

## WRITING TASK

The writing task consists of an essay on a given topic. The score on the writing task constitutes 25% of the Verbal Reasoning score.

The following instructions appear at the beginning of the section:

**This section consists of a writing task.**

The time allotted is 35 minutes.

Read the task carefully and write your essay on the lined answer sheet provided.

The essay must be at least 25 lines long. Do not write an essay that is longer than the number of lines on the answer sheet. If you need scrap paper, use pages 2 and 3 of the test booklet. (This draft will not be marked.) You will not receive an additional answer sheet, nor will you be allowed to replace the one you have.

Use a style that is consistent with academic writing. Make sure your essay is well organized and written in clear, grammatically correct language.

Write the essay in pencil. You may use an eraser.

Make sure that your handwriting is legible and neat.

### WHAT IS ACADEMIC WRITING?

Academic writing is the form of writing used for many high school subjects and is the accepted style for written exercises, tests, papers, and research in institutions of higher education. Academic writing is used to present and discuss ideas. An idea can be an opinion or a description of a phenomenon. The discussion provides details and explanations, and presents supporting arguments, proofs, and conclusions. The structure of an academic text should reflect the way you develop the idea: The different parts of the essay should follow a logical progression, and the connections among various arguments should be clear. Precise, clear language and a consistent register are needed for good academic writing.

An academic text deals with a given topic in a factual, methodical and critical manner. It makes no difference what idea you choose to express as long as it is well reasoned, well supported, and clearly

worded. Writing in a personal vein, presenting personal experiences, and using emotional terms are generally inappropriate for academic writing. The author's "personal voice" is reflected in the stance that he adopts and in his ability to provide an in-depth explanation and to discuss the idea methodically, using a critical approach that takes into account and contends with other views on the topic.

### **HOW MUCH SHOULD YOU WRITE, AND IN WHICH LANGUAGE?**

You are allotted one sheet of paper with 50 lines for writing the essay. Your essay must be at least 25 lines long. Because the sheets are scanned electronically, write only on the lines themselves and not in the margins. Anything written outside the lines will not be read. If your essay is shorter than the required number of lines, points will be deducted from your score (see essay scoring guide, p. 19-21).

In NITE's experience, given the time allotted for the writing task, a good essay in average-size handwriting is generally 30-40 lines long.

In general, you must write the essay in the language of the test (for example, if the language of the test is French, the essay must be written in French). However, in the Combined/English test, your essay may be written in one of the following languages: Hebrew, English, Russian, German, Amharic, Italian, Hungarian, Portuguese or Dutch.

### **HOW ARE THE WRITING TASKS MARKED?**

The writing tasks are evaluated by carefully selected, experienced raters who have received comprehensive professional training designed to ensure that their evaluations are objective and fair. Two raters independently evaluate each essay. Each rater evaluates the essay in terms of both content and language. Each of these components is rated on a scale of 1 (very poor) to 6 (excellent). The writing task score is the sum of the evaluations of the two raters for the two components. In the case of a major discrepancy between raters' scores, the essay will be evaluated by a third rater.

An essay that is not a reasonable fulfillment of the task (for example, an essay that does not relate to the assigned topic or that is not written in Hebrew, English, Russian, German, Amharic, Italian, Hungarian, Portuguese or Dutch) is given a score of 0 in both the content and language components.

The evaluation takes into account the limited amount of time allotted for the writing task, which may prevent examinees from fully demonstrating their writing ability. Raters are therefore instructed to view the essay as a first draft only, and evaluate it accordingly.

### **HOW IS THE CONTENT COMPONENT EVALUATED?**

In evaluating content, raters examine the extent to which the writing task focuses on the assigned topic and the clarity of the ideas expressed in it. Raters examine the various arguments presented in terms of their lucidity, logical connections, and whether they support the ideas expressed in the essay. In addition, raters examine the extent to which the essay is free of unnecessary repetitions and vague statements, and the degree to which it demonstrates critical thinking. The latter includes distinguishing between opinion and fact when examining issues from several perspectives and contending with opposing viewpoints.

### **HOW IS THE LANGUAGE COMPONENT EVALUATED?**

In evaluating language, raters consider wording, writing style and language level. They examine the degree to which the essay is written in an academic style, clarity of language, precision of word usage, richness of vocabulary, grammatical correctness, and the use of linguistic tools to organize the writing, such as conjunctions, transition sentences and correct paragraphing. Imprecise choice of a word or expression, or using a word in an inappropriate context could affect your score on the language component. Use only words and expressions that accurately convey the ideas, arguments and reasons that you wish to present in the essay. Avoid flowery and needlessly difficult language.

A sample scoring guide used by raters to evaluate the essays is found on pages 19-21.

## ■ SAMPLE WRITING TASK

In the past, the voting age in general elections in most countries was twenty-one, but in the last several decades there has been a worldwide trend to reduce the voting age to eighteen. Some countries, including Israel, have introduced bills to reduce the voting age from eighteen to seventeen, and even to sixteen, and several countries have already done so. The public discourse on reducing the voting age centers on questions such as: At what age should a person be entitled to choose the government officials whose decisions have a direct bearing on his life? Are teenagers mature enough to make decisions that affect the entire population? What are the implications of including teenagers in the voting population and involving them in the affairs of state and in the political system in general?

**In your opinion, should the voting age be reduced? Give reasons. You may make use of the questions posed in the text.**

To summarize: in terms of context, a good writing task is constructed around a thesis or several related ideas that directly address all elements of the task. The central idea must be clearly worded, and all other ideas and arguments in the essay must relate to it. The components of the essay must be connected to one another and should not be presented in random order. The tools used to develop the ideas – reasoning, examples, details, expansion of the topic, description, comparison and contrast, expressing reservations – must fit this structure and provide support for the central thesis. A considered, comprehensive grasp of the topic should be evident in your writing.

In your essay, do not stray from the assigned topic. Avoid unnecessary repetitions; gaps in transitions from one subject to another; unsuitable examples; inadequate explanations; illogical, incorrect or fabricated information; and incomplete or implied ideas.

A good essay is written in clear, fluent language, and the wording is to the point and consistent with academic writing. There must be a progression of ideas, presented in a uniform style. The division into paragraphs should reflect the ideas presented in the essay, the choice of words must be accurate, and the grammar and syntax must be correct.

Avoid writing in a personal, emotional or narrative style, or merely presenting a list of points. Refrain from excessive use of rhetorical devices, such as asking rhetorical questions, addressing the reader, or appealing to the reader's emotions. Avoid excessive use of both flowery, ornate language and slang.



## INSTRUCTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE WRITING TASK

### BEFORE THE TEST

Writing ability develops gradually over the course of your school studies, through reading and practice. The best way to achieve high-level writing is by means of gradual work over a period of years. However, intensive practice before the test is very important and can improve your performance. Therefore, we recommend that you write several practice essays before the test. You can use the sample writing tasks that appear on pages 18-19. When practicing, pay attention to the time limit (35 minutes) and the required length of the essay (25-50 lines).

You will find a sample essay sheet on page 237 on the practice test to write a practice essay of the required length. Additional copies of the essay sheet can be printed out from NITE's website.

## DURING THE TEST

- Read the entire task carefully. Make sure you understand all the information presented in it and exactly what is being asked of you.
- Devote the first few minutes to formulating ideas and planning the structure of the essay.
- Make sure that you write in a style that is consistent with academic writing.
- Write only on the printed lines of the answer sheet. Do not write in the margins. If you need scrap paper, use the pages allotted for this purpose in the test booklet.
- Write in pencil only.
- Write as legibly and neatly as possible.

## ■ PRACTICE WRITING TASKS

### TASK 1

The salary of David Letterman, host of a famous American television talk show, is 700 times greater than the salary of a stagehand on his show.

**In your opinion, is this huge difference in salary justified? Support your position.**

### TASK 2

Regulations have recently been announced which significantly raise the price of cigarettes and impose further restrictions on smoking in public areas. Following the announcement of the regulations, newspaper reporter Shai Goldin wrote: "I am not a heavy smoker. More precisely, there are days on which I do not deserve to be called a smoker at all. I smoke most of my cigarettes in the building's parking lot – a 'smokers' prison' that I eventually became fond of – and in the open air on the steps of my house. I have learned to accept the fact that smoking bothers many people around me. I respect this. But I do not understand why I have to pay so much more for cigarettes. Neither do I understand why I have to feel like a wanted criminal every time I light up in the street, where car exhaust fumes merrily blacken the lungs of one and all; nor why a policeman, whose job is to ensure my safety, should use his limited resources to chase after me."

**In your opinion, are smokers indeed persecuted, as Goldin claims?**

### TASK 3

One of the important issues that arises in the relationship between government and the media is whether there is a need for a government-funded television channel. Opponents argue that a public television channel could lead to political pressure affecting news coverage of government activities. They recommend instead a private, commercial television channel that would make money primarily from advertising, on the assumption that such a channel would not be subject to illegitimate political pressure.

I disagree with these views. In my opinion, in a democratic society it is in the public's best interest to have a strong, independent public broadcasting channel that can successfully resist political and economic pressures. Media that are entirely commercially funded cannot afford to produce unprofitable broadcasts, even if such broadcasts are essential to the democratic process and to society in general. Studies conducted in the USA and Germany show that private channels tend to broadcast news programs that are less comprehensive and of lower quality because the demand for entertainment is always greater than the demand for news. A private commercial channel will be controlled by economic factors aimed at profit-making and will not necessarily be concerned about what is in the public interest, that is, the right to news coverage that is as reliable and accurate as possible.

(Based on an article by Ehud Asheri.)

**Choose one of the following public services – health or education. Give your opinion about whether or not the public service that you chose should become a private-commercial service. Give reasons.**

### SAMPLE GUIDE FOR WRITING TASK RATERS

**Rate each writing task in terms of two components – content and language.**

**Rate each component independently.**

**Rate content according to the following criteria: the existence of a clear, well-supported idea or central theme that is relevant to the task; the strength of the connection between the idea and its development; focus and coherence of content; evidence of critical thinking.**

**Rate language according to the following criteria: clarity; consistency with academic writing; semantic precision; correct grammar; use of linguistic organizational tools; syntactic variety.**

**Rate each component on a scale of 1-6. Use the following table to score a writing task in each of the components.**

#### **Note:**

- In many cases, none of the descriptions will completely fit the essay you are rating. In such cases choose the description that most closely fits the essay.
- An essay that is not a reasonable fulfillment of the writing task – one that does not relate to the assigned topic, that is written in languages other than those listed on p. 16, or that is less than ten lines long – should receive a score of 0 in both components.
- Evaluation of essays that deviate from the required length (25-50 lines):
  - \* Essays of more than 50 lines: The part of the essay extending beyond the 50 lines on the essay sheet should not be read and should not be taken into account in the evaluation.
  - \* Essay of less than 25 lines: Essays of 20-24 lines – deduct 1 point from the language component. Essays of 10-19 lines – deduct 2 points from the language component.

CONTENT					
1 - Very Poor	2 - Poor	3 - Low Average	4 - High Average	5 - Good	6 - Excellent
No main idea or central thesis; OR little relevance between the essay's content and the writing task	Main idea or central thesis is unsupported and undeveloped; OR insufficient relevance between the essay's content and the writing task	Main idea or central thesis is undersupported and underdeveloped; OR essay's content not completely relevant to the writing task	Main idea or central thesis is fairly well-developed and fairly well-supported	Main idea or central thesis is well-developed and well-supported	Main thesis or central idea is exceptionally well-developed and well-supported
Inadequate content	Poorly developed thesis; OR little connection between the idea and the way it is developed	Inadequate connection between the thesis and the way it is developed (inadequate explanations, unconvincing arguments, inappropriate examples)	Development is relevant to the thesis (mostly adequate explanations, fairly convincing arguments, appropriate examples)	Development of the thesis is relevant and detailed (full explanations, convincing arguments, appropriate examples)	Development of the thesis is relevant, insightful and detailed (full explanations, convincing and varied arguments, appropriate examples)
Lacks focus and coherence (jumps from one idea to the next without any continuity of thought, repetitive)	Poorly focused and little coherence (very little continuity of thought, unnecessary repetitions)	Insufficient focus and coherence (little continuity of thought)	Fairly well-focused and coherent content (continuity of thought maintained throughout most of the essay, connections among the ideas in the essay are generally precise)	Well-focused and coherent content (continuity of thought maintained throughout the entire essay, connections among the ideas in the essay are precise)	Extremely well-focused and coherent content (continuity of thought maintained throughout the entire essay, connections among the ideas in the essay are precise and exhaustive)
No evidence of critical thinking*	Very little evidence of critical thinking*	Insufficient evidence of critical thinking*	Adequate evidence of critical thinking*	Impressive evidence of critical thinking*	Very impressive evidence of critical thinking*

\* Precise definition of the issue, distinction between opinion and fact, examination of issues from several perspectives, contending with opposing viewpoints

## LANGUAGE

1 - Very Poor	2 - Poor	3 - Low Average	4 - High Average	5 - Good	6 - Excellent
Inarticulate and very basic use of language	Inadequate, unclear language	Language not sufficiently clear	Fairly clear language	Clear, fluent language	Clear, fluent, rich language
Wording is not consistent with academic writing	Wording is largely inconsistent with academic writing	Wording is often not consistent with academic writing	Wording is generally consistent with academic writing	Wording is consistent with academic writing	Wording is consistent with academic writing
Many examples of incorrect word choice	Frequent incorrect word choice	Several imprecise word choices	Generally precise word choice	Precise word choice	Precise word choice
Very many errors in grammar and syntax	Significant number of errors in grammar and syntax	Several errors in grammar and syntax	Very few errors in grammar and syntax	Correct grammar and syntax	Correct grammar and syntax
Very basic sentence structure	No complexity or variety in sentence structure	Sentence structure generally lacking in complexity and variety	Some effective use of fairly complex syntactic structure	Many examples of effective use of complex sentence structure	Extensive use of complex and varied sentence structure, which helps convey the meaning of the text
No use of linguistic tools to organize the writing; OR incorrect use of such tools*	Very little use of linguistic tools to organize the writing; OR mostly incorrect use of such tools*	Little use of linguistic tools to organize the writing; OR several instances of improper use of such tools*	Several examples of the use of linguistic tools to organize the writing*	Many examples of the use of linguistic tools to organize the writing*	Extensive, varied use of linguistic tools to organize the writing*

\* Conjunctions, paragraphing