Tips for Passing the WEPT

The Written English Proficiency Test (WEPT) is one of the ways SSU students meet the CSU Graduate Written Assessment Requirement, a system-wide directive that all students demonstrate writing proficiency before graduating. “Writing proficiency” as defined by SSU’s faculty means many things. It does not primarily mean perfect correctness in usage or mastery of a specific form like the five-paragraph essay. Rather, it primarily means your ability to address a rhetorical challenge in writing with the engagement and critical thinking that one would expect of a person with a college education. WEPT readers are primarily looking for an interesting, thoughtful, well written response. That said, here are some tips to help you feel confident as you approach the exam.

Before the Test

Study the WEPT web page which contains lots of helpful information, including sample WEPT essays and evaluation criteria for the exam. Perhaps make an appointment at the Writing Center to talk with a tutor about the exam and how to approach it.

Look over old papers to find patterns that can give you a study focus (developing paragraphs, articulating arguments, avoiding comma splices, etc.). Where do you tend to feel confident? Are there elements of writing that faculty tend to ask you to work on? Then do some review.

If worry about particular usage rules (your vs. you’re, accept vs. except, etc.) or correctness in spelling troubles you, definitely plan to bring a dictionary to the exam, and prepare your dictionary: inside the covers, make the notes that will really help you and give you confidence.

Do what you need to do to be prepared for the stress of the exam: exercise, eat appropriately before the exam, get good rest, don’t drink too much caffeine, drink a lot of caffeine, whatever.

If you have taken the exam multiple times and not passed, contact the WEPT office and schedule an advising appointment to discuss your previous exam with a WEPT advisor.

At the Test

The Prompt

Most important: read the prompt carefully. All prompts contain up to four elements:

- A context. You might be asked to write a speech, an article for a local newspaper, a letter to the University president, or any one of several other possibilities. As in “real” writing, the context includes an audience and an occasion.
- A task. Usually framed in one key sentence in the prompt, this portion will articulate the kind of argument you will be asked to make. This is the most important part of the prompt; find it and respond to it accurately and directly.
- Hints at possible things you might discuss. The prompt may suggest a few specific lines of approach or specific elements around which to build your essay. These are suggestions only, meant to guide your thinking and developing.
- Thought-provoking questions. Sometimes the prompts include questions meant to deepen your thinking. You may not have to answer all (or any) of the questions—in other words, they may be offered only as guidance to keep in mind as you develop your response.
Planning your Essay
Plan before you write your actual response. Take ten minutes at least (but no more than fifteen or twenty) to brainstorm, draw a cluster diagram, make an outline, write down key words, etc.—whatever works for you. You can use the inside cover of the exam booklet for this purpose.

Articulate a thesis, a controlling idea or argument which will give shape to your essay. You need to show the evaluators that you can write a response which has a point. Use the prompt as you articulate your thesis: the basic elements of the thesis can be found in the task.

Writing your Essay
Remember that the evaluators want most of all to see your brilliance and creativity. Do this in several ways:

- Use personal experience or observation, drawing from your life in school, work, home, travel, classes, clubs, childhood, community, family, hobbies, etc.
- Use the word “I.”
- Organize the response logically for the occasion, purpose, and audience.
- Use a natural educated style suited for discourse in the public domain. This style will likely be closer to your conversational style or informal writing style than the style you might use, say, for a scientific lab report. If a sentence you’ve written seems forced, awkward, or unlike anything anybody might actually say or write, it’s probably a good one to revise.
- It’s always OK to provide the safe response, i.e., the one you think most people will tend to agree with (especially, of course, if that’s the one you really do agree with too). But think about impressing your readers by articulating the unexpected or counterintuitive view, as long as you can support it well. Academics value thoughtful challenges to accepted wisdom. Indeed, a common pattern in academic essays is the challenging pattern: “While we typically believe X, my experience (or a close reading or new experiments or deeper thinking) suggests that Y is actually true.”

Begin, develop, end. All effective writing offers some form of an introduction, the full development of an argument, and clear conclusion. Make sure your response has these elements.

Remember your thesis as you write, referring to it as appropriate, building transitions between sections that maintain the focus on the thesis, and reasserting the thesis in the conclusion.

Answer the question fully, richly, and completely. While there is no length requirement on the WEPT, students do fail on account of insufficient development. Longer essays typically succeed better than shorter ones.

Write as legibly as you can.

Finally, try to save time to edit and proofread carefully. Reread your essay carefully.

If you run out of time, jot down a brief outline of what you would have written if you had more time.

After the Test
The test results will be mailed to you in 4-6 weeks after the date you take the test. You can also check your ARR for your updated results.