GMAT ANALYTICAL WRITING ASSESSMENT

• 30-minute Argument Essay

SKILLS TESTED

• Your ability to articulate complex ideas clearly and effectively
• Your ability to examine claims and accompanying evidence
• Your ability to support ideas with relevant reasons and examples
• Your ability to sustain a well-focused, coherent discussion
• Your ability to control the elements of standard written English

WRITING AREAS TESTED

• Content
• Organization
• Style
• Mechanics

Critical thinking skills weigh more heavily than the writer’s control of fine points of grammar or the mechanics of writing.

ESSAY SCORING SYSTEM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>An essay that is totally meaningless (only keystroke characters or is blank or nonverbal) or obviously not written on the assigned topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>An essay that is fundamentally deficient in analytical writing skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>An essay that is seriously flawed, demonstrating serious weaknesses in analytical writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>An essay that is seriously limited, through demonstrating some competence in analysis and writing fundamentals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>An essay that is adequate, pressing a competent analysis while demonstrating adequate control of the elements of writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>An essay that is strong, presenting a well-developed analysis of the issue or argument complexities, while demonstrating strong control of the elements of effective writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>An essay that is outstanding, presenting a well-articulated analysis of the issue or argument complexities, while demonstrating mastery of the elements of effective writing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The essays are scored using a “holistic” grading system. Each essay is assigned to two readers who are trained to apply specified criteria.
ESSAY TIME ALLOTMENT

You will be presented with an argument, which will be summarized in a brief quotation. The topic presents an argument of general interest.

It may be useful to take a few minutes of your time to think about the argument and to plan or even outline a response before you actually begin to write. Scratch paper (or a small dry erase board) will be available for writing notes or an outline before you actually begin typing. Make sure that you organize your ideas into a coherent essay and develop them in some detail. Reserve some of your time to proofread and edit your response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minutes</th>
<th>Task</th>
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| 5       | • Carefully read the essay prompt.  
          • Decide what you can discuss most easily—meaning, what you can clearly explain/support/defend with examples and reasons.  
          • Make a quick, short list of some ideas.  
          • Create a rough outline of the essay. |
| 20      | • Draft the essay. Follow your outline, stating your position, reasons, and examples. |
| 5       | • Proofread and edit your essay. Make corrections where necessary. |

5/20/5—decide, draft, edit

ARGUMENT DEFINITIONS

- **Argument**: Based on an issue, consists of a conclusion stemming from reasons; a line of reasoning intended to persuade.
- **Conclusion**: The stand (or stance) taken on an issue—pro/con, for/against, etc.—(same as “position”); a reasoned judgment; the resulting assertion. The claim.
- **Reason**: Often called a premise, provides support for conclusions; deemed acceptable or unacceptable, valid or invalid, on the basis of its relevance and quality. Evidence.
- **Analysis**: The separation of a whole into its component parts, typically to determine how they work together to create the whole.
- **Counter-example**: an example that opposes or disproves a proposition or theory.
- **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.
ARGUMENT TOPIC EXAMPLE

All commercial airliners operating in the United States should be required to carry a computerized onboard warning system that can receive signals from the transponders of other aircraft. (A transponder is a radio device that signals a plane’s course.) The system would be able to alert pilots to the danger of a collision and recommend evasive action. Installation of the system would virtually eliminate the danger of mid-air collisions.

Your assignment: to organize and write a critique of the argument presented in a short passage. You are not being asked to present your own personal point of view on the subject! A critique of an argument other than the one presented will be given a score of zero.

• Instead, analyze the line of reasoning in the argument.
• Identify what, if any, questionable premises are made by the argument.
• Evaluate how well the evidence presented supports the conclusion of the argument. (In evaluating the evidence, you can consider what kinds of proof
would weaken or strengthen the argument and what additional information might
tend to prove or disprove the conclusion.)
Note that the two essay formats (issue and argument) are complementary: one
requires the examinee to provide arguments supported by claims and evidence,
while the other requires the examinee to analyze and evaluate someone else’s
argument.

In deciding, ask yourself:

- “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?”

**ARGUMENT ESSAY PROMPTS ARE OFTEN PROPOSALS**

Chances are good that the argument essay will be a policy proposal; it’ll cite a
problem and propose a solution.

**PROPOSAL TERMINOLOGY**

- **Quantification** = significance = importance = extent of problem
- **Inherency** = necessity = lack of other alternatives = need
- **Feasibility** = workability = chance of success = practicability
- **Disadvantages** = unwanted consequences = undesirable side effects

**Quantification**
- “Is there a problem?”
- “What is the extent of the problem to be solved?”
- “Does the argument identify the solution sufficiently to warrant the plea?”

**Inherency**
- “Is change necessary?”
- “Are there less drastic, alternative solutions?”
- “Is the problem inherent enough to justify change?”

**Feasibility**
- “Will the proposed solution really work?”
- “Would the proposal actually work?”

**Disadvantages**
- “Is the plan worth it?”
- “Do the advantages outweigh the disadvantages?”
- “Would the proposal have any adverse consequences?”
The argument for the installation of computerized on-board warning systems is inconclusive for several reasons. First, it fails to establish that there is a serious danger at present. Second, less drastic alternatives may be available to ensure public safety. Third, assuming that there is a real danger, the radio equipment and computers may simply not be sufficiently effective measures to address the problem. Fourth, the costs of the plan might outweigh any benefits.

In the first place, the argument fails to demonstrate that a serious problem exists. Before implementing such extensive measures, it would be necessary to know the likelihood of a mid-air collision. Additionally, it would be important to know what would be the cost in terms of dollars and loss of life.

Second, simpler means may solve any problem that does exist. A change in the way that air-traffic controllers monitor flights might achieve the same result. Or altering flight schedules to spread traffic out over time might effectively eliminate any danger of mid-air collisions.

Third, the computerized system may simply not solve the problem. It would have to be shown that the information transmitted by navigational transponders would give a warning sufficiently far in advance. Further, it would be necessary to know that a pilot could act on that warning effectively.

Finally, the proposal is likely to entail some fairly substantial costs. The cost of developing, installing, and maintaining the system could be greater than that of all the mid-air collisions that have occurred. The plan might even result in more collisions if the equipment malfunctions or the computer program contains bugs.
THE ARGUMENT ESSAY TEMPLATE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Intro Paragraph</th>
<th>Argument is valid/invalid, conclusive/inconclusive. First, Second, Third, Fourth . . .</th>
<th>5 sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Second Paragraph</td>
<td>In the first place, (topic sentence restating the first reason). [Plus two sentences developing the idea of that topic sentence.]</td>
<td>3 sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Third Paragraph</td>
<td>Second, (topic sentence restating the second reason). [Plus two sentences developing the idea of that topic sentence.]</td>
<td>3 sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Fourth Paragraph</td>
<td>Third, (topic sentence restating the third reason). [Plus two sentences developing the idea of that topic sentence.]</td>
<td>3 sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fifth Paragraph</td>
<td>Fourth, (topic sentence restating the fourth reason). [Plus two sentences developing the idea of that topic sentence.]</td>
<td>3 sentences</td>
</tr>
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Total: 17 sentences

GUIDELINES FOR COMPOSING ARGUMENT ESSAY

- Analyze the line of reasoning and the use of evidence in the argument.
- Consider what questionable assumptions underlie the thinking and what alternative explanations or counter-examples might weaken the conclusion.
- Consider what sort of evidence would strengthen or refute the argument. What changes in the argument would make it more logically sound? What, if anything, would help you to better evaluate its conclusion?
- The first paragraph should state several reasons why the argument is/is not flawed (QIFD—see above). The following paragraphs should develop each of the reasons in more detail, giving examples and providing alternative solutions. The last paragraph should summarize, providing a statement of conclusion (not “thus we see, amen”).

HELPFUL TRANSITION WORDS IN ARGUMENTATION

- However
- Evidently
- Therefore
- Thus
- Hence
- In conclusion

TIPS ON STYLE

- Avoid generalities and vagueness. (“Wow, this is a good question requiring serious contemplation and concentration.”)
• Avoid attempts at humor or sarcasm. ("You’d have to be Forrest Gump not to see . . .")

• Avoid being overly dramatic. ("Requiring airlines to install these devices would threaten the very basis of a free market economy and our American way of life.")

• Avoid slang: “tree hugger” or “fascist body-piercing neo-Nazi” or “capitalist swine”
• Avoid apologies or complaints. (“Dear GMAT Essay Grader, I’m so sorry I didn’t have time to finish . . .” or “Thanks for the psychologically abusive testing experience; I’m off to truck-driving school thanks to you sadists.”)

• Do signal transitions with orientation words like first, second, since, because, finally, in sum, etc.
• Be reasonably politically correct, culturally sensitive, gender neutral.
• Be concise (avoid verbal diarrhea):

  Original: Kicking is one of the many ways in which Bill and Jim participate in the rich complexities of human interaction.

  Revised: Jim kicks Bill.

  Original: The point I wish to make is that fish sleep with their eyes open.

  Revised: Fish sleep with their eyes open.
• Do incorporate advanced sophisticated punctuation marks:

• The colon : used to direct attention to something (such as a list, explanation, or quotation)
• The semicolon ; used to combine major sentence elements (independent clauses of a compound sentence)
• The dash — used especially to indicate a break in the thought or structure of a sentence