

# THE WEPT BOOK

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **What is the WEPT?**

The Written English Proficiency Test (WEPT) is the test designed by Sonoma State University to fulfill the California State University Graduate Written Assessment Requirement (GWAR). The GWAR decrees that all graduates of any CSU campus must demonstrate writing proficiency before being awarded a degree. SSU's WEPT is also used for access to many of our graduate programs. The two-hour test asks students to write a persuasive article, essay, or letter on a topic of general interest and is scored on the basis of organization, appropriateness of content, clarity and facility of expression, and mechanics.

### **Who Must Take the Test?**

All Sonoma State students, both undergraduate and graduate, must fulfill the WEPT requirement in order to receive their degrees.

**Undergraduates** complete the WEPT requirement by passing the test with a score of 8 or greater.

**Graduate students** usually are required to pass the WEPT before they will be admitted to classified status in their programs. Some programs offer alternative means of fulfilling the requirement; all graduate students should seek specific guidance from their departments.

### **Are There Alternative Means of Completing the WEPT Requirement?**

The vast majority of SSU students complete the WEPT requirement by taking and passing the exam, but there are alternatives that apply to selected (and relatively few) students. All students are strongly encouraged to take the test at least once before pursuing an alternative option.

- Students whose catalog years fall during or after 2006 may complete the requirement by passing English 375, Advanced Composition, with a grade of C or higher. English 375 is offered regularly but not in sufficient sections to serve a large number of SSU's students.

- Students with considerable professional writing experience may petition to meet the requirement through presentation of appropriate publications.
- Students who have passed another CSU's Graduate Written Assessment Requirement (for example, the Junior English Proficiency Test at San Francisco State University) can petition for acceptance of that score as coverage of SSU's WEPT requirement.

All of these alternatives to the WEPT require petition to the WEPT Office; the WEPT Coordinator will evaluate all such petitions.

### **Why Must I Take the Test?**

As noted above, even though you have completed the general education requirements in writing, the California State University system demands via the Graduate Written Assessment Requirement (GWAR) that all students must demonstrate writing competency before receiving a degree. The GWAR requirement was imposed system-wide in 1976 when the CSU realized that many students were graduating with poor writing skills. The requirement is intended to ensure that graduating students possess a writing ability at the university level or to give students advance notice that their writing skills may need improvement before graduation.

### **When Should I Take the Test?**

As soon as you can! **Undergraduates** should take the test in their **junior year**, **graduates** in their **first semester**.

In recent years, the test has been offered during three "WEPT weeks" per semester, which fall respectively at the beginning, middle, and close of the semester. A WEPT week typically includes computer examinations during the weekdays and a pen-and-paper administration on Saturday. Check with the Writing Center or the WEPT office for each semester's test dates.

### **How Do I Take the Test?**

You must register for a WEPT exam before you can actually take one. It's a good idea to register for the test well in advance, particularly if you wish to take a computer-based WEPT (see below).

To register for the test, first pay your registration fee at the The Seawolf Service Center in Salazar Hall Room 1000, or you can pay online through the payments of your Seawolf account. As of Summer 2008, the fee is \$35. The fee pays for essential

examination expenses and student-support activities such as WEPT advising, and it is required because the CSU does not provide a budget for these necessary GWAR expenses apart from a student fee.

Once you have your receipt for your fee, bring it to the SSU Writing Center (Schulz 1103), where you will be enrolled for an available examination date of your choice. You will need to **keep your receipt** since it serves as admission to the test. At the time of registration, you will be informed about the test site and will be given other pertinent information. You may enroll for an examination via the telephone, but it's a better idea to enroll in person so that you can be certain to get all the information you need about the test and discuss tutoring options and other services at the Writing Center if you wish.

**Pen-and-paper examinations** are the most common means whereby students complete the WEPT requirement. When you arrive at a pen-and-paper examination, you should carry your receipt, two forms of photo ID, a pen and/or dark pencil, and a dictionary and/or thesaurus if you desire. A booklet in which to write your exam will be provided.

**Computer-based** examinations are identical to pen-and-paper examinations in every respect (including in terms of what you should bring) except the element of typing versus handwriting. The word-processing program used in computer WEPTs has no spelling or grammar check or assistance (but as in pen-and-paper exams, you are welcome to bring a dictionary and/or thesaurus). Because computer examinations are limited in availability (as each student requires the use of a computer), the dates tend to fill up early in any given term. Enrollment is on a first-come-first-served basis.

**All test materials**, including test booklets, prompts, and survey sheets, are the property of the SSU WEPT office. Any essay drafts, notes, outlines, brainstorming, etc. must be turned in with the other test materials. Access to test materials will be prohibited once the test is finished except if requested through the WEPT office for an advising session with an approved WEPT advisor.

### **How Should I Prepare for the Test?**

Unlike other exams, the WEPT is not a test for which you can cram. There are, though, a number of ways in which you can prepare yourself for the test.

First, you should assess your performance in previous writing situations—in English classes, in other classes where you have had to produce substantial writing, or in work situations. If your writing has been well received and you have had no reason to lack confidence in your writing, then it is likely (though not guaranteed) that your writing

will meet the criteria of the WEPT. It is important, however, that your practice of writing be fairly recent, since it is as possible to get rusty in this skill as in any other.

If, on the other hand, you have had difficulty in writing, you should consider what those difficulties have been. Review old pieces of writing and the comments you've received on them. Identify what seem to have been and perhaps continue to be the problem areas. Then do some practice writing and get responses to it before taking the exam. Here are a few other suggestions:

- Review an English handbook which covers your problem areas.
- Review a rhetoric text to reacquaint you with the principles and structures of a persuasive essay.
- Check in for a tutorial session in the Writing Center (Schulz 1103)
- Select several topics; then write on one topic for an hour each evening. Have a friend read and comment on your writing.

#### **Some additional tips...**

- Get a good night's rest before taking the exam.
- Use the two full hours allotted to complete the exam.
- Be calm....don't panic....keep a positive attitude.

#### **And while at the test...**

- **Read** the topic carefully and note key terms of the assignment
- **Pre-write** (make notes to yourself before beginning to write)
- **Outline** (or list) sequence of points you want to make
- **Write** thoughtfully, arguing a clear thesis using appropriate evidence: personal experience, others' experience you've witnessed, personal observations, ideas and facts you know from reading, and your general knowledge
- **Edit** (leave time at the end to reread and correct errors)

#### **Who Can Help Me with My Questions?**

**The SSU Writing Center**, located in Schulz 1103, handles registration, fees, and administration of the WEPT as well as providing writing practice for those wishing more instruction. In keeping with its mission of helping students with any writing challenges they face, the Writing Center offers many services to students with questions about the WEPT or who wish to improve their writing in preparation for a WEPT test (and note that the Center does not create or evaluate the test; the WEPT is an evaluation by the faculty of the University). At the Writing Center, students can simply talk with a tutor about the test; they can also look at a variety of sample prompts and even write a practice test, which they can then discuss with a tutor. The Writing Center also offers a three-hour workshop series about the WEPT twice per term. The Writing Center can be reached at 707-664-4401.

**The WEPT Office**, located in 1073 Salazar Hall, conducts evaluation of the essays and provides orientation, workshops, and counseling for the WEPT. Any petitions to the WEPT program of any sort (for WEPT alternatives, for WEPT rereads, for counseling about a failed WEPT) should come to the WEPT Office. Call the WEPT Office at 707-664-2058.

**Disability Services for Students**, located in Salazar 1049, proctors WEPT exams for students with diagnosed disabilities, including learning disabilities. Interested students need to be registered with DSS as legitimately diagnosed in order to use such proctoring services. The DSS phone number is 707-664-2677 (TTY 707-664-2958).

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE WEPT**

### **The Essay**

This writing exam is similar to tests used on many other campuses in the CSU system to assess writing competence and for a number of professional certifying exams such as CBEST, MCAT, CSET, and LCAT. In the test, you will be asked to respond to a single topic of general interest. Usually, the task assigned will be to write to a specific person or group of people asking or advising that a specific action or point of view be undertaken. This is the sort of writing you will find yourself doing as a person active in business, government, and civic affairs. You should write from a first person point of view (do not hesitate to use the pronouns *I* or *me*), and you may include some personal experience or observation to support your ideas and to avoid over-generalizing. Remember, though, you will be stating and explaining ideas, not writing a chronological account of your past experience.

Your objective in the test is to demonstrate your ability to address an audience appropriately, focus on a topic, express ideas clearly and coherently, provide an orderly sequence of ideas, and display your knowledge of standard written English.

You will have two hours to write your essay, so you can use your time to plan what you will write as well as edit your writing before handing it in. Do not approach the test cavalierly; use as much of the two hours as you need to do the best job you can. The readers of the essay, however, do understand that what you will present for evaluation is essentially first draft writing, so they will accept some errors in the writing. Your essay does not have to be faultless in order for you to pass.

As noted above, you may take with you a dictionary and a thesaurus to use when you are writing, but you cannot bring other books or materials into the testing room. **And again, you will not have access to either spell or grammar check when taking a computer test.**

### **Passing essays**

...address their audience appropriately

...are focused

...use specific examples

...have sentence and word variety

...are relatively free of spelling, grammar, and other errors in language use

### **Scoring Procedure**

All of the essays from a single test administration (normally meaning a full “WEPT week”) are usually read and scored at the same time. A group of faculty from English and other disciplines gathers to do the evaluations of the essays. In most cases, they are experienced readers, having read WEPT for several years; those who are new will have been trained prior to the reading. Before beginning the reading, readers review the test topic and the scoring guide and examine and discuss sample essays taken from the test administration.

Each essay is read by two readers, each of whom marks a score of 1 to 6, according to the scoring guide. The first score is covered so that the second reader does not know the score of the first reader. Scores are then added to make the total score. Thus, the highest score is 12. If a discrepancy occurs, the essay is read by a third reader, and this

score is doubled to make the final score. A discrepancy occurs when there is a two-point or more difference between the two scores (e.g., a 2 and a 4). A discrepancy also occurs when scores of 3 and 4 are given to an essay—such a score means that one reader felt that the essay passed and the other reader did not, and therefore a third reading is necessary. A total score of 8 is necessary to pass.

## **Evaluation Criteria**

WEPT readers perform what is called "holistic" evaluation of the essays. Perhaps the best way to describe this type of evaluation is to compare it to "analytic" evaluation of writing. Students are most familiar with this latter type of evaluation since it is the method most commonly used in the classroom: the teacher reads an essay, marks errors in the writing with a circle or symbol, and makes numerous comments in the margins of the essay—in other words, analyzes the writing. Here the reader/teacher is looking for specific errors or writing problems in order to bring them to the attention of the writer.

In holistic evaluation, the reader focuses upon the total impression the essay makes and does not mark the essay. The reader looks for the central ideas in the essay, expects them to be clearly expressed, supported or explained with specific examples and presented in a logical sequence. He allows for occasional lapses in the writing, but does not expect his reading to be interrupted by unclear language, misused words, or frequent or gross errors in punctuation, spelling, or grammar. The specific criteria used by the readers is contained in a scoring guide, provided at the end of this handbook.

## **EXAMPLES OF WEPT ESSAYS WITH COMMENTARIES**

The sample essays and commentaries below will help explain how holistic evaluation works in practice and will also illustrate how the scoring is determined.

Writing Topic:

*Every year, the California State Lottery takes in millions of dollars, some of which is given back to buyers of lottery tickets in the form of prizes to winners and some of which remains with the State of California. The money that remains with the State is to be used to benefit the people of California.*

*Write a letter to your state legislator in which you describe one way you would like to see this money spent; explain the reasons for your choice.*

*\*Don't worry if you can't remember your legislator's name. What is important is that you address the position, not necessarily the individual.*

### **Essay #1: Score 12**

Dear Congressman Houser:

I would like to propose that the state lottery funds be used to bring the natural environment closer to the majority of the people of this state. This goal can be accomplished through parks, preserves or plantings either within urban communities or in the surrounding areas. Not only will physical and psychological benefits be gained by these residents but possibly economic ones as well.

In existing urban areas, the creation or maintenance of traditional forms of parks or plantings would be the most practical method of contributing to a more natural environment. Streets are usually laid out in geometric patterns with preexisting landscape forms such as hills and streams subdued or destroyed. Monies could be used in this case for maintaining old or creating new parks whenever feasible. Sidewalk tree and flower plantings could also be implemented.

Support could also be provided for helping members of the inner city community to enjoy nearby outlying natural areas. The majority of California's population lives within a few minutes to a few hours of mountains or the ocean. The crowded conditions at places like Yosemite and Muir Woods are well known and it would seem that this abundant usage would indicate that acquisition of more recreational areas would be welcomed by the public. However setting aside the natural landscape would be the first step, but access must follow. The lottery funds could also be used to generate camping programs through parks and recreational departments or to help provide affordable mass transit to these areas.

The planning of new, densely populated communities should include as much of the original natural landscaping as possible. The Chico Parks and Recreation Land Trust recommends setting aside 1/7 of newly developed land for park-like use. Once the native contours have been removed, it is difficult, if not impossible, to restore them and a valuable learning tool of nature has been lost. The city of San Antonio has developed around a meandering river and provides an exciting downtown shopping attraction.



The addition of greenery to the urban environment provides health benefits to its residents also. As plants utilize carbon dioxide to produce oxygen, they provide for one of the main by-products of city living while donating an element essential for human life. Dense plantings can also aid in filtering noise and pollution.

Natural areas that are accessible to the people can contribute to the social and psychological well-being of the community. People of different ages and ethnic backgrounds are all drawn to and can appreciate the benefits of a green lawn, beautiful flowers, or the shade of a tree. Visit any national park and you will hear languages from all over the world. Providing settings that we can all relate to and enjoy brings us in contact with people we may not otherwise get to know and can promote inter-personal understanding.

An argument may be raised that these areas, by being set aside from development, are not economically benefiting the majority of the population. The value is hard to estimate but if the money is coming from the lottery, the people are in a sense "buying" a certain quality for their life. There would undoubtedly be some jobs created by the initial construction of these areas and some maintenance employment would be necessary, but the attraction of tourists that this type of planning might bring to the community should not be ignored. As a congressman I am sure you are interested in encouraging the tourist industry in our state.

The lottery is often criticized for encouraging the societal emphasis on acquisition of objects as opposed to encouraging the enjoyment of life and the feeling of contentment and well-being. I feel that bringing the natural environment to the urban communities of our state would be providing direct enjoyment to those who support the lottery the most and who most need the benefits nature provides for us.

Commentary:

The above is an impressive performance for a two-hour writing exam. Note the clear organization of the essay in which each paragraph advances and elaborates the topic. In the first paragraph, the writer identifies her idea clearly--"bring the natural environment closer to the majority of the people of the state." She then defines the exact means she would like to see used to accomplish the goal and identifies benefits to the people of the state from the implementation of her idea. Notice that the language is brief and clear. The writer realizes that the reader--a state senator--is busy, and she does not wish to waste his time with unnecessary verbiage. Notice also that the introductory paragraph is addressed specifically to the interests of a state senator--"the majority of the people of the state."

The next five paragraphs give detailed descriptions of the types of projects on which the writer would like to spend lottery money, following the list presented in the first paragraph. The writer provides examples, probably from her own experience, to support the descriptions as well.

The sixth paragraph considers a possible counterargument that the reader might raise-- a lack of economic benefit to the majority of the people of the state. The writer then refutes that counterargument and suggests that in fact her plan might provide jobs.

The last paragraph briefly sums up the position the writer has taken in the essay.

In other respects, this is also a sound piece of writing. Ideas are clearly expressed, there is considerable sentence variety, and diction is accurate and appropriate.

## **Essay #2: Score 10**

Dear Mr./Ms. Legislator:

I am writing to you regarding a much needed use for the State's income from the California Lottery. I feel that one of the most important areas in which this money could be spent is higher education. The quality, accessibility, and effectiveness of the state's university systems are presently declining as a result (primarily) of lack of funding. When the voters of California originally voted in favor of the creation of the lottery, one of the state's promises was that it would generate revenue for the state's educational systems. Now, several years later, the CSU and UC systems are suffering from severe and frequent budget cuts. I believe that state lottery money should be used to help offset the effects of those cuts.

The quality of education provided by our university systems is currently deteriorating. Decreases in funding have led to cutbacks in part-time faculty positions and reduction of class sections offered each semester. Overly large class sizes, overworked faculty members, and limited access to faculty by students have been the results of the cutbacks. California's college students are being shortchanged by the system. We are paying more and more into the system while we are getting less and less out of it. Many students are unable to complete their degrees on time because required courses are not being offered as frequently as they once were. As a result, students are forced to spend even more money to complete a degree which would have already been completed if there had been no budget cuts.

The accessibility of higher education in our state is also suffering as a result of the state's financial crisis. Historically, access to higher education has been restricted to those who ranked in the upper half (or even quarter) of their graduating high school

classes and who could afford the cost of attending college. Although the introduction of various grant, scholarship, and loan programs has helped to defray some of the costs of attending college in recent years, the constant fee increases are virtually forcing more and more current students out of school each semester. The expense of an education ends up being eliminated in order to accommodate the cost of living, which leaves the student with no degree and little opportunity for career advancement. And for those who are not already in the university system, it is becoming harder and harder to become a college student in California.

Higher education is the key to keeping California on the leading edge of our nation's economy. Without well-educated businesspeople, scientists, and other specialists, California can only suffer as companies move to states where they can find more highly qualified employees. Many of our brightest high school students are now choosing to enroll in the university systems of other states, systems which offer a higher-quality education for the students' money. If we continue to drive our best students out of the state, California will become a state inhabited only by the uneducated and by those individuals who are lucky enough to have the means to pay for an education.

Mr./Ms. Legislator, the current condition of the state's higher education system is highly disturbing. If budget cuts cannot be reduced or eliminated, we must do something to offset the damage that they are causing. Channeling revenue from the California Lottery into the state's university system would be one of the most effective ways to help remedy this situation. If the elected officials in Sacramento fail to take action soon, the quality and accessibility of higher education in California will continue to decline. The effects may be disastrous.

Sincerely

Commentary:

As with the preceding essay, this essay is well developed and has a considerable amount of pertinent detail. It tends, however, to be a little more generalized and to focus less on the precise *use* for the lottery money than on the *need* for it. For example, the writer lists deteriorating quality, accessibility, and economic effectiveness as problems that could be remedied through the spending of lottery money on higher education. The reader must supply the conclusion, which is that providing lottery money would lead to improvements in all these areas. In addition, the precise improvements are not spelled out.

As it turns out, this essay has five paragraphs and follows a familiar pattern. Using this pattern may have kept the writer from developing the argument more fully,

however. Readers of the WEPT do not count the number of paragraphs and are not looking for any particular pattern or formula in the writing. The essay should follow a sequence appropriate to the topic and to the writer's intentions.

There are a few other errors that one could point out; however, this essay, as a first draft, is still a substantial piece of writing that would probably be effective for its purpose and definitely deserves a high passing score.

### **Essay #3: Score 8**

To the honorable Senator Mike Thompson,

While some argue that the lottery is gambling, and therefore should not be allowed, lottery revenue can provide this state with valuable extra funds. Since we have instituted a lottery in California, I feel that it is necessary for me to voice my opinion on how that revenue is allocated. I feel very strongly, that these funds be used for extracurricular activities in the K-12 school system. Whether lottery funds be used for field trips, bands, or sports, these activities are an integral part of the educational process and should be given adequate funding. We could achieve adequate funding if we redirected lottery revenue

Recent budget cuts have prompted school officials to do away with many extracurricular activities. Among those activities that have fell victim to the budgetary axe are band, after school clubs, and sports. Moreover, many sports that do not have large attendance records, girls volleyball, for example, are cancelled. Those sports that are well attended and generate their own revenue, football for example, are usually kept going. This poses a difficult problem for schools, since what it amounts to is that only a small number of students will get to participate, and the majority of those participants will be boys. This type of situation is both unfair and unequal, but could easily be remedied with additional funding.

Education is more than just learning how to read and write. Education is learning how to interact with your peers. Learning how to set goals and achieve those goals, and also learning about teamwork. No other setting can teach these young people those things like after school activities. It does not matter if these activities are sports, marching band, or a field trip to a local museum. They all teach how to interact with other people. I myself was extremely active in after school sports. These activities instilled a variety of attributes within me that I hold very dear. From these activities I learned how to accept defeat, how to be a gracious winner, and most importantly, how to achieve my goals. I realized then, as I do now, that the only way to reach ones goals is through hard work. Without these activities, I do not know what I would have become, which brings me to my next point.

Young people, especially teenagers, are extremely active. Their boundless energy and curiosity will lead them to seek out many experiences. What type of experiences they seek out will be those experiences that are available to them. If there are no afterschool activities available for these young people, or there is only limited activities available, these young people will seek out other means to displace their energy. Unfortunately, these alternate activities are all too often delinquency and crime. By funding afterschool activities we have a unique opportunity to ensure that young people have a positive environment in which to experience themselves and others.

Extracurricular activities are essential to the education process in the K-12 system. These activities provide young people with a positive environment to grow emotionally in. Furthermore, these activities instill in them skills that we all consider valuable. Skills such as teamwork, acceptance, interaction, and how to achieve goals. Putting lottery revenue toward extracurricular activities would be an investment in the young people of California. I urge you to consider reallocating lottery funds toward extracurricular activities.

Commentary:

As you can see, this essay is more limited in development than the previous two essays. The writer successfully focuses upon an important issue--K-12 extra-curricular activities--and provides some reasons why these activities should be important to a state legislator. However, the writer takes too long to get to his point in the beginning and makes the mistake of introducing a non-issue--whether the state should even be in the business of running a lottery. This writer also assumes that a topic with three parts is advisable; thus he divides extra-curricular activities into field trips, band, and sports. In so doing, he probably leaves out some activities that might have been important to mention. He also trips himself up a bit by naming the three activities as band, after school clubs, and sports later in the letter.

The writer's organization is adequate, though not as strong as it might have been. He blends the proposal and the reasons rather than first announcing his plan and then supporting it. This blending tends to weaken the argument, though not to the point of rendering it invalid.

The writer has some difficulty with spelling and with word choice. He tends to use cliches ("victim to the budgetary axe") and in one case failed to use the correct form of the verb ("have fell victim"). He also relies on empty words such as "extremely" and "unique" rather than providing more specific details.

Having noted all this, however, one can say that this essay does respond at least minimally to all the tasks assigned by the exam topic--the writer addresses the

audience, tells what he wishes to see happen, and provides some reasons, with examples, to support his proposal. Moreover, the writer on the whole demonstrates adequate competence in sentence formation, diction, and writing conventions.

#### **Essay # 4: Score 6**

Dear Mr. Legislator

When the California State Lottery was introduced to the People of California, it was with the understanding that some of the money taken in from it would be given back to the state of California to be used to benefit the people in some way. There are many possible uses for this money that can greatly help the population as a whole, but I believe the most beneficial use for this money is to put it towards fighting the "drug war" in our state.

In recent years, illegal drugs have been an increasing menace on the stability of our society. When people are addicted to these drugs they tend to not be as productive, or in many cases, be a burden on society because they are not able to work and function normally. In many cases they will commit crimes, such as robbery or burglary to get the money to buy the drugs that they are addicted to.

I feel that there are two ways in which the money can be spent to the fullest extent to fight the drug problem. One way is to increase the amount of man power and resources in enforcing the laws concerning the sale and possession of illegal drugs. The second way is to develop good rehabilitation programs for the people who are addicted to these drugs so that they can be reinstated as a productive member of our society.

Although many problems face the people of California today, the root of many of these problems can probably be traced back to the use of illegal drugs as being a contributor to the high crime rate. As a public official I am sure you can see for yourself the impact that illegal drugs has had on all of us over the years. The crime rate and drug use has seem to have risen hand in hand with no end in sight. Hopefully you will come to the right decision and make a proposal to the rest of the legislative body that some of the money from the state lottery be allocated to fight the "drug war."

Sincerely

Commentary:

One of the principles of holistic evaluation is to recognize and reward writers for what they are able to achieve in their writing. This writer has been able to focus on a central topic (namely, the use of lottery money to address drug usage in the state), name some negative results of drug usage, propose ways for lottery money to be spent to combat drug use, and provide some reasons that the lottery money should be spent in this way. Although the writer takes some time to get to the point in the beginning, she does state her proposal clearly, if briefly, in the last sentence of the introductory paragraph. Rather than describing her proposal, however, the writer gives details about the problem of drug use. In the third paragraph, though, she does provide a brief description of her plan. Unfortunately, rather than developing these ideas, she reverts back to a discussion of the negative aspects of drug use.

The writer demonstrates a lack of knowledge of her subject by making unsupported generalizations and by trying to establish a causal relationship between drug use and "many (unspecified) problems." She says "although many problems face the people of California today, the root of many of these problems can probably be traced back to the use of illegal drugs as being a contributor to the high crime rate." Then rather than support this rather confusing statement, she attempts to put the responsibility back onto her audience by saying: "As a public official I am sure you can see for yourself the impact that illegal drugs has had on all of us." Moreover, there are numerous and quite disconcerting problems in spelling and in sentence formation, enough to drop the essay below a passing score.

This writer probably would have benefited from writing about a subject with which she was more familiar. It seems likely that she felt that she had to choose a topic that she had heard discussed publicly. Her choice did not allow her to demonstrate her ability to generate an idea and support it and it led her to write sentences that often didn't make much sense. This writer might benefit by retaking the exam at the next administration and choosing to write about a more familiar subject (as did the writers of the previous three essays). However, some of the problems, particularly at the sentence level, indicate that the writer might benefit from doing some practice writing before retaking the exam. In any event, a 6 seems to be a reasonable score for this essay.

#### **Essay # 5: Score 4**

Dear Mr. Legislator,

Californias State Lottery takes in millions of dollars each year. What happens with the money? I am aware that some of the money is given back in the form of prizes, but what about the rest.

I believe that this money could be spent on other things. This money could be spent on education for example. There are many good reasons for investing more money in education. I feel that this money would benefit the schools most. I work in a high school and have also visited many others and frankly I believe that those schools are in very bad condition and I am sure it goes for schools in general. The classrooms are over crowded and there are not enough teachers to teach these students. If more was spent on schools I am sure that it would pay off in the long run.

Right now California schools have a very high drop out rate. I ask myself why is this true? This could be because the children get bored and don't learn? Then one might ask, why don't they learn? I feel that there are not enough teachers to motivate these kids to finish school and go to college. Another thing that motivates students are sports. Since schools don't have money they are dropping some sports. I feel that sports are very important because they keep the kids minds off bad things.

Like I mentioned before the children are our future if we invest in them it will pay off. If we do there might not be that many dropouts. A lot more students would have positive attitudes about higher education.

Before I end this letter I would like to thank you for taking the time to read this letter. I would also like to ask you to please take my opinion in concederation.

Thank you

Commentary:

The primary problem in this essay is a lack of focus which seems to represent a failure on the part of the writer to develop a specific idea to present. The writer wants lottery money to be spent on education. That much is clear. However, he fails to deliver a plan that would be convincing to a legislator. He does mention overcrowding and lack of teachers as well as underfunding for sports. However these are presented negatively--as problems which need to be solved. Moreover, the solution or plan provided is simply the expenditure of money. The writer relies solely on his own feelings or beliefs to support the plan: "If more was spent on schools I am sure that it would pay off better in the long run."

In addition to the lack of detail and organization, the writer seems unable to use the conventions of standard written English appropriately. There are frequent errors in spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure.



You may see some other problems in the essay, but those noted above are the main reasons for the score of 4 on this essay. In a counseling session, this writer would probably be advised to take a writing course before attempting the WEPT again.

## **WHAT IF I SHOULD FAIL THE WEPT?**

Within approximately three to four weeks after you have taken the test, you will receive a notification of your score. If you should receive a score of 6 or less, you will have failed the test. A score of 8 or more is passing (no essay should receive a 7, as all 3 / 4 splits are arbitrated by a third reader).

Failing the test is disappointing, but don't be discouraged. Failing the test does not necessarily mean that you cannot write at the level demanded by the test. Some students fail because they were tired or distracted when they took the test; some because they did not limber up with some practice writing before taking the test; others because they failed to heed an important criterion in the test (e.g., providing specific examples to explain or support their ideas, avoiding too much narrative, or using appropriate sentence variety).

Should you fail the test, your first step should be to call the WEPT Office (664-2058, Salazar 1073) to find out when WEPT advisors are available. A WEPT advisor will review your essay with you and explain why you failed the test and what your next step should be. Usually, students are advised to retake the test, especially when it is clear that more attention to some aspect of the essay would probably have pushed it over the passing line. The counselor might also recommend that the student work with a tutor or take a writing class before retaking the test.

Students who fail the WEPT can also receive a variety of kinds of help from the Writing Center. While tutors in the Writing Center cannot go over your unsuccessful examination with you, they can offer many kinds of preparatory help. The Writing Center is the only place on campus where students are allowed to look at old exam prompts, and students are encouraged to do so while discussing writing strategies with a tutor. Students can even write sample essays in response to one or more of these prompts and then receive tutoring on their practice tests. Finally, any student may also take one of the free three-hour workshops offered each semester by the Writing Center in order to improve their skills and reduce anxiety often brought on by writing under pressure.

If at any time during the counseling process the student refuses to accept the explanations of the counselor and challenges the score of the essay given by the readers, the student may request a review of the essay by a special board. This request must be in writing, contain substantial reasons for a review, and be directed to the WEPT Coordinator. We strongly advise that students make use of this process only in exceptional circumstances, since the process takes time and involves several faculty members and a University dean.

### **Some reasons students fail the WEPT**

Writing...

- is too general, has no specific examples
- exhibits little variety in sentences and word choice
- lacks sufficient development or support of ideas
- fails to join paragraphs in a clear and logical sequence
- contains frequent and serious errors
- relies too heavily on a narrative (autobiographical or story-telling) format

## **LAST WORDS**

Professional writers as well as teachers of writing know how difficult writing is, and they are well aware of the kinds of anxiety and self-doubts all writers have occasionally. They are also aware of the stress that a testing situation can place upon an individual and that person's performance. The WEPT program attempts to make allowances for the test conditions and provide support to the student both before and after the test administration. Also, holistic evaluation is perhaps one of the fairest ways of judging writing short of individual assessment in a one-to-one situation. Still, much "real world" writing is done under deadlines and pressures, and the ability to produce reasonably clear, coherent, and correct writing in a limited time should be a fundamental skill of all university graduates.

The WEPT is intended to be one way by which the University tests and certifies that fundamental skill. The test program does not assume that all students will rely equally in their personal or professional lives upon writing and, as a consequence, the test

demands a demonstration of average, not superior, writing competency. On the other hand, the program does assume that writing ability, as a part of general literacy, is a necessary component of a university education.

## **APPENDIX: SCORING CRITERIA**

A **6** essay demonstrates a high degree of competence in writing, though it may have minor errors. An essay in this category:

- addresses the topic clearly and responds effectively to all aspects of the task.
- explores the issues thoughtfully and in depth
- appeals to the audience specifically and appropriately
- is clearly focused, well organized, and well developed
- uses pertinent examples and detail for support
- displays syntactic variety and a clear command of the language
- demonstrates clear facility in expression and diction

A **5** essay demonstrates competence in writing though it may have minor errors. An essay in this category:

- clearly addresses the topic, but may respond to some aspects of the task more effectively than others
- shows some depth and complexity of thought
- appeals to the audience appropriately
- is focused, well-organized, and developed
- uses examples and details for support
- displays syntactic variety
- demonstrates facility in expression

A **4** essay demonstrates adequate competence in writing; it may have occasional errors in mechanics and syntax. An essay in this category:

- addresses the topic, but may slight some aspects of the task
- may treat the topic somewhat simplistically
- appeals to the audience appropriately
- is focused and adequately organized and developed
- uses some details or examples but may tend to generalize
- demonstrates adequate facility in expression and diction

A **3** essay demonstrates some ability in writing, but it will be clearly flawed, an inappropriate and inadequate response to the task at hand. An essay in this category will have one or more of the following weaknesses:

- distorts or neglects aspects of the task
- lacks focus or demonstrates confused or simplistic thinking
- lack of consideration of audience's needs and interests
- unclear focus, inadequate organization or development
- lack of variety in sentence patterns
- limited facility in clear expression and diction
- an accumulation of errors in mechanics, syntax or usage

A **2** essay suggests minimal writing ability. It will reveal one or more of the following weaknesses:

- confusion about the topic or neglect of important aspects of the task
- lack of focus and coherence; failure to communicate ideas
- inappropriate response to audience
- disorganization or incomplete development

--excessive generalization or irrelevant detail

--serious and multiple errors in mechanics, syntax or usage

A **1** essay demonstrates incompetence. A paper in this category is marked by any of the following weaknesses:

--inappropriate response to audience

--incoherence of expression or illogical connection between ideas

--severe under-development

--major and repeated problems in grammar and sentence formation