



Direct Writing Assessment (DWA) Frequently Asked Questions

What are the requirements of the essay?

The writing assessment is an essay completed within a ninety minute time period. Students are expected to respond to the prompt in an organized, developed format using standard language, but the response is not expected to be a final polished essay.

What grades are assessed?

Fifth, seventh, and ninth grade students are assessed annually.

What type of essay is required at each grade level?

Fifth grade students write a narrative essay. Seventh and ninth grade students write expository essays.

How does the seventh grade expository essay differ from the ninth grade expository essay?

The prompts are similar, but the expectations for student responses differ. Ninth grade responses will demonstrate a more advanced understanding of expository writing. This progress will show up in essay organization, the relevance of the supporting information, and the language and style choices made throughout the response.

What is a prompt?

A prompt defines the topic for the student's writing.

How are prompts selected?

Prompts are developed by Idaho teachers and reviewed for appropriateness by the DWA Steering Committee. All prompts used for the DWA are field tested in Idaho classrooms.

How long do students have to write a response to the prompt?

Fifth, seventh, and ninth grade students have ninety minutes to respond to the prompt.

How is the DWA scored?

The DWA is scored holistically. Holistic scoring goes beyond mechanical correctness to focus on the overall impact of the writing. It measures the effectiveness of the communication. Trained readers evaluate each student's essay using the criteria of the scoring standard and anchor papers. Readers are trained not to focus on any one aspect of the writing, but to look at the entire essay.

What is a scoring standard?

A scoring standard is a set of scoring criteria used to measure performance levels. Each score is

defined by descriptors or characteristics. The DWA scoring standard uses a four-point holistic scale.

Does each grade have its own scoring standard?

Yes. The standard differs slightly from grade to grade.

Should students be allowed to see the scoring standard?

Yes. Students should be allowed to see the scoring standard, and they should practice using the scoring standard to score their own writing samples.

Who developed the scoring standard used in the DWA?

The DWA scoring standard is very similar to the standard used by the National Assessment of Educational Progress and standards used by large-scale assessments in other states. A grade-level steering committee, made up of Idaho teachers, developed each Idaho DWA scoring standard.

Who decides what is "proficient"?

Idaho teachers representing each grade level meet for two days in early December to read and score essays from a sample group each year. The teachers discuss the papers and choose anchor papers for each score point of the scoring rubric to be used as guides in the scoring process.

What are anchor papers?

They are papers chosen to typify the characteristics of a particular score point on the scoring rubric. The anchor papers are guides that set the standard for the current year's scoring and represent the range of responses within each score point.

Who scores the papers?

All papers are scored by Idaho teachers. Idaho specialists train the readers to score the essays using the Idaho four-point scoring standard and the current Idaho anchor papers.

How is quality maintained throughout the scoring process?

Two readers score each paper independently. If the two scores are different but adjacent, the paper receives the average of the two scores. If the two readers' scores differ by more than one point, the paper is scored by a team leader. In addition, papers are chosen at random and read by a third reader to monitor consistency. State specialists review the statistics constantly to ensure that the readers are using the full scale of the scoring rubric. Readers and their scoring are monitored throughout the scoring process to ensure reliability.