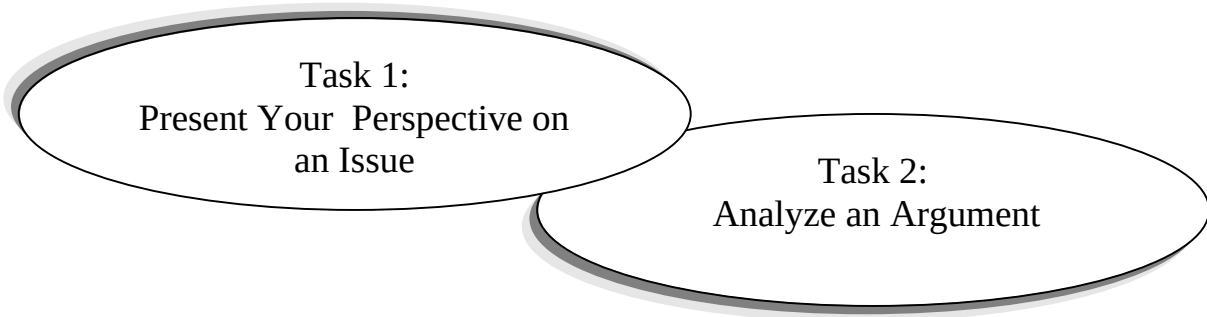


# **An Introduction to the GRE<sup>®</sup> Writing Assessment**



Task 1:  
Present Your Perspective on  
an Issue

Task 2:  
Analyze an Argument

**Description of the GRE Writing Assessment, Scoring Information,  
Strategies for Each Task, Scoring Guides, Screen Directions,  
Sample Essays with Reader Comments**



**July 2000**

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## DESCRIPTION OF THE GRE WRITING ASSESSMENT

The GRE Writing Assessment consists of two analytical writing tasks:

- a 45-minute “Present Your Perspective on an Issue” task
- a 30-minute “Analyze an Argument” task

Test takers will be given a choice between two “Issue” topics. Each states an opinion on an issue of broad interest and asks test takers to discuss the issue from any perspective(s) they wish, so long as they provide relevant reasons and examples to explain and support their views.

Test takers will not have a choice of “Argument” topics. Instead, the computer will present an argument for test takers to analyze. The Argument task presents a different challenge: it requires test takers to critique a given argument by discussing how well reasoned they find it. Test takers are asked to consider the logical soundness of the argument rather than to agree or disagree with the position it presents.

The two tasks are complementary in that one requires test takers to construct their own arguments by taking a position and providing evidence supporting their view on the issue, whereas the other requires them to critique someone else’s argument by assessing its claims and evaluating the evidence it provides.

The GRE Writing Assessment is offered on computer as a separate test, available year-round at all ETS authorized computer-based testing (CBT) centers worldwide.

If you plan to apply to graduate school in 2000 or later, check with your prospective graduate schools to determine if they require or recommend this new assessment.

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### Scoring Information

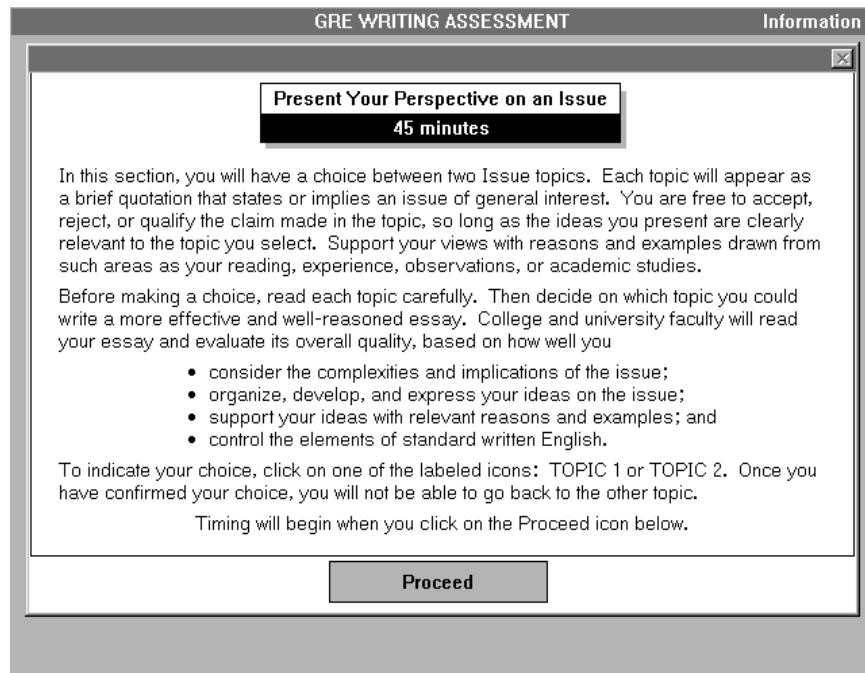
Each essay is scored on a 6-point holistic scale according to the criteria published in GRE scoring guides (see pages 9 and 23). In holistic scoring, readers are trained to assign scores on the basis of the overall quality of an essay in response to the assigned task and the writing situation. Essay scoring is performed by college and university faculty experienced in teaching writing or writing-intensive courses. All GRE readers have undergone careful training, passed stringent GRE qualifying tests, and demonstrated that they are able to maintain a high degree of scoring accuracy. Scoring and monitoring procedures have been designed for fairness and objectivity: all essays are scored by two readers; essays are randomly distributed to the readers; all identifying information about the test takers is concealed from the readers; and readers do not know what other scores an essay may have received. The scoring procedure requires identical or adjacent scores from two readers; any other score combination will be adjudicated by a third GRE reader.

Although the GRE Writing Assessment contains two discrete essay-writing tasks, **a single combined score** is reported because it is more reliable than either task score alone. This score represents the average of the scores for the two essays. Because of the scoring process, test takers will not receive their scores at the test center. Scores will be sent to institutions and test takers within 10 to 15 days. Institutions will also be provided with brief descriptions of the writing abilities evidenced at particular score levels.

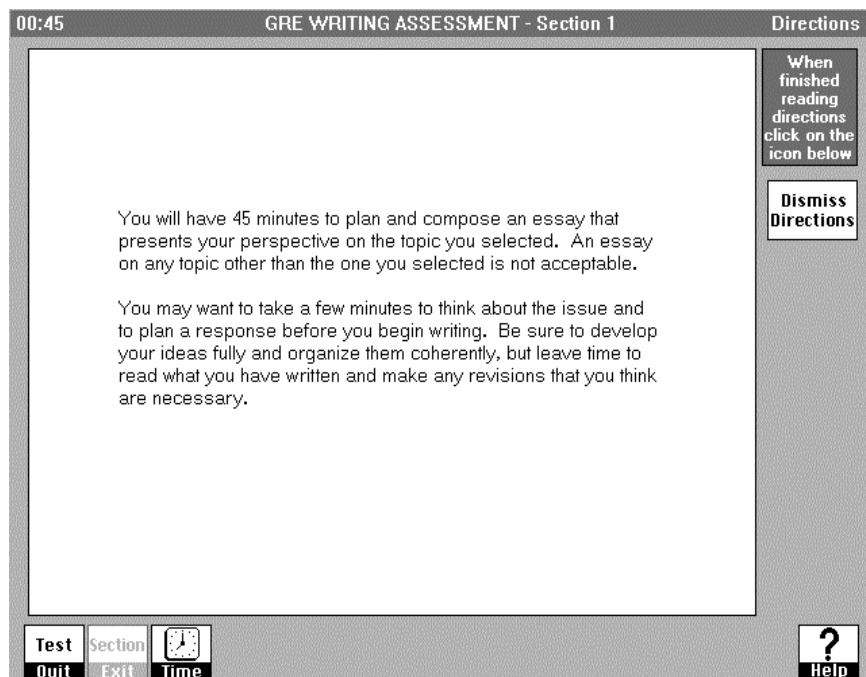
# PRESENT YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON AN ISSUE TASK

## SCREEN DIRECTIONS

The screen below shows the content of the CBT directions for the Issue task.



After selecting the topic, the test taker sees this screen:



## **STRATEGIES FOR THE “PRESENT YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON AN ISSUE” TASK**

### **Understanding the Issue Task**

The “Present Your Perspective on an Issue” section of the test assesses your ability to think critically about a topic of general interest and to clearly express your thoughts about it in writing. Each topic, presented in quotation marks, makes a claim about an issue that test takers can discuss from various perspectives and apply to many different situations or conditions. Your *task* is to present a compelling case for your own position on the issue. The best approach to this task is read the topic carefully. Think about the claim from several points of view, and then make notes about the position you want to take and the main reasons and examples that you plan to develop more fully in your essay.

The Issue task gives you considerable latitude in the way you respond to the statement or claim made in each topic. Although it is important that you address the central issue, you are free to take any approach you wish. For example, you might

- agree absolutely with the claim, disagree completely, or agree with some parts and not others
- question the assumptions the statement seems to be making
- qualify any of its terms, especially if the way you define or apply a term is important to developing your perspective on the issue
- point out why the claim is valid in some situations but not in others
- evaluate points of view that contrast with your own perspective
- develop your position with reasons that are supported by several relevant examples or by a single extended example

The GRE readers scoring your response are not looking for a “right” answer — in fact, there is no correct position to take. Instead, the readers are evaluating the skill with which you articulate and develop an argument to support your position on the issue.

### **Understanding the Context for Writing: Purpose and Audience**

The Issue task is an exercise in critical thinking and persuasive writing. The purpose of the task is to see how well equipped you are to develop a compelling argument supporting your own perspective on an issue and to effectively communicate that argument in writing to an academic audience. Your audience consists of college and university faculty who are trained as GRE readers to apply the scoring criteria identified in the scoring guide for “Present Your Perspective on an Issue.” (See page 9.)

To get a clearer idea of how GRE readers apply the Issue scoring criteria to actual essays, you might want to review sample Issue essays and readers’ commentaries. The sample essays, particularly at the 5 and 6 score levels, will show you some successful strategies for organizing and developing a persuasive argument. You will also see examples of particularly effective uses of language. The readers’ commentaries discuss specific aspects of writing, such as the use of examples, development and support, organization, language fluency, and effective word choice. These commentaries will point out aspects that are particularly effective and persuasive as well as any that detract from the overall effectiveness of the essay.

### **The Published Pool of “Issue” Topics**

Everyone — even the most practiced and confident of writers — should spend some time preparing for the GRE Writing Assessment before arriving at the testing site. To help you prepare for the test, the

## Present Your Perspective on an Issue Task

GRE Program has published the entire pool of topics from which your test topics will be selected. You might find it helpful to review the entire Issue pool and to discuss some of the topics with a friend or teacher. You can download the published pool from the Web at [www.gre.org/writing.html](http://www.gre.org/writing.html) or you can obtain a copy by writing to GRE Program, PO Box 6000, Princeton, NJ 08541-6000. The six Issue topics used in POWERPREP were selected from this pool to represent the kinds of topics in the pool.

### Preparing for the “Issue” Task

Because the Issue task is meant to assess the persuasive writing skills you have developed throughout your education, it has been designed neither to require any particular course of study nor to advantage students with a particular type of training. Many college textbooks on composition offer advice on persuasive writing that you might find useful, but even this advice might be more technical and specialized than you need for the Issue task. You will not be expected to know specific critical thinking or writing terms or strategies; instead, you will need to know how to use reasons, evidence, and examples effectively to support your position on an issue. Suppose, for instance, that an Issue topic asks you to consider whether it is important for government to provide financial support for art museums. If your position is that government *should* fund art museums, you might support your position by discussing the reasons art is important and explain that museums are the places where art is available to anyone. On the other hand, if your position is that government *should not* support museums, you might point out that, given limited governmental funds, art museums are not as deserving of governmental funding as are other institutions. Or, if you are in favor of government funding for art museums *only under certain conditions*, your argument might focus on the artistic criteria, cultural concerns, or political conditions that you think should determine how — or whether — art museums receive government funds. It is not your position that matters so much as the skills you display in developing your position.

Reviewing the “Present Your Perspective on an Issue” scoring guide will help you understand the kinds of skills you need to display in your essay to earn a particular score. The scoring guide describes the qualities of writing that characterize the responses at each score point.

An excellent way to prepare for the Issue task is to practice writing on some of the published topics. There is no “best” approach: some people prefer to start practicing without regard to the 45-minute time limit; others prefer to take a “timed test” first and practice within the time limit. No matter which approach you take when you practice the Issue task, you should

- carefully read the claim made in the topic and make sure you understand the issue involved; if an issue seems unclear, discuss it with a friend or teacher
- think about the issue in relation to your own ideas and experiences, to events you have read about or observed, and to people you have known; this is the knowledge base from which you will develop compelling reasons and examples in your argument that reinforce, negate, or qualify the claim in some way
- decide what position on the issue you want to take and defend — remember you are free to agree or disagree completely or to agree with some parts of the claim but not others
- decide what compelling evidence (reasons and examples) you can use to support your position

Remember that this is a task in critical thinking and persuasive writing. Therefore, you might find it helpful to explore the complexity of a claim in one of the topics by asking yourself the following questions:

- What, precisely, is the central issue?
- Do I agree with all or with any part of the claim? Why or why not?

## *Present Your Perspective on an Issue Task*

- Does the claim make certain assumptions? If so, are they reasonable?
- Is the claim valid only under certain conditions? If so, what are they?
- Do I need to explain how I interpret certain terms or concepts used in the claim?
- If I take a certain position on the issue, what reasons support my position?
- What examples — either real or hypothetical — could I use to illustrate those reasons and advance my point of view? Which examples are most compelling?

Once you have decided on a position to defend, you should consider the perspective of others who might not agree with your position. Ask yourself:

- What reasons might someone use to refute or undermine my position? How should I acknowledge or defend against those views in my essay?

To plan your response, you might want to summarize your position and make brief notes about how you will support the position you are going to take. When you have done this, look over your notes and decide how you will organize your response. Then write an essay developing your position on the issue. Even if you don't write a full essay response, you should find it helpful to practice with a few of the Issue topics and to sketch out your possible responses. After you have practiced with some of the topics, you should try writing responses to some of the topics within the 45-minute time limit so that you have a good idea of how to use your time in the actual test.

You might want to get some feedback on your essay(s) from a writing instructor or another instructor who emphasizes writing in his or her courses. It might also be useful to trade papers on the same topic with other students and discuss one another's essays in relation to the scoring guide. Try to determine how each paper meets or misses the criteria for each score point in the guide. Comparing your essay to the scoring guide will help you see how and where you might need to improve.

GRE POWERPREP® software, version 2.0, will let you practice writing essays under simulated GRE testing conditions, using the same GRE word processor and testing tools that appear on the test. You can also review the tutorials for the word processor and testing tools at the GRE Web site, [www.gre.org/writing.html](http://www.gre.org/writing.html).

## **Deciding Which “Issue” Topic to Choose**

Remember that at the testing site, the computer will select two topics from the published pool of topics; you must choose *one* of these two. Because the 45-minute timing begins when you first see the two topics, you should not spend too much time making a decision. Instead, try to choose fairly quickly the issue that you feel better prepared to discuss.

Before making a choice, read each topic carefully. Then decide on which topic you could write a more effective and well-reasoned essay. In making this decision, you might ask yourself:

- Which topic do I find more interesting or engaging?
- Which topic more closely relates to my own academic studies or other experiences?
- On which topic can I more clearly explain and defend my perspective?
- On which topic can I more readily think of strong reasons and examples to support my position?

Your answers to these questions should help you make your choice.

## **Writing Your Essay in the Time Allowed**

With this, as with any standardized essay writing assessment, it is important to budget your time. Within the 45-minute time limit, you will need to allow sufficient time to choose one of the two topics, think about the issue you've chosen, plan a response, and compose your essay. Although GRE readers understand the time constraints under which you write and will consider your essay a "first draft," you still want it to be the best possible example of your writing that you can produce under the testing circumstances. Save a few minutes to check for obvious errors. Although an occasional typographical or spelling or grammatical error will not affect your score, severe and persistent errors will detract from the overall effectiveness of your writing and thus lower your overall score.

## **The Form of Your Essay**

You are free to organize and develop your essay in any way that you think will effectively communicate your ideas about the issue. Your essay may, but need not, incorporate particular writing strategies learned in English composition or writing-intensive college courses. GRE readers will not be looking for a particular developmental strategy or mode of writing; in fact, when faculty are trained to be GRE readers, they review hundreds of Issue essays that, although highly diverse in content and form, display similar levels of critical thinking and persuasive writing. Readers will see, for example, some Issue essays at the 6 score level that begin by briefly summarizing the writer's position on the issue and then explicitly announcing the main points to be argued. They will see others that lead the reader into the writer's position by making a prediction, asking a series of questions, describing a scenario, or defining critical terms in the quotation. The readers know that a writer can earn a high score by giving multiple examples or by presenting a single, extended example. You might want to look at the sample Issue essays, particularly at the 5 and 6 score levels, to see how other writers have successfully developed and organized their essays.

You should use as many or as few as you consider appropriate for your essay — for example, you will probably need to create a new paragraph whenever your discussion shifts to a new cluster of ideas. What matters is not the number of examples, the number of paragraphs, or the form your essay takes but, rather, the cogency of your ideas about the issue and the clarity and skill with which you communicate those ideas to academic readers within the context of the Issue task.



## GRE WRITING ASSESSMENT SCORING GUIDE: PRESENT YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON AN ISSUE\*

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### SCORE 6

A 6 paper presents a *cogent, well-articulated analysis* of the complexities of the issue and demonstrates *mastery* of the elements of effective writing. A typical paper in this category

- develops a position on the issue with insightful reasons and/or persuasive examples
- sustains a well-focused, well-organized discussion
- expresses ideas clearly and precisely
- uses language fluently, with varied sentence structure and effective vocabulary
- demonstrates superior facility with the conventions (grammar, usage, and mechanics) of
- standard written English but may have minor flaws

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### SCORE 5

A 5 paper presents a *well-developed analysis* of the complexities of the issue and demonstrates a *strong control* of the elements of effective writing. A typical paper in this category

- develops a position on the issue with well-chosen reasons and/or examples
- is focused and generally well organized
- expresses ideas clearly and well
- uses varied sentence structure and appropriate vocabulary
- demonstrates facility with the conventions of standard written English but may have minor flaws

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### SCORE 4

A 4 paper presents a *competent analysis* of the issue and demonstrates *adequate control* of the elements of writing. A typical paper in this category

- develops a position on the issue with relevant reasons and/or examples
- is adequately organized
- expresses ideas clearly
- demonstrates adequate control of language but may lack sentence variety
- demonstrates control of the conventions of standard written English but may have some flaws

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### SCORE 3

A 3 paper demonstrates *some competence* in its analysis of the issue and in its control of the elements of writing but is *plainly flawed*. A typical paper in this category exhibits **one or more** of the following characteristics:

- is vague or limited in developing a position on the issue
- is weak in the use of relevant reasons or examples
- is poorly focused and/or poorly organized
- has problems expressing ideas clearly
- uses language imprecisely and/or lacks sentence variety
- contains occasional major errors or frequent minor errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

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### SCORE 2

A 2 paper demonstrates *serious weaknesses* in analytical writing. A typical paper in this category exhibits **one or more** of the following characteristics:

- is unclear or seriously limited in developing a position on the issue
- provides few, if any, relevant reasons or examples
- is unfocused and/or disorganized
- has serious and frequent problems in the use of language and sentence structure
- contains numerous errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics that interfere with meaning

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### SCORE 1

A 1 paper demonstrates *fundamental deficiencies* in analytical writing skills. A typical paper in this category exhibits **one or more** of the following characteristics:

- provides little evidence of the ability to develop or organize a coherent response to the topic
- has severe and persistent errors in language and sentence structure
- contains a pervasive pattern of errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics that severely interferes with meaning

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### SCORE 0

- Off topic, in a foreign language, merely copies the topic, consists only of keystroke characters, or is illegible, blank, or nonverbal

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\*Developed with university faculty and approved by the GRE Writing Assessment Advisory Committee

## **Six Sample Essays and Reader Comments for the Following Issue Topic\***

“In our time, specialists of all kinds are highly overrated. We need more generalists — people who can provide broad perspectives.”

### **Sample Essay - Score 6**

In this era of rapid social and technological change leading to increasing life complexity and psychological displacement, both positive and negative effects among persons in Western society call for a balance in which there are both specialists and generalists.

Specialists are necessary in order to allow society as a whole to properly and usefully assimilate the masses of new information and knowledge that have come out of research and have been widely disseminated through mass global media. As the head of Pharmacology at my university once said (and I paraphrase): "I can only research what I do because there are so many who have come before me to whom I can turn for basic knowledge. It is only because of each of the narrowly focussed individuals at each step that a full and true understanding of the complexities of life can be had. Each person can only hold enough knowledge to add one small rung to the ladder, but together we can climb to the moon." This illustrates the point that our societies level of knowledge and technology is at a stage in which there simply must be specialists in order for our society to take advantage of the information available to us.

Simply put, without specialists, our society would find itself bogged down in the Sargasso sea of information overload. While it was fine for early physicists to learn and understand the few laws and ideas that existed during their times, now, no one individual can possibly digest and assimilate all of the knowledge in any given area.

On the other hand, Over specialization means narrow focii in which people can lose the larger picture. No one can hope to understand the human body by only inspecting one's own toe-nails. What we learn from a narrow focus may be internally logically coherent but may be irrelevant or fallacious within the framework of a broader perspective. Further, if we inspect only our toe-nails, we may conclude that the whole body is hard and white. Useful conclusions and thus perhaps useful inventions must come by sharing among specialists. Simply throwing out various discoveries means we have a pile of useless discoveries, it is only when one can make with them a mosaic that we can see that they may form a picture.

Not only may over-specialization be dangerous in terms of the truth, purity and cohesion of knowledge, but it can also serve to drown moral or universall issues. Generalists and only generalists can see a broad enough picture to realize and introduce to the world the

*\*Note: All of these sample essays are reproduced as written, although reformatted for this document. Misspellings, typos, grammatical errors, etc., have been retained from the originals.*

## *Present Your Perspective on an Issue Task*

problems of the environment. With specialization, each person focusses on their research and their goals. Thus, industrialization, expansion, and new technologies are driven ahead. Meanwhile no individual can see the wholisitc view of our global existence in which true advancement may mean stifling individual specialists for the greater good of all.

Finally, over-specialization in a people's daily lives and jobs has meant personal and psychological compartmentalization. People are forced into pigeon holes early in life (at least by university) and must conciously attempt to consume external forms of stimuli and information in order not to be lost in their small and isolated universe. Not only does this make for narrowly focussed and generally poorly-educated individuals, but it guarantees a sense of loss of community, often followed by a feeling of psychological displacement and personal dissatisfaction.

Without generalists, society becomes inward-looking and eventually inefficient. Without a society that recongnizes the impotance of braod-mindedness and fora for sharing generalities, individuals become isolated. Thus, while our form of society necessitates specialists, generalists are equally important. Specialists drive us forward in a series of thrusts while generalists make sure we are still on the jousting field and know what the stakes are.

### **Commentary for Sample 6 Essay**

This is an outstanding response — insightful, well reasoned, and highly effective in its use of language. The introductory paragraph announces the writer's position on the issue and provides the context within which the writer will develop that position: "In this era of rapid social and technological change leading to increasing life complexity and psychological displacement . . . ."

The argument itself has two parts. The first part presents a compelling case for specialization, primarily in the field of medicine. The second part presents an equally compelling, well-organized case against overspecialization based on three main reasons:

- logical (narrowly trained specialists often fail to understand the whole)
- moral (usually generalists understand what is needed for "the greater good")
- personal (specializing/pigeonholing too early can be psychologically damaging)

The argument's careful line of reasoning is further strengthened by the skillful use of expert testimony (quotation from a prominent medical researcher) and vivid metaphor (to inspect only one's toenails is to ignore the whole body).

It is not only the reasoning that distinguishes this essay. The language is precise and often the figurative ("bogged down in a Sargasso sea of information overload," "a pile of useless discoveries," and "specialists drive us forward in a series of thrusts, while generalists make sure we are still on the jousting field"). The reader is constantly guided through the argument by transitional phrases and ideas that help organize the essay and move the argument forward. This is an exceptionally fine response to the topic.

### **Sample Essay - Score 5**

Specialists are not overrated today. More generalists may be needed, but not to overshadow the specialists. Generalists can provide a great deal of information on many topics of interest with a broad range of ideas. People who look at the overall view of things can help with some of the large problems our society faces today. But specialists are necessary to gain a better understanding of more in depth methods to solve problems or fixing things.

One good example of why specialists are not overrated is in the medical field. Doctors are necessary for people to live healthy lives. When a person is sick, he may go to a general practitioner to find out the cause of his problems. Usually, this kind of "generalized" doctor can help most ailments with simple and effective treatments. Sometimes, though, a sickness may go beyond a family doctor's knowledge or the prescribed treatments don't work the way they should. When a sickness progresses or becomes diagnosed as a disease that requires more care than a family doctor can provide, he may be referred to a specialist. For instance, a person with constant breathing problems that require hospitalization may be suggested to visit an asthma specialist. Since a family doctor has a great deal of knowledge of medicine, he can decide when his methods are not effective and the patient needs to see someone who knows more about the specific problem; someone who knows how it begins, progresses, and specified treatments. This is an excellent example of how a generalied person may not be equipped enough to handle something as well as a specialized one can.

Another example of a specialist who is needed instead of a generalist involves teaching. In grammar school, children learn all the basic principles of reading, writing, and arithematic. But as children get older and progress in school, they gain a better understanding of the language and mathematical processes. As the years in school increase, they need to learn more and more specifics and details about various subjects. They start out by learning basic math concepts such as addition, subtraction, division, and multiplication. A few years later, they are ready to begin algebraic concepts, geometry, and calculus. They are also ready to learn more advanced vocabulary, the principles of how all life is composed and how it functions. One teacher or professor can not provide as much in depth discussion on all of these topics as well as one who has learned the specifics and studied mainly to know everything that is currently known about one of these subjects. Generalized teachers are required to begin molding students at a very early age so they can get ready for the future ahead of them in gaining more facts about the basic subjects and finding out new facts on the old ones.

These are only two examples of why specialists are not highly overrated and more generalists are not necessary to the point of overshadowing them. Generalists are needed to give the public a broad understanding of some things. But, specialists are important to help maintain the status, health, and safety of our society. Specialists are very necessary.

### **Commentary for Sample 5 Essay**

The essay presents a well-developed analysis of the complexities of the issue by discussing the need for both the generalist and the specialist.

This writer's argument is rooted in two extended examples, both well chosen and effective. The first (paragraph 2) begins with a discussion of the necessity for medical

### *Present Your Perspective on an Issue Task*

generalists (the general practitioner) as well as specialists and moves into an example within the example (breathing problems and the need for an asthma specialist). This extension from the general to the specific characterizes the example in the next paragraph as well. There, the discussion centers on education from elementary to high school, from basic arithmetic to calculus.

Smoothness of development is aided by the use of good transitions: "but," "usually," and "for instance," among others. The essay ends by revisiting the writer's thesis.

While the writer handles both language and syntax well, some bothersome problems keep this otherwise well-argued response out of the 6 category. The problems vary from the lack of a pronoun referent ("When a sickness progresses or becomes diagnosed, . . . he may be referred to a specialist") to an error in parallel structure (" . . . how it begins, progresses and specified treatments"), to loose syntax and imprecise language ("Generalized teachers are required to begin molding students at a very early age so they can get ready for the future ahead of them in gaining more facts about the basic subjects . . .").

### **Sample Essay - Score 4**

Specialists are just what their name says: people who specialize in one part of a very general scheme of things. A person can't know everything there is to know about everything. This is why specialists are helpful. You can take one general concept and divide it up three ways and have three fully developed different concepts instead of one general concept that no one really knows about. Isn't it better to really know something well, than to know everything half-way.

Take a special ed teacher compared to a general ed teacher. The general ed teacher knows how to deal with most students. She knows how to teach a subject to a student that is on a normal level. But what would happen to the child in the back of the room with dyslexia? She would be so lost in that general ed classroom that she would not only not learn, but be frustrated and quite possibly, have low self-esteem and hate school. If there is a special ed teacher there who specializes in children with learning disabilities, she can teach the general ed teacher how to cope with this student as well as modify the curriculum so that the student can learn along with the others. The special ed teacher can also take that child for a few hours each day and work with her on her reading difficulty one-on-one, which a general ed teacher never would have time to do.

A general ed teacher can't know what a special ed teacher knows and a special ed teacher can't know what a general ed teacher knows. But the two of them working together and specializing in their own things can really get a lot more accomplished. The special ed teacher is also trained to work on the child's self-esteem, which has a big part in how successful this child will be. Every child in the United States of America has the right to an equal education. How can a child with a learning disability receive the same equal education as a general ed student if there was no specialist there to help both teacher and child?

Another thing to consider is how a committee is supposed to work together. Each person has a special task to accomplish and when these people all come together, with their tasks finished, every aspect of the community's work is completely covered. Nothing is left

### *Present Your Perspective on an Issue Task*

undone. In this case there are many different specialists to meet the general goal of the committee.

When you take into account that a specialist contributes only a small part of the generalist aspect, it seems ridiculous to say that specialists are overrated. The generalists looks to the specialists any time they need help or clarification on their broad aspect. Specialists and generalists are part of the same system, so if a specialist is overrated, then so is a generalist.

#### **Commentary for Sample 4 Essay**

This is an adequate response to the topic. After a somewhat confusing attempt to define "specialists" in the introductory paragraph, the writer presents a pertinent example (the special education teacher) to illustrate the importance of specialists. The example dominates the essay and contributes positively to the overall score of 4.

The second example, how a committee works, is less persuasive. However, it does seem to help clarify the writer's definition of "general" as an umbrella term meaning the total collection of what specialists know about a topic.

Although the writer's views about the relationship between "generalist" and "specialist" are unusual, they do become clear in the conclusion of the essay. Yet, these ideas are not developed in depth or with enough logical control to earn a score higher than 4.

The writing is generally error free. There are few problems in sentence structure, grammar, and usage, although the phrasing is at times imprecise and wordy. Overall, this essay displays clearly adequate control of the elements of written English.

#### **Sample Essay - Score 3**

To quote the saying, "Jack of all trades, master of none," would be my position on the statement. I feel specialists in all areas of knowledge lead to a higher standard of living for everyone. Specializing in different areas allows us to use each others talents to the highest level and maximize potential. As an example, if a person required brain surgery, would they rather have a brain surgeon or a general practitioner doing the work? Clearly a specialist would do the better job and give the patient a chance at a better life.

A university education starts by laying the groundwork for general knowledge but then narrows down to a specific field. General knowledge and a broad prospective are important, but if there was no focus on specific areas, our overall knowledge as a population would be seriously lessened.

Another example of specialists not being overated would be international trade. Not every nation can provide for themselves. They need to get products and ideas from other parts of the world because they are better at providing them. This allows for a growing economy if two different nations can provide each other with two different products. If one country can produce oranges better than another, it should trade the oranges for the fish that it can not produce. If generalizing was the normal thing to do and both countries tried to produce all kinds of products, the countries would probably survive, but not have the standard of living they presently have.

## *Present Your Perspective on an Issue Task*

### **Commentary for Sample 3 Essay**

This essay takes a position — that specialists are important and necessary — but exhibits problems with development and use of examples.

The writer's position is made clear in the first paragraph and is reinforced with the appropriate, though unoriginal, example of the brain surgeon versus the general practitioner.

Paragraph 2, with a second example of an increasingly narrow university education, contains only two sentences and is seriously undeveloped. It does little to advance the writer's position.

Paragraph 3 offers yet another example, the most developed of all. Unfortunately, this example is not clearly logical. The writer tries to argue that the "specialist" country (one that is a better producer of oranges) is superior to the "generalist" country (presumably one that produces oranges as well as other products). This generalist country, the writer tells us, would be inferior to the other. This conclusion does not emerge logically from the writer's argument, and it seems to be at odds with everyday reality.

Although language is used with some imprecision throughout the essay, the writer's meaning is not obscured. The main reasons for the score of 3 are the lack of sufficient development and inappropriate use of examples.

### **Sample Essay - Score 2**

In the situation of health I feel that specialists are very important. For example if a person has heart problems, choose a heart specialist over a genral medicine Dr. However if a person is having a wide range of syptoms, perhaps choose a Dr. with a wide range of experience might be more helpful.

It also depends on the type of problem you are having. For example I would not suggest taking a troubled child to a theorpist who specializes in marriage problems. In some cases have a specialists helps to insure that you are getting the best possibly treatment. On the other hand dealing with a person who has a wide range of experience may be able to find different ways of dealing with a particular problem.

Since the quotation did not state exactly what type of specialist we are dealing with it is also hard to determine the importance of having a specialist is. For example the could be health or problems with a car, or basically anything else. I feel that this information should not have been left out. I guess the bottom line is that I feel sometimes a specialist is very important.

### **Commentary for Sample 2 Essay**

This is a seriously flawed response to the topic. The essay argues in favor of specialists, but neither the reasons nor the examples are persuasive. The example of not taking "a troubled child to see a theropist who specializes in marriage problems" is both simplistic and off the mark since it differentiates between two specialists, not between a generalist and a specialist.

### *Present Your Perspective on an Issue Task*

The sentences are so poorly formed and phrased that the argument is at times hard to follow. Nevertheless, this is not a 1 essay: the writer presents a position on the issue, develops that position with some very weak analysis, and communicates some ideas clearly.

#### **Sample Essay - Score 1**

I disagree with the statement about specialists, we need specialists who take individual areas and specialize. A generalists can pinpoint a problem. He or she cannot determine the magnitude of the problem. A specialist can find the root of the problem. When he or she has years working in that specific field. For example, when i got sick i went to a doctor. He did blood work, x-ray, talk to me, ect. He prescribed me a medicine. I got worst. So i decided to go another doctor. Now, i am doing great. A specialist knows the facts right away. Otherwise, it will take longer or not at all.

#### **Commentary for Sample 1 Essay**

This response presents a fundamentally deficient discussion of the issue.

The first sentence states the writer's position in support of specialists, but that position is not followed by a coherent argument. Some of the ideas seem contradictory (e.g., "generalists can pinpoint a problem") and the example is confusing. If the essay explained that the first (unsuccessful) doctor was a generalist and the second (successful) doctor was a specialist, the example would be useful. However, as written, the example is unclear and even misleading. The concluding statement only adds to the confusion.

Most of the sentences in the essay are short and choppy. Thus, the ideas they try to communicate are also choppy. The writer needs to provide transitional phrases and ideas to bring cohesion to this response. Also, basic errors in usage and grammar are pervasive.

For all of these reasons — lack of a coherent argument and frequency of basic writing errors — this essay was rated a 1.



# ANALYZE AN ARGUMENT TASK

## SCREEN DIRECTIONS

The screen below shows the content of the CBT directions for the Argument task.

00:30 GRE WRITING ASSESSMENT - Section 2 Directions

Beginning

**Analyze an Argument**  
30 minutes

You will have 30 minutes to plan and write a critique of an argument presented in the form of a short passage. A critique of any other argument is not acceptable.

Analyze the line of reasoning in the argument. Be sure to consider what, if any, questionable assumptions underlie the thinking and, if evidence is cited, how well it supports the conclusion.

You can also discuss what sort of evidence would strengthen or refute the argument, what changes in the argument would make it more logically sound, and what additional information might help you better evaluate its conclusion. *Note that you are NOT being asked to present your own views on the subject.*

College and university faculty will read your critique and evaluate its overall quality, based on how well you

- identify and analyze important features of the argument;
- organize, develop, and express your critique of the argument;

Test Section Time

Dismiss Directions

? Help

00:30 GRE WRITING ASSESSMENT - Section 2 Directions

End

- organize, develop, and express your critique of the argument;
- support your critique with relevant reasons and examples; and
- control the elements of standard written English.

Before you begin writing, you may want to take a few minutes to evaluate the argument and to plan a response. Be sure to develop your ideas fully and organize them coherently, but leave time to read what you have written and make any revisions that you think are necessary.

Timing for this section will begin when you click on the Dismiss Directions icon.

Test Section Time

Dismiss Directions

? Help

## STRATEGIES FOR THE “ANALYZE AN ARGUMENT” TASK

### Understanding the “Argument” Task

The “Analyze an Argument” section of the test assesses your ability to understand, analyze, and evaluate an argument and to clearly convey your critique in writing. Each argument consists of a brief passage in which the author makes a case for some course of action or interpretation of events by presenting claims backed by reasons and evidence. Your task is to discuss the logical soundness of the author’s case by critically examining the line of reasoning and the use of evidence. The best approach to this task is to read the argument very carefully, perhaps more than once, and possibly make brief notes about points you want to develop more fully in your response. In reading the argument, you should pay special attention to

- what is offered as evidence, support, or proof
- what is explicitly stated, claimed, or concluded
- what is assumed or supposed, perhaps without justification or proof
- what is not stated, but necessarily follows from what is stated

In addition, you should consider the *structure* of the argument — the way in which these elements are linked together to form a *line of reasoning*; that is, you should recognize the separate, sometimes implicit steps in the thinking process and consider whether the movement from each one to the next is logically sound. In tracing this line, look for transition words and phrases that suggest that the author is attempting to make a logical connection (e.g., *however, thus therefore, evidently, hence, in conclusion*).

An important part of performing well on “Analyze an Argument” is remembering what you are NOT being asked to do. You are NOT being asked to discuss whether the statements in the argument are true or accurate; instead, you are being asked whether conclusions and inferences are validly drawn from the statements. You are NOT being asked to agree or disagree with the position stated; instead, you are being asked to comment on the thinking that underlies the position. You are NOT being asked to express your own views on the subject being discussed (as you are in “Present Your Perspective on an Issue”); instead, you ARE being asked to evaluate the logical soundness of an argument of another writer and, in doing so, to demonstrate the critical thinking, perceptive reading, and analytical writing skills that university faculty consider important for success in graduate school.

“Analyze an Argument” is primarily a critical thinking task presented in an essay format. Consequently, the analytic skills displayed in your critique will carry great weight in determining your score.

### Understanding the Context for Writing: Purpose and Audience

The purpose of the task is to see how well equipped you are to insightfully analyze an argument written by someone else and to effectively communicate your critique in writing to an academic audience. Your audience consists of college and university faculty who are trained as GRE readers to apply the scoring criteria identified in the scoring guide for “Analyze an Argument.” (See page 23.)

## Analyze an Argument Task

To get a clearer idea of how GRE readers apply the Argument scoring criteria to actual essays, you might want to review sample Argument essays and readers' commentaries. The sample essays, particularly at the 5 and 6 score levels, will show you some successful strategies for organizing and developing your critique. You will also see examples of particularly effective uses of language. The readers' commentaries discuss specific aspects of writing, such as cogency of ideas, development and support, organization, syntactic variety, and facility with language. These commentaries will point out aspects that are particularly effective and insightful as well as any that detract from the overall effectiveness of the essay.

### The Published Pool of “Argument” Topics

Everyone — even the most practiced and confident of writers — should spend some time preparing for the GRE Writing Assessment before arriving at the testing site. To help you prepare for the test, the GRE Program has published the entire pool of topics from which your test topics will be selected. You might find it helpful to review the entire Argument pool and to discuss some of the topics with a friend or teacher. You can download the published pool from the Web at [www.gre.org/writing.html](http://www.gre.org/writing.html) or you can obtain a copy by writing to GRE Program, PO Box 6000, Princeton, NJ 08541-6000.

The Argument topics relate to a broad range of familiar subjects and situations. No topic requires specific content knowledge. In fact, each topic has been field-tested to ensure that it possesses several important characteristics, including the following:

- GRE test takers, regardless of field of study or special interests, understood the argument and could easily analyze it
- the argument elicited the kinds of critical thinking and analytical writing skills that university faculty consider important for success in graduate school
- the actual essay responses varied in content and in the way the writers developed their critiques

### Preparing for the “Argument” Task

Because “Analyze an Argument” is meant to assess writing and informal reasoning skills that you have developed throughout your education, it has been designed so as not to require any specific course of study or to give unfair advantage to students with a particular type of training. Many college textbooks on rhetoric and composition have sections on informal logic and critical thinking that might prove helpful, but even these might be more detailed and technical than the task requires. You will not be expected to know methods of analysis or technical terms. For instance, in one topic an elementary school principal might conclude that the new playground equipment has improved student attendance because absentee rates have fallen since the equipment was installed. You will not need to see that the principal has committed the *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* fallacy; you will simply need to see that there are other possible explanations for the improved attendance, to offer some common-sense examples, and perhaps to suggest what would be necessary to verify the conclusion.

Although you do not need to know special analytic techniques and terminology, you should be familiar with the directions for the task and with certain key concepts, including the following:

## Analyze an Argument Task

- **alternative explanation** — a possible competing version of what might have caused the events in question; an alternative explanation undercuts or qualifies the original explanation because it too can account for the observed facts
- **analysis** — the process of breaking something (e.g., an **argument**) down into its component parts in order to understand how they work together to make up the whole; also a presentation, usually in writing, of the results of this process
- **argument** — a claim or a set of claims with reasons and evidence offered as support; a line of reasoning meant to demonstrate the truth or falsehood of something
- **assumption** — a belief, often unstated or unexamined, that someone must hold in order to maintain a particular position; something that is taken for granted but that must be true in order for the **conclusion** to be true
- **conclusion** — the end point reached by a line of reasoning, valid if the reasoning is sound; the resulting assertion
- **counterexample** — an example, real or hypothetical, that refutes or disproves a statement in the **argument**

In addition to such key concepts, you should also be familiar with the “Analyze an Argument” scoring guide, which describes the qualities of analysis and writing that characterize papers at each score point. Reviewing the scoring guide will help you understand what you need to do in your response to earn a given score.

An excellent way to prepare for “Analyze an Argument” is to practice writing on some of the published topics. There is no one way to practice that is best for everyone. Some prefer to start practicing without adhering to the 30-minute time limit. If you follow this approach, take all the time you need to analyze an argument. You might, for instance,

- carefully read the argument — you might want to read it over more than once
- identify as many of its claims, conclusions, and underlying assumptions as possible
- think of as many alternative explanations and counterexamples as you can
- think of what additional evidence might weaken or lend support to the claims
- ask yourself what changes in the argument would make the reasoning more sound

Jot down each of these thoughts as a brief note. When you’ve gone as far as you can with your analysis, look over the notes and put them in a good order for discussion (perhaps by numbering them). Then write a critique by fully developing each of your points in turn. Even if you choose not to write a full essay response, you should find it very helpful to practice analyzing a few of the arguments and sketching out your responses. When you become quicker and more confident, you should practice writing some Argument responses within the 30-minute time limit so that you will have a good sense of how to pace yourself in the actual test. For example, you will not want to discuss one point so exhaustively or to provide so many equivalent examples that you run out of time to make your other main points.

You might want to get feedback on your response(s) from a writing instructor, a philosophy teacher, or someone who emphasizes critical thinking in his or her course work. It can also be very informative to trade papers on the same topic with fellow students and discuss one another’s responses in terms of the scoring guide. Focus not so much on giving the “right scores” as on seeing how the papers meet or miss the performance standards for each score point and what you therefore need to do in order to improve.

## Analyze an Argument Task

Finally, you might want to sharpen your analytic skills by reviewing the published multiple-choice reasoning items for GRE (logical reasoning). Here, of course, the questions are posed and the potential answers are provided for you, but you will get used to seeing the kinds of questions that can be asked about arguments and then thinking through to the answers. Try to understand why you miss whatever questions you do and how to avoid making similar mistakes again. In this way, you will improve your chances of doing well on both the multiple-choice reasoning questions on the GRE General Test and the Argument section of the GRE Writing Assessment.

### How to Interpret Numbers, Percentages, and Statistics in “Argument” Topics

Some arguments contain numbers, percentages, or statistics that are offered as evidence in support of the argument’s conclusion. For example, an argument might claim that a certain community event is less popular this year than it was last year because only 100 people attended this year in comparison with 150 last year, a 33 percent decline in attendance. *It is important to remember that you are NOT being asked to do a mathematical task with the numbers, percentages, or statistics.* Instead you should evaluate these as evidence that is intended to support the conclusion. In the example above, the conclusion is that a community event has become less popular. You should ask yourself: does the difference between 100 people and 150 people support that conclusion? Note that, in this case, there are other possible explanations: for example, the weather might have been much worse this year; this year’s event might have been held at an inconvenient time; the cost of the event might have gone up this year. Each of these could explain the difference in attendance, and thus would weaken the conclusion that the event was “less popular.” Similarly, percentages might support or weaken a conclusion depending on what actual numbers the percentages represent. Consider the claim that the drama club at a school deserves more funding because its membership has increased by 100 percent. This 100 percent increase could be significant if there had been 100 members and now there are 200 members, whereas the increase would be much less significant if there had been 5 members and now there are 10. Remember that any numbers, percentages, or statistics in Argument topics are used only as evidence in support of a conclusion, and you should always consider whether they actually support the conclusion.

### Writing Your Essay in the Time Allowed

Here, as with any standardized essay writing assessment, it is important to budget your time. Within the 30-minute time limit, you will need to allow sufficient time to analyze the argument, plan a critique, and compose your essay. Although GRE readers understand the time constraints under which you write and will consider your essay a “first draft,” you still want it to be the best possible example of your writing that you can produce under the testing circumstances. You might well find it important to budget time to correct obvious errors. Although an occasional typographical, spelling, or grammatical error will not affect your score, severe and persistent errors will detract from the overall effectiveness of your writing and thus lower your overall score.

### The Form of Your Essay

You are free to organize and develop your critique in any way that you think will effectively communicate your analysis of the argument. Your essay may, but need not, incorporate particular writing strategies learned in English composition or writing-intensive college courses. GRE readers will not be looking for a particular developmental strategy or mode of writing. In

## *Analyze an Argument Task*

fact, when faculty are trained to be GRE readers, they review hundreds of Argument essays that, although highly diverse in content and in form, display similar levels of critical thinking and analytical writing. Readers will see, for example, some essays at the 6 score level that begin by briefly summarizing the argument and then explicitly stating and developing the main points of the critique. The readers know that a writer can earn a high score by analyzing and developing several points in a critique or by identifying a central flaw in the argument and developing that critique extensively. You might want to look at the sample Argument essays, particularly at the 5 and 6 score levels, to see how other writers have successfully developed and organized their essays.

You should make choices about format and organization that you think support and enhance the overall effectiveness of your critique. This means using as many or as few paragraphs as you consider appropriate for your critique — for example, creating a new paragraph when your discussion shifts to a new point of analysis. You might want to organize your critique around the organization of the argument itself, discussing the argument line by line. Or you might want to first point out a central questionable assumption and then move on to discussing related flaws in the argument's line of reasoning. Similarly, you might want to use examples if they help illustrate an important point in your critique or move your discussion forward (remember, however, that, in terms of your ability to perform the Argument task effectively, it is your critical thinking and writing, not your ability to come up with examples, that is being assessed). What matters is not the form the essay takes, but how insightfully you analyze the argument and how articulately you communicate your analysis to academic readers within the context of the assigned task.

**GRE WRITING ASSESSMENT SCORING GUIDE:  
ANALYZE AN ARGUMENT\***

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**SCORE 6**

A 6 paper presents a *cogent, well-articulated critique* of the argument and demonstrates *mastery* of the elements of effective writing. A typical paper in this category

- clearly identifies important features of the argument and analyzes them insightfully
- develops ideas cogently, organizes them logically, and connects them with clear transitions
- effectively supports the main points of the critique
- demonstrates control of language, including diction and syntactic variety
- demonstrates facility with the conventions of standard written English but may have minor flaws

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**SCORE 5**

A 5 paper presents a *well-developed critique* of the argument and demonstrates *good control* of the elements of effective writing. A typical paper in this category

- clearly identifies important features of the argument and analyzes them in a generally thoughtful way
- develops ideas clearly, organizes them logically, and connects them with appropriate transitions
- sensibly supports the main points of the critique
- demonstrates control of language, including diction and syntactic variety
- demonstrates facility with the conventions of standard written English but may have occasional flaws

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**SCORE 4**

A 4 paper presents a *competent critique* of the argument and demonstrates *adequate control* of the elements of writing. A typical paper in this category

- identifies and analyzes important features of the argument
- develops and organizes ideas satisfactorily but may not connect them with transitions
- supports the main points of the critique
- demonstrates sufficient control of language to convey ideas with reasonable clarity
- generally follows the conventions of standard written English but may have flaws

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**SCORE 3**

A 3 paper demonstrates *some competence* in analytical writing skill and in its control of the elements of writing but is *plainly flawed*. A typical paper in this category exhibits **one or more** of the following characteristics:

- does not identify or analyze most of the important features of the argument, although some analysis of the argument is present
- mainly analyzes tangential or irrelevant matters, or reasons poorly
- is limited in the logical development and organization of ideas
- offers support of little relevance and value for points of the critique
- does not convey meaning clearly
- contains occasional major errors or frequent minor errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

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**SCORE 2**

A 2 paper demonstrates *serious weaknesses* in analytical writing skills. A typical paper in this category exhibits **one or more** of the following characteristics:

- does not present a critique based on logical analysis, but may instead present the writer's own views on the subject
- does not develop ideas, or is disorganized and illogical
- provides little, if any, relevant or reasonable support
- has serious and frequent problems in the use of language and in sentence structure
- contains numerous errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics that interfere with meaning

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**SCORE 1**

A 1 paper demonstrates *fundamental deficiencies* in analytical writing skills. A typical paper in this category exhibits **more than one** of the following characteristics:

- provides little evidence of the ability to understand and analyze the argument
- provides little evidence of the ability to develop an organized response
- has severe and persistent errors in language and sentence structure
- contains a pervasive pattern of errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics that results in incoherence

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**SCORE 0**

- Off topic, in a foreign language, merely copies the topic, consists of only keystroke characters, or is illegible, blank, or nonverbal

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\*Developed with university faculty and approved by the GRE Writing Assessment Advisory Committee

## Six Sample Essays and Reader Comments for the Following Argument Topic\*

Hospital statistics regarding people who go to the emergency room after rollerskating accidents indicate the need for more protective equipment. Within this group of people, 75 percent of those who had accidents in streets or parking lots were not wearing any protective clothing (helmets, knee pads, etc.) or any light-reflecting material (clip-on lights, glow-in-the-dark wrist pads, etc.). Clearly, these statistics indicate that by investing in high-quality protective gear and reflective equipment, rollerskaters will greatly reduce their risk of being severely injured in an accident.

### Sample Essay - Score 6

The notion that protective gear reduces the injuries suffered in accidents seems at first glance to be an obvious conclusion. After all, it is the intent of these products to either prevent accidents from occurring in the first place or to reduce the injuries suffered by the wearer should an accident occur. However, the conclusion that investing in high quality protective gear greatly reduces the risk of being severely injured in an accident may mask other (and potentially more significant) causes of injuries and may inspire people to over invest financially and psychologically in protective gear.

First of all, as mentioned in the argument, there are two distinct kinds of gear - preventative gear (such as light reflecting material) and protective gear (such as helmets). Preventative gear is intended to warn others, presumably for the most part motorists, of the presence of the roller skater. It works only if the "other" is a responsible and caring individual who will afford the skater the necessary space and attention. Protective gear is intended to reduce the effect of any accident, whether it is caused by an other, the skater or some force of nature. Protective gear does little, if anything, to prevent accidents but is presumed to reduce the injuries that occur in an accident. The statistics on injuries suffered by skaters would be more interesting if the skaters were grouped into those wearing no gear at all, those wearing protective gear only, those wearing preventative gear only and those wearing both. These statistics could provide skaters with a clearer understanding of which kinds of gear are more beneficial.

The argument above is weakened by the fact that it does not take into account the inherent differences between skaters who wear gear and those who do not. It is at least likely that those who wear gear may be generally more responsible and/or safety conscious individuals. The skaters who wear gear may be less likely to cause accidents through careless or dangerous behavior. It may, in fact, be their natural caution and responsibility that keeps them out of the emergency room rather than the gear itself. Also, the statistic above is based entirely on those who are skating in streets and parking lots which are relatively dangerous places to skate in the first place. People who are generally more safety conscious (and therefore more likely to wear gear) may choose to skate in safer areas such as parks or back yards.

*\*Note: All of these sample essays are reproduced as written, although reformatted for this document. Misspellings, typos, grammatical errors, etc., have been retained from the originals.*



## Analyze an Argument Task

The statistic also goes not differentiate between severity of injuries. The conclusion that safety gear prevents severe injuries suggests that it is presumed that people come to the emergency room only with severe injuries. This is certainly not the case. Also, given that skating is a recreational activity that may be primarily engaged in during evenings and weekends (when doctors' offices are closed), skater with less severe injuries may be especially likely to come to the emergency room for treatment.

Finally, there is absolutely no evidence provided that high quality (and presumably more expensive) gear is any more beneficial than other kinds of gear. For example, a simple white t-shirt may provide the same preventative benefit as a higher quality, more expensive, shirt designed only for skating. Before skaters are encouraged to invest heavily in gear, a more complete understanding of the benefit provided by individual pieces of gear would be helpful.

The argument for safety gear based on emergency room statistics could provide important information and potentially saves lives. Before conclusions about the amount and kinds of investments that should be made in gear are reached, however, a more complete understanding of the benefits are needed. After all, a false confidence in ineffective gear could be just as dangerous as no gear at all.

### Commentary for Sample 6 Essay

This outstanding response demonstrates the writer's insightful analytical skills. The introduction, which notes that adopting the topic's fallacious reasoning could "... inspire people to over invest financially and psychologically in protective gear," is followed by a comprehensive examination of each of the argument's root flaws. Specifically, the writer exposes several points that undermine the argument:

- that preventive and protective gear are not the same
- that skaters who wear gear may be less prone to accidents because they are, by nature, more responsible and cautious
- that the statistics do not differentiate by the severity of the injuries
- that gear may not need to be high — quality to be beneficial

The discussion is smoothly and logically organized, and each point is thoroughly and cogently developed. In addition, the writing is succinct, economical and error-free. Sentences are varied and complex, and diction is expressive and precise.

In sum, this essay exemplifies the very top of the 6 range described in the scoring guide. If the writer had been less eloquent or provided fewer reasons to refute the argument, the essay could still have been scored 6.

### Sample Essay - Score 5

The argument presented is limited but useful. It indicates a possible relationship between a high percentage of accidents and a lack of protective equipment. The statistics cited compel a further investigation of the usefulness of protective gear in preventing or mitigating roller-skating related injuries. However, the conclusion that protective gear and reflective equipment would "greatly reduce risk of being severely injured" is premature. Data is lacking with reference to the

## Analyze an Argument Task

total population of skaters and the relative levels of experience, skill and physical coordination of that population. It is entirely possible that further research would indicate that most serious injury is averted by the skater's ability to react quickly and skillfully in emergency situations.

Another area of investigation necessary before conclusions can be reached is identification of the types of injuries that occur and the various causes of those injuries. The article fails to identify the most prevalent types of roller-skating related injuries. It also fails to correlate the absence of protective gear and reflective equipment to those injuries. For example, if the majority of injuries are skin abrasions and closed-head injuries, then a case can be made for the usefulness of protective clothing mentioned. Likewise, if injuries are caused by collision with vehicles (e.g. bicycles, cars) or pedestrians, then light-reflective equipment might mitigate the occurrences. However, if the primary types of injuries are soft-tissue injuries such as torn ligaments and muscles, back injuries and the like, then a greater case could be made for training and experience as preventative measures.

### Commentary for Sample 5 Essay

This strong response gets right to the work of critiquing the argument, observing that it "indicates a possible relationship" but that its conclusion "is premature." It raises three central questions that, if answered, might undermine the soundness of the argument:

- What are the characteristics of the total population of skaters?
- What is the usefulness of protective or reflective gear in preventing or mitigating rollerskating-related injuries?
- What are the types of injuries sustained and their causes?

The writer develops each of these questions by considering possible answers that would either strengthen or weaken the argument. The paper does not analyze the argument as insightfully or develop the critique as fully as the typical 6 paper, but the clear organization, strong control of language, and substantial degree of development warrant more than a score of 4.

### Sample Essay - Score 4

Although the argument stated above discusses the importance of safety equipment as significant part of avoiding injury, the statistics quoted are vague and inconclusive. Simply because 75 percent of the people involved in roller-skating accidents are not wearing the stated equipment does not automatically implicate the lack of equipment as the cause of injury. The term "accidents" may imply a great variety of injuries. The types of injuries one could incur by not wearing the types of equipment stated above are minor head injuries; skin abrasions or possibly bone fracture of a select few areas such as knees, elbows, hands, etc. (which are in fact most vulnerable to this sport); and/or injuries due to practising the sport during low light times of the day. During any physically demanding activity or sport people are subjected to a wide variety of injuries which cannot be avoided with protective clothing or light-reflective materials. These injuries include inner trauma (e.g., heart-attack); exhaustion; strained muscles, ligaments, or tendons; etc. Perhaps the numbers and percentages of people injured during roller-skating, even without protective equipment, would decrease greatly if people participating in the sport had proper training, good physical health, warm-up properly before beginning (stretching), as well as take other measures to prevent possible injury, such as common-sense, by refraining from performing the activity after proper lighting has ceased and knowing your personal limitations as an individual and athlete. The statistics used in the

## *Analyze an Argument Task*

above reasoning are lacking in proper direction considering their assertions and therefore must be further examined and modified so that proper conclusions can be reached.

### **Commentary for Sample 4 Essay**

This adequate response targets the argument's vague and inconclusive "statistics." The essay identifies and critiques the illogical reasoning that results from the misguided use of the argument's statistics:

- that non-use of equipment may be "automatically" assumed to be the cause of injury
- that "accidents" may refer to minor injuries
- that injuries may result from other causes — skating in the dark, failure to train or warm-up properly, failure to recognize one's physical limitations

The writer competently grasps the weaknesses of the argument. The ideas are clear and connected, but the essay lacks transitional phrases. Development, too, is only adequate.

Control of language is better than adequate. The writer achieves both control and clarity and ably conforms to the conventions of written English. Overall, though, this 4 essay lacks the more thorough development of a 5.

### **Sample Essay - Score 3**

The argument is well presented and supported, but not completely well reasoned. It is clear and concisely written. The content is logically and smoothly presented. Statistics cited are used to develop support for the recommendation, that roller skaters who invest in protective gear and reflective equipment can reduce their risk of severe, accidental injuries. Examples of the types of protective equipment are described for the reader. Unfortunately, the author of the argument fails to note that merely by purchasing gear and reflective equipment that the skater will be protected. This is, of course, fallacious if the skater fails to use the equipment, or uses it incorrectly or inappropriately. It is also an unnecessary assumption that a skater need purchase high-quality gear for the same degree of effectiveness to be achieved. The argument could be improved by taking these issues into consideration, and making recommendations for education and safety awareness to skaters.

### **Commentary for Sample 3 Essay**

The first half of this generally well-written but limited response merely describes the argument. The second half of the paper identifies two assumptions of the argument:

- that people who purchase protective gear will use the gear
- that high-quality gear is more effective than other gear

These points are sufficient to constitute some analysis and thus warrant a score of 3. However, neither of these analytic points is developed sufficiently to merit a score of 4.

### Sample Essay - Score 2

To reduce the accidents from roller skating we should consider about it causes and effects concurrently to find the best solution. Basically the roller-skating players are children, they had less experiences to protect themselves from any kind of dangerous. Therefore, it should be a responsible of adult to take care them. Adult should recommend their child to wear any protective clothing, set the rules and look after them while they are playing.

In the past roller-skating is limited in the skate yard but when it became popular people normally play it on the street way) Therefore the number of accidents from roller-skating is increased. The skate manufacturer should have a responsibility in producing a protective clothing. They should promote and sell them together with skates. The government or state should set the regulation of playing skate on the street way like they did with the bicycle.

To prevent this kind of accident is the best solution but it needs a cooperation among us to have a concious mind to beware and realize its dangerous.

### Commentary for Sample 2 Essay

This seriously flawed response, rather than critiquing the argument, suggests ways for adults and skate manufacturers to ensure that children wear protective clothing. In essence, the writer is uncritically accepting the argument.

The response exhibits serious and frequent problems in sentence structure and language use. Errors — word choice, verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, punctuation — are numerous and sometimes interfere with meaning, e.g., ". . . it needs a cooperation among us to have a concious mind to beware and realize its dangerous."

This essay earns a 2 because it demonstrates both serious linguistic weaknesses and failure to construct a critique based on logical analysis.

### Sample Essay - Score 1

the protective equipment do help to reduce the risk of being severly injured in an accident since there are 75% Of those who had accidents in streets or parking lots were not wearing any protective clothing. such as hemlets, kenn pads, etc. or any light-reflecting materials such as clip-on lights, glow-in-the-dark wrist pads ets. if they do have protective equipment that only a quarter accident may happen, also that can greatly reduce their risk ofbeing severly injured in an accident, that can save some lives and a lot of energy and money for the treatment. the protective equipment do help to reduce the risk of being severly injured in an accident since there are 75% Of those who had accidents in streets or parking lots were not wearing any protectivel clothing. such as hemlets, kenn pads, etc. or any light-reflecting materials such as clip-on lights, glow-in-the-dark wrist pads ets. if they do have protective equipment that only

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a quarter accident may happen, also that can greatly reduce their risk of being severely injured in an accident, that can save some lives and a lot of energy and money for the treatment.

#### **Commentary for Sample 1 Essay**

This fundamentally deficient response uncritically accepts the reasoning of the topic: "the protective equipment do help to reduce the risk of being severely injured in an accident." There is no evidence, though, that the writer is able to understand or analyze the argument; what follows, except for a few additional words, merely copies the topic. This two-sentence response is repeated — verbatim — two more times.

Language and usage are equally problematic. The few words that have been added, in combination with the words of the topic, results in incoherence. In sum, this essay fits all of the scoring guide descriptors for a 1.