

GMAC Business Writing Assessment Guide

The GMAC™ Business Writing Assessment (BWA) consists of one 30-minute writing task that will measure your analysis, reasoning, and written communication skills. In this assessment, you must read a brief argument, analyze the reasoning behind it, and then write a critique of the argument. You are not asked to state your opinion but rather to analyze the one given. For example, you may consider what questionable assumptions underlie the author's thinking, what alternative explanations or counterexamples might weaken the conclusion, or what sort of evidence could help strengthen or refute the argument. You will use the computer keyboard to type your response.

You will be able to take notes when planning your response in the online question notepad and/or on your own physical whiteboard that meets the specified requirements. It is important that you plan carefully before you begin writing. Read the specific analytical writing task several times to make sure you understand exactly what is expected. Think about how you might present your analysis. You may want to sketch an outline to help you plan and organize. Keep in mind the 30-minute time limit as you plan your response—keep your analysis brief enough to allow for plenty of time to write a first draft, read it over carefully, and make any necessary corrections or revisions before you run out of time. As you write, try to keep your language clear, your sentences concise, and the flow of your ideas logical. State your premise clearly at the beginning, and make sure you present a strong conclusion at the end.

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What is Measured

The Business Writing Assessment is designed as a direct measure of your ability to communicate important ideas critically and concisely through your writing, beyond traditional application materials. More specifically, the task tests your ability to formulate an appropriate and constructive critique of a prescribed conclusion based upon a specific line of thinking.

The argument that you will analyze may concern a topic of general interest, possibly related to business, or to a variety of other subjects. It is important to note, however, that no question presupposes any specific knowledge of business or other specific content areas. Only your capacity to write analytically and synthesize and convey complex ideas is assessed.

Each assessment is evaluated using a standardized rubric, scoring in one-point increments on a scale of 0 to 6.

Your responses will be scored on the basis of:

- The overall quality of your ideas
- Your ability to organize, develop, and express those ideas
- How well you provide relevant supporting reasons and examples
- Your ability to control the elements of standard written English



Test-Taking Strategies

1. Read the question carefully.

Make sure you have taken all parts of a question into account before you begin to respond to it.

2. Do not start to write immediately.

Take a few minutes to think about the question and plan a response before you begin writing. You may find it helpful to write a brief outline or jot down some ideas on your physical whiteboard or the online question notepad provided. Take care to organize your ideas and develop them fully, but leave time to reread your response and make any revisions that you think would improve it.

3. Focus on the task of analyzing and critiquing a line of thinking or reasoning.

Get used to asking yourself questions such as the following: What questionable assumptions might underlie the thinking? What alternative explanations might be given? What counterexamples might be raised? What additional evidence might prove useful in fully and fairly evaluating the reasoning?

4. Develop fully any examples you use.

Do not simply list your examples—explain how they illustrate your point.

5. Discuss alternative explanations or counterexamples.

These techniques allow you to introduce illustrations and examples drawn from your observations, experiences, and reading.

6. Make sure your response reads like a narrative.

Your response should not read like an outline. It should use full sentences, a coherent organizational scheme, logical transitions between points, and appropriately introduced and developed examples.



The Directions

These are the directions that you will see for the Business Writing Assessment essay question. If you read them carefully and understand them clearly before going to sit for the test, you will not need to spend too much time reviewing them when you take the assessment. They read as follows:

You will be asked to write a critique of the argument presented. You are not asked to present your own views on the subject.

Writing Your Response

Take a few minutes to evaluate the argument and plan a response before you begin writing. Be sure to leave enough time to reread your response and make any revisions that you think are necessary.

Evaluation of Your Response

Scores will reflect how well you:

- Organize, develop, and express your ideas about the argument presented
- Provide relevant supporting reasons and examples
- Control the elements of standard written English



Business Writing Assessment Scoring Guide

Outstanding (6/6)

An **outstanding** paper presents a cogent, well-articulated critique of the argument and demonstrates mastery of the elements of effective writing.

A typical paper in this category exhibits the following characteristics:

- Clearly identifies important features of the argument and analyzes them insightfully
- Develops ideas cogently, organizes them logically, and connects them with clear transitions
- Effectively supports the main points of the critique
- Demonstrates control of language, including diction and syntactic variety
- Demonstrates facility with the conventions of standard written English but may have minor flaws

Strong (5/6)

A **strong** paper presents a well-developed critique of the argument and demonstrates good control of the elements of effective writing.

A typical paper in this category exhibits the following characteristics:

- Clearly identifies important features of the argument and analyzes them in a generally thoughtful way
- Develops ideas clearly, organizes them logically, and connects them with appropriate transitions
- Sensibly supports the main points of the critique
- Demonstrates control of language, including diction and syntactic variety
- Demonstrates facility with the conventions of standard written English but may have occasional flaws

Adequate (4/6)

An **adequate** paper presents a competent critique of the argument and demonstrates adequate control of the elements of writing.

A typical paper in this category exhibits the following characteristics:

- Identifies and analyzes important features of the argument
- Develops and organizes ideas satisfactorily but may not connect them with transitions
- Supports the main points of the critique
- Demonstrates sufficient control of language to convey ideas with reasonable clarity
- Generally follows the conventions of standard written English but may have some flaws



Limited (3/6)

A **limited** paper demonstrates some competence in analytical writing skills and in its control of the elements of writing but is plainly flawed.

A **typical** paper in this category exhibits one or more of the following characteristics:

- Does not identify or analyze most of the important features of the argument, although some
- Analysis of the argument is present mainly analyzes tangential or irrelevant matters, or reasons poorly
- Is limited in the logical development and organization of ideas
- Offers support of little relevance and value for points of the critique
- Does not convey meaning clearly
- Contains occasional major errors or frequent minor errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

Seriously Flawed (2/6)

A **seriously flawed** paper demonstrates serious weaknesses in analytical writing skills.

A **typical** paper in this category exhibits one or more of the following characteristics:

- Does not present a critique based on logical analysis, but may instead present the writer's own views on the subject
- Does not develop ideas, or is disorganized and illogical
- Provides little, if any, relevant or reasonable support
- Has serious and frequent problems in the use of language and in sentence structure
- Contains numerous errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics that interfere with meaning

Fundamentally Deficient (1/6)

A **fundamentally deficient** paper demonstrates fundamental deficiencies in analytical writing skills.

A **typical** paper in this category exhibits more than one of the following characteristics:

- Provides little evidence of the ability to understand and analyze the argument
- Provides little evidence of the ability to develop an organized response
- Has severe and persistent errors in language and sentence structure
- Contains a pervasive pattern of errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics that results in incoherence

No Score (0/6)

A paper in this category is off topic, not written in English, is merely attempting to copy the topic, or consists only of keystroke characters.



Sample: Essay Statement

Read the statement and the instructions that follow it, and then make any notes that will help you plan your response.


The following appeared as part of an article in a daily newspaper:

“The computerized on-board warning system that will be installed in commercial airliners will virtually solve the problem of midair plane collisions. One plane’s warning system can receive signals from another’s transponder—a radio set that signals a plane’s course—in order to determine the likelihood of a collision and recommend evasive action.”

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.

See the following pages for sample papers and explanations for their scoring.





Outstanding (6/6) Sample Paper

The argument that this warning system will virtually solve the problem of midair plane collisions omits some important concerns that must be addressed to substantiate the argument. The statement that follows the description of what this warning system will do simply describes the system and how it operates. This alone does not constitute a logical argument in favor of the warning system, and it certainly does not provide support or proof of the main argument.

Most conspicuously, the argument does not address the cause of the problem of midair plane collisions, the use of the system by pilots and flight specialists, or who is involved in the midair plane collisions. First, the argument assumes that the cause of the problem is that the planes' courses, the likelihood of collisions, and actions to avoid collisions are unknown or inaccurate. In a weak attempt to support its claim, the argument describes a system that makes all of these things accurately known. But if the cause of the problem of midair plane collisions is that pilots are not paying attention to their computer systems or flight operations, the warning system will not solve the collision problem. Second, the argument never addresses the interface between individuals and the system and how this will affect the warning system's objective of obliterating the problem of collisions. If the pilot or flight specialist does not conform to what the warning system suggests, midair collisions will not be avoided. Finally, if planes other than commercial airliners are involved in the collisions, the problem of these collisions cannot be solved by a warning system that will not be installed on non-commercial airliners. The argument also does not address what would happen in the event that the warning system collapses, fails, or does not work properly.

Because the argument leaves out several key issues, it is not sound or persuasive. If it included the items discussed above instead of solely explaining what the system supposedly does, the argument would have been more thorough and convincing.

Outstanding (6/6) Explanation

This response is, as the scoring guide requires of a 6, "coherent" and "well articulated": all the points made not only bear directly on the argument to be analyzed, but also contribute to a single, integrated development of the writer's critique. The writer begins by making the controlling point that a mere description of the warning system's mode of operation cannot serve as a true argument proving the system's effectiveness, since the description overlooks several major considerations. The writer then identifies these considerations—what causes midair collisions, how pilots will actually use the commercial airline warning system, what kinds of airplanes are typically involved in midair collisions—and, citing appropriate counterexamples (e.g., what if pilots do not pay attention to their instruments?), explains fully how each oversight undermines the conclusion that the warning system will virtually eliminate midair plane collisions.

Throughout, the writer complements the logically organized development of this critique with good, clear prose that demonstrates the ability not only to control language and vary sentence structure but also to express ideas forcibly (e.g., "the argument never addresses the interface between individuals and the system"). Of course, as in any response written under time constraints, occasional minor flaws can be found. For example, "the argument assumes that the cause of the problem is that the planes' courses, the likelihood of collisions, and actions to avoid collisions are unknown or inaccurate" is wordy and imprecise: how can a course, a likelihood, or actions be inaccurate? But flaws such as these, minor and infrequent, do not interfere with the overall clarity and forcefulness of this outstanding response.



Adequate (4/6) Sample Paper

The argument is not logically convincing. It does not state whether all planes can receive signals from each other. It does not state whether planes constantly receive signals. If they only receive signals once every certain time interval, collisions will not definitely be prevented. Further if they receive a signal right before they are about to crash, they cannot avoid each other.

The main flaw in the argument is that it assumes that the two planes, upon receiving each other's signals, will know which evasive action to take. For example, the two planes could be going towards each other and then receive the signals. If one turns at an angle to the left and the other turns at an angle to the right, the two planes will still crash. Even if they receive an updated signal, they will not have time to avoid each other.

The following argument would be more sound and persuasive. The new warning system will solve the problem of midair plane collisions. Each plane will receive constant, continual signals from each other. If the two planes are headed in a direction where they will crash, the system will coordinate the signals, and tell one plane to go one way, and the other plane to go another way. The new system will ensure that the two planes will turn in different directions so they don't crash by trying to prevent the original crash. In addition, the two planes will be able to see themselves and the other on a computer screen, to aid in the evasive action.

Adequate (4/6) Explanation

This response competently cites a number of deficiencies in the argument presented: the information given about the nature of the signals sent and received and the evasive action recommended does not warrant the conclusion that the onboard warning system "will virtually solve the problem of midair plane collisions." However, in discussing these insufficiencies in the argument, the response reveals an unevenness in the quality of its reasoning. For example, while it is perfectly legitimate to point out that the argument assumes too much and says too little about the evasive action that will be recommended by the warning system, it is farfetched to suggest that the system might be so poorly designed as to route two approaching airplanes to the same spot. Likewise, while it is fair to question the effectiveness of a warning signal about which the argument says so little, it is not reasonable to assume that the system would be designed to space signals so far apart that they would prove useless. Rather than invent implausibly bad versions of the warning system to prove that it might be ineffective, a stronger response would analyze unexplored possibilities inherent in the information that is given—for example, the possibility that pilots might not be able to respond quickly and effectively to the radio signals the argument says they will receive when the new system is installed. The "more sound and persuasive argument" in the last paragraph, while an improvement on the original, continues to overlook this possibility and also assumes that other types of aircraft without transponders will pose no problems.

The organization of ideas, while generally sound, is sometimes weakened by needless repetition of the same points, as in sentences 4 and 5 of the last paragraph. The writing contains minor instances of awkwardness (e.g., "Each plane will receive constant, continual signals from each other" in paragraph 3), but is free of flaws that make understanding difficult. However, though the writing is generally clean and clear, the syntax does not show much variety. A few sentences begin with "if" clauses, but almost all the rest, even those that begin with a transitional phrase such as "for example" or "in addition," conform to a "subject, verb, complement" pattern. The first paragraph, in which the second and third sentences begin the same way ("It does not state"), is particularly repetitious.

Seriously Flawed (2/6) Sample Paper

This argument has no information about air collisions. I think most cases happen in new airports because the air traffic is heavy. In this case sound airport control could solve the problem.

I think this argument is logically reasonable. Its assumption is that plane collisions are caused by planes that don't know each other's positions. So pilots can do nothing, if they know each other's position through the system it will solve the problem.

If it can provide evidence the problem is lack of knowledge of each other's positions, it will be more sound and persuasive.

More information about air collisions is helpful, (the reason for air collisions).

Seriously Flawed (2/6) Explanation

This response is seriously flawed in several ways. First of all, it has very little substance. The writer appears to make only one point—that while it seems reasonable to assume that midair collisions would be less likely if pilots were sure of each other's positions, readers cannot adequately judge this assumption without more information about where, why, and how such collisions occur. This point, furthermore, is neither explained by a single reason beyond what is given in the topic nor supported by a single example. Legitimate though it is, it cannot, alone and undeveloped, serve as an adequate response to the argument.

Aside from being undeveloped, the response is confusing. At the outset, it seems to be critical of the argument. The writer begins by pointing to the inadequacy of the information given; then speculates, without evidence, that “most cases happen in new airports”; and then suggests that the problem should be addressed by improving “airport control,” not (it is implied) by installing onboard warning systems. After criticizing the argument in the first paragraph, the writer confusingly seems to endorse it in the second. Then, in the remainder of the response, the writer returns to a critical stance.

The general lack of coherence is reflected in the serious and frequent writing problems that make meaning hard to determine—for example, the elliptical and ungrammatical “So pilots can do nothing, if they know each other's position through the system it will solve the problem” (paragraph 2) or “If it can provide evidence the problem is lack of knowledge of each other's positions, it will be more sound and persuasive” (paragraph 3). The prose suffers from a variety of basic errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics.

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