

## Pre-Professional Skills Test: Writing (0720)

### Test at a Glance

Test Name	Pre-Professional Skills Test: Writing		
Test Code	0720		
Time	60 minutes, divided into two 30-minute sections		
Number of Questions	120		
Format	38 multiple-choice questions, 1 essay question		
Content Outline	Multiple-choice questions involving usage and sentence correction; essay topic as a basis for a writing sample		
	Content Categories	Approximate Number of Questions	Approximate Percentage of Questions
	I. Grammatical Relationships	13	17%
	II. Structural Relationships	14	18.5%
	III. Word Choice and Mechanics	11	14.5%
	VI. Essay	1	50%

## About This Test

The Pre-Professional Skills Test in Writing assesses the ability to use grammar and language appropriately and the ability to communicate effectively in writing; these abilities are essential to a well-educated adult in a professional role. The Writing test has two separately timed 30-minute sections: 38 multiple-choice questions on the use of standard English and a writing sample based on an essay topic.

The multiple-choice section is designed to measure an examinee's ability to use standard written English correctly and effectively. This section is divided into two parts: usage and sentence correction. In the usage questions, examinees are asked to recognize errors in mechanics, in structural and grammatical relationships, and in idiomatic expressions or word choice, and they are also asked to identify sentences that have no error and that meet the conventions of standard written English. The sentence correction questions require examinees to select, from among the choices presented, the best way to restate a certain phrase or sentence by using standard written English; in some cases, the phrase or sentence is correct and most effective as stated. Examinees are not required to have a knowledge of formal grammatical terminology.

The essay section assesses an examinee's ability to write effectively in a limited period of time. The essay topic invites examinees to draw from personal experience, observation, or reading to support a position with specific reasons and examples.

This test may contain some questions that will not count toward your score.

The topics attempt to present situations that are familiar to all educated people; no topic will require any specialized knowledge other than an understanding of how to write effectively in English.

Examinees should write only on the topic in the test book, address all the points presented in the topic, and support generalizations with specific examples. Before beginning to write, examinees should read the topic and organize their thoughts carefully.

Experienced teachers read and evaluate each essay holistically (that is, with a single score for overall quality) under carefully controlled conditions designed to ensure fair and reliable scoring. Acknowledging that writing comprises a number of features that are not independent of one another, scorers base their judgments on an assessment of such features as quality of insight or central idea, clarity, consistency of point of view, cohesiveness, strength and logic of supporting information, rhetorical force, appropriateness of diction and syntax, and correctness of mechanics and usage.

## Topics Covered

Representative descriptions of topics covered in each category are provided below.

\*In the multiple-choice section, some questions will not contain an error; such questions are considered No Error questions. All of the No Error questions will be reported in Category III.\*

### I. Grammatical Relationships

- Identify Errors in
  - Adjectives
  - Adverbs
  - Nouns
    - Agreement
  - Pronouns
    - Agreement
    - Proper use
  - Verbs
    - Agreement
    - Form
    - Tense

### II. Structural Relationships

- Identify Errors in
  - Comparison
  - Coordination
  - Correlation
  - Negation
  - Parallelism
  - Subordination

### III. Word Choice and Mechanics

- Identify Errors in
  - Word Choice
    - Idiomatic expressions
    - Commonly confused words
    - Wrong word use
    - Redundancy
  - Mechanics
    - Capitalization
    - Punctuation
      - Commas
      - Semicolons
      - Apostrophes
- Identify sentences free from error

### IV. Essay

- Write an essay that is appropriate for the assigned task and for an audience of educated adults
- Organize and develop ideas logically, making clear connections between them
- Provide and sustain a clear focus or thesis
- Use supporting reasons, examples, and details to develop clearly and logically the ideas presented in the essay
- Demonstrate facility in the use of language and the ability to use a variety of sentence structures
- Construct effective sentences that are generally free of errors in standard written English

## Sample Test Questions

The sample questions that follow illustrate the types of multiple-choice questions in the test. They are not, however, representative of the entire scope of the test in either content or difficulty. Answers with explanations follow the questions.

Part A: Usage  
(Suggested time – 10 minutes)

**Directions:** In each of the sentences below, four portions are underlined and lettered. Read each sentence and decide whether any of the underlined parts contains a grammatical construction, a word use, or an instance of incorrect or omitted punctuation or capitalization that would be inappropriate in carefully written English. If so, note the letter printed beneath the underlined portion and completely fill in the corresponding lettered space on the answer sheet with a heavy, dark mark so that you cannot see the letter.

If there are no errors in the underlined portion, fill in space E. *No sentence has more than one error.*

Remember, try to answer every question.

1. The club members agreed that  
A  
each would contribute ten days of volunteer  
B  
work annually each year at the local hospital.  
C D  
No error  
E
2. The school magazine will print those who win  
A  
prizes for poetry, short stories, and drama;  
B  
nonfiction, however, will not be accepted for  
C D  
publication. No error  
E
3. Plagued by robbers, Paris in 1524 passed an  
A  
ordinance requiring citizens to burn candles in  
B C D  
windows fronting on the streets. No error  
E
4. For a writer, the rarest privilege is not merely  
A B  
to describe her country and time but to help  
C  
shape it. No error  
D E

Part B: Sentence Correction  
(Suggested time – 20 minutes)

**Directions:** In each of the following sentences, some part of the sentence or the entire sentence is underlined. Beneath each sentence you will find five ways of writing the underlined part. The first of these repeats the original, but the other four are different. If you think the original sentence is better than any of the suggested changes, you should choose A; otherwise you should mark one of the other choices. Select the best answer and completely fill in the corresponding lettered space on the answer sheet with a heavy, dark mark so that you cannot see the letter.

This is a test of correctness and effectiveness of expression. In choosing answers, follow the requirements of standard written English; that is, pay attention to acceptable usage in grammar, diction (choice of words), sentence construction, and punctuation. Choose the answer that expresses most effectively what is presented in the original sentence; this answer should be clear and exact, without awkwardness, ambiguity, or redundancy.

Remember, try to answer every question.

5. Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke out passionately for the poor of all races.
- (A) spoke out passionately
  - (B) spoke out passionate
  - (C) did spoke out passionately
  - (D) has spoke out passionately
  - (E) had spoken out passionate
6. The agent, passing through the crowd without being noticed by hardly anyone.
- (A) The agent, passing through the crowd without being noticed by hardly anyone.
  - (B) The agent passed through the crowd without hardly being noticed by anyone.
  - (C) The agent's passing through the crowd was not hardly noticed by anyone.
  - (D) No one hardly noticed how the agent passed through the crowd.
  - (E) The agent was hardly noticed as she passed through the crowd.
7. As a consumer, one can accept the goods offered to us or we can reject them, but we cannot determine their quality or change the system's priorities.
- (A) As a consumer, one can accept
  - (B) We the consumer either can accept
  - (C) The consumer can accept
  - (D) Either the consumer accepts
  - (E) As consumers, we can accept
8. The fact that some mushrooms are perfectly safe for one person but not for another probably accounts for differences of opinion as to which species are edible and which are not.
- (A) but not for another
  - (B) but not for the other
  - (C) and not for the other
  - (D) and unsafe for some other
  - (E) and some are unsafe for others

## Answers

**1.** The error in this sentence occurs at C. The phrase “annually each year” is redundant, since “annually” and “each year” convey the same information. The sentence would be correct with **either** “annually” **or** “each year” at C. The error is one of diction, or word choice.

**2.** The error occurs at A. In the phrase “those who win,” the pronoun “those” indicates the people who win prizes. But the magazine will not print the people who win; it will print what the winners have written, or the submissions of those who win prizes. The error in this question is the illogical use of a pronoun.

Note that at B you are required to determine whether a punctuation mark—the underlined semicolon—is correct or incorrect. In this instance, the semicolon is used correctly.

**3.** Because this sentence contains no grammatical, idiomatic, logical, or structural errors, the best answer is E. Note that at B you are required to determine whether the underlined letter—a lowercase o—needs to be capitalized, and that at D you are asked to determine whether the sentence requires some mark of punctuation in the underlined space. In this sentence, the use of the lowercase o is correct because “ordinance” is not a proper noun, and no comma is required after “candles.”

**4.** The error in this sentence occurs at D. The pronoun “it” is incorrectly used to refer to two nouns, “country” and “time.” The pronoun required here is the plural “them.”

**5.** This sentence presents no problem of structure or logic. The verb tense is correct, and the use of the adverb “passionately” is also correct in this context. In choice B, the verb form is correct, but the adjective “passionate” is incorrectly used instead of the adverb. Choices C and E also use the incorrect adjective, and choice D, although it uses the correct adverb, introduces an incorrect verb form, “has spoke out.” Thus, the best answer is A.

**6.** Choice A presents two major problems: it is not a complete sentence, and the phrase “without . . . hardly” is not idiomatic. Although choices B, C, and D are complete sentences, each uses “hardly” in an equally unidiomatic construction. E, the best answer, is an idiomatic and complete sentence.

**7.** The problem in this sentence concerns parallelism and agreement in pronoun number. The underlined portion of the sentence uses the singular pronoun “one,” which correctly agrees with its antecedent, “consumer.” However, in the portion of the sentence that is not underlined, the first person plural, “we,” is used as the subject in the second part of the sentence. To create a sentence free of agreement faults, you must look for a choice that contains both “we” and the plural of “consumer.” E is the only one that corrects the agreement problem and has a phrase parallel to “we can reject them.”

**8.** Choice A, the best answer, is both logical and idiomatic: the use of the construction “safe for one person but not for another” expresses an opposition between the two different effects some mushrooms have on people in general. Choices B, C, and D change “another” to “the other” (B and C) or to “some other” (D), thus suggesting incorrectly that one particular person is being discussed. In choices C, D, and E the appropriate conjunction “but” is changed to “and.” Choice E changes the meaning of the sentence by introducing a new subject, “some (other mushrooms).”

## Sample Test Questions

This section presents an essay topic and sample essay responses along with the standards used in scoring the essays. When you read these sample responses, keep in mind that they will be less polished than if they had been developed at home, edited, and carefully presented. The examinee does not know what question will be asked and must decide, on the spot, how to respond. Readers take these circumstances into account when scoring the essays; they have been trained to judge the overall quality rather than to attempt to count errors.

Each essay will be scored holistically; that is, on the basis of its total quality. In computing your total PPST Writing score, the essay score is combined with the score for the multiple-choice part of the Writing test.

Readers will assign scores based on the following scoring guide.

## Scoring Guide

6

A 6 essay demonstrates a *high degree of competence* in response to the assignment but may have a few minor errors.

An essay in this category

- states or clearly implies the writer's position or thesis
- organizes and develops ideas logically, making insightful connections between them
- clearly explains key ideas, supporting them with well chosen reasons, examples, or details
- displays effective sentence variety
- clearly displays facility in the use of language
- is generally free from errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

5

A 5 essay demonstrates *clear competence* in response to the assignment but may have minor errors.

An essay in this category

- states or clearly implies the writer's position or thesis
- organizes and develops ideas clearly, making connections between them
- explains key ideas, supporting them with relevant reasons, examples, or details
- displays some sentence variety
- displays facility in the use of language
- is generally free from errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

4

A 4 essay demonstrates *competence* in response to the assignment.

An essay in this category

- states or implies the writer's position or thesis
- shows control in the organization and development of ideas

- explains some key ideas, supporting them with adequate reasons, examples, or details
- displays adequate use of language
- shows control of grammar, usage, and mechanics, but may display errors

3

A 3 essay demonstrates *some competence* in response to the assignment but is obviously flawed.

An essay in this category reveals *one or more* of the following weaknesses:

- limited in stating or implying a position or thesis
- limited control in the organization and development of ideas
- inadequate reasons, examples, or details to explain key ideas
- an accumulation of errors in the use of language
- an accumulation of errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

2

A 2 essay is *seriously flawed*.

An essay in this category reveals one or more of the following weaknesses:

- no clear position or thesis
- weak organization or very little development
- few or no relevant reasons, examples, or details
- frequent serious errors in the use of language
- frequent serious errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

1

A 1 essay demonstrates *fundamental deficiencies* in writing skills.

An essay in this category

- contains serious and persistent writing errors or
- is incoherent or
- is undeveloped

## Sample Essay Topic

**Directions:** You will have 30 minutes to plan and write an essay on the topic specified. Read the topic carefully. You will probably find it best to spend time considering the topic and organizing your thoughts before you begin writing. **DO NOT WRITE ON A TOPIC OTHER THAN THE ONE SPECIFIED. IN ORDER FOR YOUR TEST TO BE SCORED, YOUR RESPONSE MUST BE IN ENGLISH.**

Read the opinion stated below:

“Minimum-wage jobs are a ticket to nowhere. They are boring and repetitive and teach employees little or nothing of value. Minimum-wage employers take advantage of people because they need a job.”

Discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with this opinion. Support your views with specific reasons and examples from your own experience, observations, or reading.

### Sample Essay That Received a Score of 5:

I completely disagree with the opinion that, “minimum-wage jobs are a ticket to nowhere.” I feel this way because I know from personal experience that you can learn a lot about life, about people, and about how to work hard and work your way up.

I worked as a nursing assistant in a rest home starting at minimum wage. I didn’t take this job to take advantage of people because I needed a job, but because I wanted to help people, to take care of the elderly, and to get some experience in the nursing field. I would have took the job even if it was volunteer work.

Being a nursing assistant is by no means boring or repetitive. Every day you do something different and you are faced with new problems. You never have time to sit down and relax or be lazy. When I get to work, I’m actually excited to find out what interesting things are going to happen.

Working in a nursing home has taught me many things. I have learned to work hard and budget my paychecks. However, the most important things I’ve learned are things I’ve learned from residents. I’ve learned to respect my elders and that old people are very wise and have experienced life. They have taught me many things that I wouldn’t have learned otherwise. Minimum-wage jobs definitely are worthwhile. I have learned to work hard and I have learned about elderly people. I learned that you can love your job, even if you aren’t the highest paid individual. One of the most important things I’ve learned is that I want to be a nurse. If I hadn’t taken this minimum-wage job, I wouldn’t have known that I wanted to be a nurse, and I wouldn’t be able to help people and save lives like I will in the future.

### Sample Essay That Received a Score of 2:

Minimum-wage jobs are a ticket to nowhere. They are boring and repetitive and teach little or nothing of value. Minimum-wage employers take advantage of people because they need a job.

When I worked at a fast food restaurant at the mall I received minimum wage. All they do is see how much work they can get out of you for as little pay as possible. Many minimum-wage employers are harder on you in places like that than they are at high paying jobs. Yes, minimum-wage jobs are boring because you do the same thing over and over which means that you learn little skill from working there.

## Essay Topics

When you take the essay portion of the test, one of the following topics, or a topic similar to the ones listed below, will be presented. You will be asked to discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the opinion stated and to support your position with specific reasons and examples from your own experience, observations, or reading.

1. “Celebrities have a tremendous influence on the young, and for that reason, they have a responsibility to act as role models.”
2. “Our society is overly materialistic. We center our lives on acquiring material things at the expense of such traditional values as family and education.”
3. “Censorship of song lyrics, television shows, and offensive speech is necessary in order to protect the rights of all members of society.”
4. “Young people who attend college immediately after high school often lack a clear sense of direction and seriousness about learning. Before hurrying into college, it’s better to get a taste of the real world by working or serving in the military for a few years.”
5. “Although routines may seem to put us in a rut and stifle creativity, in fact routines make us more efficient and allow creativity to blossom.”
6. “An effective leader of any organization—from the military to businesses to social organizations—is someone who is decisive, acts quickly, and remains committed to certain key principles.”
7. “Advances in computer technology have made the classroom unnecessary, since students and teachers are able to communicate with each other from computer terminals at home or at work.”
8. “Schools should be open for classes all year long.”
9. “Schools should focus more on preparing students for specific careers and vocations, and less on teaching subjects such as literature, art, and history.”
10. “Although the marvels of technology surround us every day, there are moments when we all would give anything to be freed from that technology.”
11. “Colleges should require all students, regardless of their individual majors, to take a common set of required courses.”
12. “Schools should require all students to participate in field trips since these outings are an essential part of the curriculum for all grade levels.”
13. “In order to prepare students to live in a culturally diverse society, schools should formally require all students to study other cultures and societies in depth.”
14. “One clear sign that our society has improved over the past 100 years is the development of disposable products whose convenience has made our lives easier.”
15. “The best way to understand the true nature of a society is to study its dominant trends in art, music, and fashion.”
16. “Because the traditional grading scale of A through F fosters needless competition and pressure, colleges and universities should use a simple pass/fail system.”
17. “To address the problem of chronic truancy, schools should fine the parents of students who are frequently absent from school.”
18. “Studying a foreign language should be a college requirement for anyone planning to be a teacher.”
19. “We are constantly bombarded by advertisements—on television and radio, in newspapers and magazines, on highway signs and the sides of buses. They have become too pervasive. It’s time to put limits on advertising.”
20. “In order to understand other societies, all college students should be required to spend at least one of their undergraduate years studying or working in a foreign country.”
21. “Every member of society should be required before the age of 21 to perform at least one year of community or government service, such as in the Peace Corps, the military, a hospital, the Environmental Conservancy Corps, a rural or inner-city school, or some equivalent organization.”

22. "Citizens of the United States should be allowed to designate how a portion of their tax dollars should be spent."
23. "The only important criterion by which to judge a prospective teacher is his or her ability to get along with the widest possible variety of students."
24. "Rather than relying on taxes, communities should be directly responsible for raising any required funds to pay for all extracurricular public school activities, including after-school sports."
25. "School activities not directly related to course work, such as assemblies and pep rallies, should not be part of the regular school day."
26. "School children should be required to participate in a variety of extracurricular activities so that they can become well-rounded individuals."
27. "All schools should have student dress codes."
28. "It is well within the capability of society to guarantee that all public schools are entirely drug-free."
29. "Opinion polls should not play an important role in the political decision-making process because they indicate only what is popular, not what is the right or wrong position for our leaders to take."
30. "Childhood is a time for studying and playing, not working. Parents should not force their children to do chores."
31. "We are all influenced in lasting ways—whether positive or negative—by the particular kind of community in which we grow up."
32. "Television has had an overwhelmingly negative impact on society."
33. "Grading systems should be replaced with some other method of measuring students' performance because giving grades to students puts too much emphasis on competition and not enough emphasis on learning for its own sake."
34. "Political candidates should not be allowed to use popular actors in their advertising campaigns. Candidates too often win elections because they have actors for friends rather than because they are honestly qualified to represent the public interest."
35. "Television programming should be limited and strictly monitored for offensive content by a governmental supervising agency."
36. "Although we say we value freedom of expression, most of us are not really very tolerant of people who express unpopular ideas or act in nonconforming ways."
37. "Job satisfaction is more important in a career than a high salary and fringe benefits."
38. "College students should not have to decide on a major until after they have taken several classes and examined the various career fields the school has to offer."
39. "Schools should make a greater effort to teach ethics and moral values to students."
40. "Colleges and universities should ban alcoholic beverages on campus, even for students who are of legal drinking age."
41. "Teachers and parents should be more concerned than they are about the gradual trend among high school students toward part-time employment and away from participation in school-sponsored extracurricular activities."
42. "It is the responsibility of the government rather than the individual citizen to find a solution to the growing problem of homelessness in the United States."
43. "Federal regulations should entirely ban all advertising of alcoholic beverages in all media, including television, radio, and magazines."
44. "Schools should put as much emphasis on such subjects as music, physical education, and visual arts as they do on traditional academic courses such as English or math."
45. "Materialism and consumerism have gone too far in American society. We often buy things that we do not need, and we even buy things that we do not especially enjoy."
46. "The failure of public schools is not ruining society. The failure of society has ruined the public schools."
47. "Honesty is universally valued, at least in principle. In practice, however, there are many cases in which governments, businesses, and individuals should not be completely honest."

48. "All employers should institute mandatory drug testing for employees."
49. "All high school students should be required to take some classes in vocational education."
50. "School administrators should regulate student speech in school-sponsored publications."
51. "Computer training should be mandatory for anyone planning to become a teacher, no matter what subject the person will teach."
52. "The world offers us abundant places to learn. We should not expect all of our most important lessons to be learned in the buildings we call schools."
53. "Many public buildings and transportation systems in the United States prohibit or restrict smoking. These restrictions are unfair because they deny smokers their individual rights."
54. "Public schools should be required to offer socially oriented courses, such as sex education and personal finance, because such courses help students cope with problems in society."
55. "Our lives today are too complicated. We try to do too much and, as a result, do few things well."
56. "The United States government has become so corrupt that people who vote in national elections are wasting their time."
57. "The increasing involvement of businesses in the schools, ranging from the establishment of apprenticeships and grants to the donation of equipment and facilities, is a cause for concern because this involvement gives the businesses too much influence over school policy and curriculum."
58. "One of the biggest troubles with colleges is that there are too many distractions."
59. "The best way to improve the quality of public schools in the United States is to institute a national curriculum with national standards so that students, parents, and teachers all across the country know exactly what is expected at each grade level."
60. "Instead of making our lives simpler, computers cause more problems than they solve."
61. "Children learn responsibility and the value of work by being required to do household chores such as making beds, washing dishes, and taking care of pets."
62. "We should ban any speech—whether on the radio, in the movies, on television, or in public places such as college campuses—that encourages violent behavior."
63. "In today's society, the only real function of a college education is to prepare students for a career."
64. "Students suffer from participating in highly competitive extracurricular activities such as debate and sports."
65. "We live in a passive society in which few people take a stand or become involved in social issues."
66. "Students should be required to meet certain academic standards, such as passing all courses or maintaining a 'C' average, in order to participate in extracurricular activities."
67. "Increasing reliance on the use of new technologies in the classroom has distracted from, rather than contributed to, the learning process."
68. "We find comfort among those who agree with us—growth among those who don't."
69. "Film and television studios in the United States nearly always want to dish up a sunny view of life because American audiences would rather not be reminded of problems in society."
70. "Competition is a destructive force in society."
71. "High schools and colleges should require students to perform some kind of community service."



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