money generated by park tourism to build clinics and provide educational programs for surrounding communities. However, because some parks do not attract as many tourists as others do, and also because of the sheer number of poor villages, the benefits were spread too thinly.

In recent years, the number of elephant killings due to poaching has decreased, largely due to the worldwide ban (since 1990) on the trade of ivory. However, the illegal trade continues, and as long as it does, poachers will be a part of it. The poaching problem is incredibly intricate. Fueled by the illicit trade to southeast Asia and the rest of the world, it is also the result of a lack of education and public services in African villages.

It is evident that a single country cannot successfully combat poaching and the loss of elephant habitat. The world needs to unite like never before if we want to save our remaining elephants.

Stealing intellectual property via the Internet is the stimulating idea that hooks and holds the reader in twelfth-grader Dan's feature article. This is a very current topic, dealt with in an informative manner.

Internet Plagiarism

Not all thieves lurk in dark alleys and parks. Some sit with their faces lit by the glow of their computer monitors, copying, pasting, and printing.

It may seem like just another helpful source of information, but the Internet has taken the theft of "intellectual property" to a new level. Part of the problem is that most students don't really know the exact definition of plagiarism or its consequences. Some say that using someone else's ideas without attributing them is a form of theft, but most people don't think of it as a serious crime.

For teachers, Internet plagiarism has been especially problematic compared to "theft" from other sources. This is because it is so difficult to locate the origin of Internet material. To counter student plagiarism, Internet services designed to detect copied material have emerged to aid teachers. One Internet company, TurnItIn.com, has developed a system for detecting material plagiarized from the Internet. Teachers can upload student works onto the site, which searches for similarities to material from all over the Web. The teachers receive an "originality report" within a few days. To utilize this new technology, a few teachers at this high school are having students submit their papers on disk as well as on paper.

"The threat of using [these programs] will stop a lot of students. They will be afraid they'll be caught. Unfortunately, fear is what works," English teacher Judy Gear said.

English teacher Barbara Swovelin said, "With all the info that's on the Internet, it's understandable that we go to it to get information. It's understandable that people would use it as a resource. The legal and moral issues come in when students use it improperly."

A main concern is not only the use of a few plagiarized sentences, but of entire papers. "Paper mills" like SchoolSucks.com and Evil House of Cheat are some of the most popular sources for pirated papers. Sites like these, which have achieved fame and notoriety among slackers everywhere, were the motivation for TurnItIn.com and similar sites.

In addition to such blatant "cut and paste" plagiarism, most teachers agree that students must be wary of the theft of ideas. One plagiarism-detection program, Word Check, asserts through their Web site, "Whether you agree or disagree on how information should be used or reused in digital form, one thing is clear: protecting intellectual property from theft and infringement is the number one security issue."

By some definitions, it seems like everyone plagiarizes. But for many students who feel that they might unknowingly plagiarize, programs like TurnItIn.com are intimidating. The detection system on TurnItIn.com, which is a part of plagiarism.org, claims to detect plagiarism down to the eight-word level, which many fear could include accidental lifting of words.

"You might lift an idea or a line or two. Everybody does that. Some writers don't read other writers because of it," Gear said.

Swovelin responds positively to the new technology that detection programs use. "What we would try to produce would be students who would be ethical. People learn lessons when they do something wrong," she said about the program.

"I think that the idea is good," Chris M., a senior, said. "But it might be a little extreme because some phrases are common enough that they might be in more than one essay." The thieves are out there, and they aren't wearing stocking caps. They're not robbing banks; they're stealing words.

The Write Source. Retrieved from the World Wide Web at: <http://www.thewritesource.com/models.htm#inc>.

GED® 2002 Essay Scoring Guide

	1	2	3	4
	Inadequate	Marginal	Adequate	Effective
	Reader has difficulty identifying or following the writer's ideas.	Reader occasionally has difficulty understanding or following the writer's ideas.	Reader understands writer's ideas.	Reader understands and easily follows the writer's expression of ideas.
Response to the Prompt	Attempts to address prompt but with little or no success in establishing a focus.	Addresses the prompt, though the focus may shift.	Uses the writing prompt to establish a main idea.	Presents a clearly focused main idea that addresses the prompt.
Organization	Fails to organize ideas.	Shows some evidence of an organizational plan.	Uses an identifiable organizational plan	Establishes a clear and logical organization
Development and Details	Demonstrates little or no development; usually lacks details or examples or presents irrelevant information.	Has some development but lacks specific details; may be limited to a listing, repetitions or generalizations.	Has focused but occasionally uneven development; incorporates some specific detail.	Achieves coherent development with specific and relevant details and examples
Conventions of EAE	Exhibits minimal or no control of sentence structure and the conventions of EAE.	Demonstrates inconsistent control of sentence structure and the conventions of EAE.	Generally controls sentence structure and the conventions of EAE.	Consistently controls sentence structure and the conventions of Edited American English (EAE).
Word Choice	Exhibits weak and/or inappropriate words.	Exhibits a narrow range of word choice, often including inappropriate selections.	Exhibits appropriate word choice.	Exhibits varied and precise word choice.

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GED® 2002 Essay Scoring Guide Template

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	Reader has difficulty identifying or following the writer's ideas.	Reader occasionally has difficulty understanding or following the writer's ideas.	Reader understands writer's ideas.	Reader understands and easily follows the writer's expression of ideas.
Response to the Prompt				
Organization				
Development and Details				
Conventions of EAE				
Word Choice				

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