Writing Sample
Guidelines
Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT®)
From the OWU Writing Center in the Sagan Academic Resource Center
Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT®)  
Writing Sample Guidelines  

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Essay at a Glance
The Analytical Writing Assessment (AWA) of the GMAT® consists of two 30-minute writing tasks—Analysis of an Issue and Analysis of an Argument that measure your ability to think critically, write analytically, and clearly communicate ideas. The Analysis of an Issue task tests your ability to analyze the complexities of an issue and to take a position supported by reasons and examples. The Analysis of an Argument section tests your ability to formulate an appropriate, constructive critique of a conclusion based on a specific line of reasoning.

How important is the essay portion of the GMAT ®?
Each school values the GMAT/AWA differently. Many schools use the AWA in making admissions decisions and, in some cases, in placing students in appropriate writing-intensive courses. Top business schools tend to place higher value on the AWA than some other schools. Admissions offices at many schools use the AWA score as a tie-breaker in difficult admissions decisions. Applicants should check with individual schools about the importance they place on the GMAT Writing Assessment.

How is the AWA of the GMAT ® scored?
The AWA score is an average of two independent ratings for each section. One rating is by a reader, usually a college faculty member, and the other by a computer-based essay-scoring program. If ratings differ by more than one point, a third human reader evaluates the essay. Scores range from 0 to 6 in half point intervals. According to MBA.com, The Official GMAT Website, the mean score on the AWA in 2009 was 4.4. (http://www.mba.com/mba/thegmat/gmatscoresandscorereports/whatyourpercentilerankingmeans.htm)

Description of Essay Prompts
The prompts concern issues of general interest related to business or other subjects. You do not need any special or specific knowledge.

Analysis of an Issue: For the Analysis of an Issue section, you will analyze an issue and explain your point of view. Consider various perspectives, and provide reasons or examples from your experience, observations, or reading to develop your position.

Analysis of an Argument: For the Analysis of an Argument section, you will analyze the reasoning behind a given argument and critique that argument. You will not present your own views.

Organization
1. Try a simple organization structure with a clear introduction, at least 2 or 3 body paragraphs, and a conclusion.
2. In the intro, try a pattern in which you:
   a. Make a general statement about the given topic
b. Provide 1 or 2 sentences that focus on what you will discuss  
c. End the intro with 1 or 2 sentences about the specific details or particular reasons/examples you will present to support your position or analysis  
3. Provide at least one specific example for each aspect of the topic you cover. Signal examples with labels such as “for instance,” “for example,” or “to illustrate” so the readers (especially the computer evaluator) can identify them.  
4. In the conclusion, consider a formal summary or a wrap-up of your argument.  

Style Guide/Writing Suggestions  
1. Plan the structure: Before writing, plan and set up the structure of the essay  
2. Signal transitions: Use transitional words and phrases such as "first", ‘on the other hand,” “therefore" and "because" so the computer can identify concepts between and within the paragraphs.  
3. Conform to expected conventions of academic analytical writing: The computer program cannot appreciate individuality, humor, sarcasm or figurative language. Keep the argument and style straightforward and informative.  
4. Don’t get too personal: In the Analysis of an Issue essay, avoid presenting personal political opinions or too much detail from your personal life. Examples from your personal experience are acceptable.  
5. State your critique: In the Analysis of Argument section, state your critique clearly. Label logical problems or fallacies with terms such as such as unwarranted assumption or equivocation.  
6. For the Analysis of an Argument, be sure to discuss the argument rather than present your opinion of the topic: Consider the following questions: What questionable assumptions underlie the thinking behind the argument? What alternative explanations or counterexamples might weaken the conclusion? What sort of evidence could help strengthen or refute the argument?  
7. Save time to edit and proofread: Content and organization are most important, but readers expect essays to be free of major errors in syntax, diction, grammar, and mechanics.  

Sample Essays  
Following are examples of successful essays plus prompts and explanations of scores.  

[The sample essays below are from the Analytical Writing Assessment section of MBA.com, The Official GMAT Website at http://www.mba.com/mba/thegmat/teststructureandoverview/analyticalwritingassessmentsection ]  

Sample Essay I: Analysis of an Issue  

Prompt: "People often complain that products are not made to last. They feel that making products that wear out fairly quickly wastes both natural and human resources. What they fail to see, however, is that such manufacturing practices keep costs down for the consumer and stimulate demand.”
Directions: Which do you find more compelling, the complaint about products that do not last or the response to it? Explain your position, using relevant reasons and/or examples from your own experience, observations, or reading.

Response: Many people feel that products are not made to last, and correspondingly, many natural and human resources are wasted. On the other hand, it can be noted that such manufacturing practices keep costs down and hence stimulate demand. In this discussion, I shall present arguments favoring the former statement and refuting the latter statement.

Products that are not made to last waste a great deal of natural and human resources. The exact amount of wasted natural resources depends on the specific product. For example, in the automobile industry, the Yugo is the classic example of an underpriced vehicle that was not made to last. Considering that the average Yugo had (not "has," since they are no longer produced!) a life expectancy of two years and 25,000 miles, it was a terrible waste.

Automobile industry standards today create vehicles that are warranted for about five years and 50,000 miles. By producing cheap Yugos that last half as long as most cars are warranted, the Yugo producer is wasting valuable natural resources. These same resources could be used by Ford or Toyota to produce an Escort or Tercel that will last twice as long, thereby reducing the usage of natural resources by a factor of two.

Human resources in this example are also wasteful. On the production side, manufacturers of a poor-quality automobile, such as the Yugo, get no personal or professional satisfaction from the fact that their product is the worst automobile in the United States. This knowledge adversely affects the productivity of the Yugo workers.

Conversely, the workers at the Saturn plants constantly receive positive feedback on their successful products. Saturn prides itself with its reputation for quality and innovation—as is seen in its recent massive recall to fix a defect. This recall was handled so well that Saturn's image was actually bolstered. Had a recall occurred at a Yugo plant, the bad situation would have been even worse.

Another factor in the human resources area is the reaction by the consumer. A great deal of human resources have been wasted by Yugo owners waiting for the dreaded tow truck to show up to haul away the Yugo carcass. Any vehicle owner who is uncertain of his/her vehicle's performance at 7 a.m., as he/she is about to drive to work, senses a great deal of despair. This is a great waste of human resources for the consumer.

While the consumer senses the waste of natural and human resources in a poor quality product, so does the manufacturer. People who argue that low quality manufacturing processes keep costs low for the consumer and hence stimulate demand should look at the Yugo example. In the mid-1980s, the Yugo was by far the cheapest car in the United States, at $3,995. By 1991, the Yugo was no longer sold here and was synonymous with the word "lemon."

Score Explanation for Response I:
The following features earned this essay a score of 6:

- The first paragraph restates the prompt, presents an opposite view, and states the writer’s claim and position
- One specific, detailed, extended example illustrates both sides of the topic
- Facts and details support the writer’s initial claim
- Effective sentence variety and accomplished vocabulary
- Confident tone and presentation of support for the claim
Sample Essay II: Analysis of an Argument

Prompt: The following appeared in the editorial section of a monthly business news magazine: "Most companies would agree that as the risk of physical injury occurring on the job increases, the wages paid to employees should also increase. Hence it makes financial sense for employers to make the workplace safer: they could thus reduce their payroll expenses and save money."

Directions: Discuss how well reasoned you find this argument. In your discussion be sure to analyze the line of reasoning and the use of evidence in the argument. For example, you may need to consider what questionable assumptions underlie the thinking and what alternative explanations or counterexamples might weaken the conclusion. You can also discuss what sort of evidence would strengthen or refute the argument, what changes in the argument would make it more logically sound, and what, if anything, would help you better evaluate its conclusion.

Response: This argument states that it makes financial sense for employers to make the workplace safer because by making the workplace safer then lower wages could be paid to employees. This conclusion is based on the premise that as the list of physical injury increases, the wages paid to employees should also increase. However, there are several assumptions that may not necessarily apply to this argument. For example, the costs associated with making the workplace safe must outweigh the increased payroll expenses due to hazardous conditions. Also, one must look at the plausability of improving the work environment. And finally, because most companies agree that as the risk of injury increases so will wages doesn't necessarily mean that the all companies which have hazardous work environments agree.

The first issue to be addressed is whether increased labor costs justify large capital expenditures to improve the work environment. Clearly one could argue that if making the workplace safe would cost an exorbitant amount of money in comparison to leaving the workplace as is and paying slightly increased wages than it would not make sense to improve the work environment. For example, if making the workplace safe would cost $100 million versus additional payroll expenses of only $5,000 per year, it would make financial sense to simply pay the increased wages. No business or business owner with any sense would pay all that extra money just to save a couple dollars and improve employee health and relations. To consider this, a cost benefit analysis must be made. I also feel that although a cost benefit analysis should be the determining factor with regard to these decisions making financial sense, it may not be the determining factor with regard to making social, moral and ethical sense.

This argument also relies on the idea that companies solely use financial sense in analysing improving the work environment. This is not the case. Companies look at other considerations such as the negative social ramifications of high on-job injuries. For example, Toyota spends large amounts of money improving its environment because while its goal is to be profitable, it also prides itself on high employee morale and an almost perfectly safe work
environment. However, Toyota finds that it can do both, as by improving employee health and employee relations they are guaranteed a more motivated staff, and hence a more efficient staff; this guarantees more money for the business as well as more safety for the employees.

Finally, one must understand that not all work environments can be made safer. For example, in the case of coal mining, a company only has limited ways of making the work environment safe. While companies may be able to ensure some safety precautions, they may not be able to provide all the safety measures necessary. In other words, a mining company has limited ability to control the air quality within a coal mine and therefore it cannot control the risk of employees getting blacklung. In other words, regardless of the intent of the company, some jobs are simply dangerous in nature.

In conclusion, while at first it may seem to make financial sense to improve the safety of the work environment sometimes it truly does not make financial sense. Furthermore, financial sense may not be the only issue a company faces. Other types of analyses must be made such as the social ramifications of an unsafe work environment and the overall ability of a company to improve that environment (i.e., coal mine). Before any decision is made, all this things must be considered, not simply the reduction of payroll expenses.

Score Explanation for Response II:
The following features earned this essay a score of 6:

- The clear, straightforward opening paragraph restates the argument, identifies the premise and assumptions that underlie the conclusion, and states the writer’s critique and reasons for it
- Two compelling examples illustrate and support the writer’s analysis
- Effective critique based on concrete evidence
- Transition words and signals (“the first issue,” “finally,” “however,” “in conclusion,” “furthermore”) show the steps of the analysis of the argument and guide the organization
- Very effective variety in sentence length and structure
- Accomplished command of the language with only a few minor errors in expression

Practice Prompts
Below are some topics for you to write about for practice. At first, try writing without time limits. Follow the organization patterns and suggestions above. After you have written an untimed response or two, try writing within the time limits imposed by the test. For feedback and suggestions for improvement, schedule a meeting with a Writing Center Instructor. You can also evaluate your own essays by comparing them with the successful essays above.

[The Graduate Management Admission Council (GMAC) draws the AWA questions from a pool of 275 questions that are published yearly and available free of charge from the GMAC's official GMAT website (www.mba.com). The following samples were drawn from this pool.]

Issue Questions
A direct link to the current pool of Issue topics is here: Analysis of an Issue Topics.

“In some countries, television and radio programs are carefully censored for offensive language and behavior. In other countries, there is little or no censorship.” In your view, to what extent
should government or any other group be able to censor television or radio programs? Explain, giving relevant reasons and/or examples to support your position.

“It is unrealistic to expect individual nations to make, independently, the sacrifices necessary to conserve energy. International leadership and worldwide cooperation are essential if we expect to protect the world’s energy resources for future generations.” Discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the opinion stated above. Support your views with reasons and/or examples from your own experience, observations, or reading.

“Corporations and other businesses should try to eliminate the many ranks and salary grades that classify employees according to their experience and expertise. A ‘flat’ organizational structure is more likely to encourage collegiality and cooperation among employees.” Discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the opinion stated above. Support your views with reasons and/or examples from your own experience, observations, or reading.

“There is only one definition of success—to be able to spend your life in your own way.” To what extent do you agree or disagree with this definition of success? Support your position by using reasons and examples from your reading, your own experience, or your observation of others.

“For hundreds of years, the monetary system of most countries has been based on the exchange of metal coins and printed pieces of paper. However, because of recent developments in technology, the international community should consider replacing the entire system of coins and paper with a system of electronic accounts of credits and debits.” Discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the opinion stated above. Support your views with reasons and/or examples from your own experience, observations, or reading.

Analysis of an Argument
A direct link to the current pool of Argument topics is here: Analysis of an Argument Topics

Each question is followed by this statement:

Discuss how well reasoned you find this argument. In your discussion be sure to analyze the line of reasoning and the use of evidence in the argument. For example, you may need to consider what questionable assumptions underlie the thinking and what alternative explanations or counterexamples might weaken the conclusion. You can also discuss what sort of evidence would strengthen or refute the argument, what changes in the argument would make it more logically sound, and what, if anything, would help you better evaluate its conclusion.

Prompts:
The following appeared in an announcement issued by the publisher of The Mercury, a weekly newspaper: “Since a competing lower-priced newspaper, The Bugle, was started five years ago, The Mercury’s circulation has declined by 10,000 readers. The best way to get more people to read The Mercury is to reduce its price below that of The Bugle, at least until circulation increases to former levels. The increased circulation of The Mercury will attract more businesses to buy advertising space in the paper.” Discuss how well reasoned . . . etc.

The following appeared in a report presented for discussion at a meeting of the directors of a company that manufactures parts for heavy machinery: “The falling revenues that the company is experiencing coincide with delays in manufacturing. These delays, in turn, are due in large part to poor planning in purchasing metals. Consider further that the manager of the department that handles purchasing of raw materials has an excellent background in general business, psychology, and sociology, but knows little about the properties of metals. The company should, therefore, move the purchasing manager to the sales department and bring in a scientist from the research division to be manager of the purchasing department.” Discuss how well reasoned . . . etc.

The following appeared as part of an article in a magazine devoted to regional life: “Corporations should look to the city of Helios when seeking new business opportunities or a new location. Even in the recent recession, Helios’s unemployment rate was lower than the regional average. It is the industrial center of the region, and historically it has provided more than its share of the region’s manufacturing jobs. In addition, Helios is attempting to expand its economic base by attracting companies that focus on research and development of innovative technologies.” Discuss how well reasoned . . . etc.

Sources

