

Hints for GED Essay Writers

From The University of Texas at Austin Scoring Center

These hints were prepared by the actual readers who score the GED essay for Texas and other states. This is designed to help GED candidates prepare for the essay portion of the Writing Skills test.

GED essay readers, the people who evaluate your essay, work very quickly. They read and evaluate between 25 and 40 essays per hour. They read for the overall impression your essay makes. Successful essays tell the reader something interesting, provide enough specific details, and are well organized. You can help the reader understand what you are trying to say by using multiple paragraphs and transition words like "first," "next," and "then." Look at your handwriting - will a stranger have trouble reading it? Write neatly to make sure you get credit for all of your ideas.

The readers do not expect your essay to be perfect because 45 minutes is simply not enough time to produce an error-free piece of writing. As long as the reader can understand what you are saying (i.e. the essay is well-organized and well-developed), an occasional error in spelling or grammar will not lower your score.

At The Test

Make sure you:

DO use a ballpoint pen.

DO listen to all instructions from the person who administers the test. Carefully read the topic in your test booklet.

DO take time to brainstorm the topic. What do you know? What connections can you make with the subject?

DO you have personal experiences that you could use? As you plan and write the essay ask yourself, "Am I really writing on the topic?"

DO plan your essay. You should take time to organize your ideas. This will help you keep your ideas organized in paragraphs and should help remind you to provide enough examples, illustrations, explanations, etc.

DO develop your ideas fully. If you can only think of one or two ideas, provide specific examples and explanation. It is better to illustrate one or two points fully than to give a sketchy list of reasons with little support.

DO think of the essay as a conversation with your reader. Think of what you would say to someone if you were talking about the topic. Try to think about any questions your “conversation partner” might like answered. In a conversation you talk freely and supply plenty of details; you should do that in writing too.

DO use paragraphs. Paragraphs signal the reader that you are moving to another point and helps the reader see your organizational plan.

DO use transitions, e.g. first, another time, finally, words that link one sentence to another or one paragraph to another. This helps the reader easily follow and understand your ideas. **DO** make your handwriting as neat as possible.

DO leave time to go back over your essay. Use your editing skills and neatly correct any errors in spelling or punctuation that you notice. Feel free to cross out any unnecessary words or phrases or add to the content. Remember, we don't expect the writing to look perfect.

Things to Avoid:

DON'T waste time and words with phrases like, “Well, I don't know much about this topic but here goes,” or “I don't really know how to do this but I hope you like what I write.” Just start writing!

DON'T stop writing too soon. Sometimes essays receive low scores simply because they are not fully developed. While an extremely short essay may be error-free, it usually lacks the development (explanations, illustrations, examples) necessary to receive a passing score or better. You should use the full 45 minutes to organize, write, and edit your essay.

DON'T sign your name. We like to get to know you from your writing, but we don't need to know your name because scoring should be done anonymously.

**** Remember that holistic scoring rewards what is good about an essay. We do not use red pens. Relax, remember what you have learned about good writing, and write with confidence and lots of detail!****