



## CHAPTER 8

# Preparing for the GED Essay

This section of the book presents a simple strategy for writing a passing GED essay.

- Gathering Ideas
- Organizing
- Writing
- Revising

The GED Language Arts, Writing Test has two parts. Part I, Editing, is a multiple-choice section covering organization, sentence structure, usage, and mechanics. The first part of this book will help you pass Part I of the test. Part II, the Essay, is a writing section in which you will be asked to write a well-developed essay on a specified topic. This section of the book will help you develop the skills you need to score well on Part II.

To write a good GED essay, you need several skills. You need to know how to express yourself clearly on paper—how to make a point, support it with specific examples, organize your ideas logically, and link them smoothly. You also need a good command of standard written English—knowledge of the rules that good writers use to decide what makes a complete sentence, where commas belong, which words to capitalize, and when to use a particular word form.

By sharpening these skills, you will be much closer to your goal of passing the GED. In addition, you will give yourself a gift that you can use for the rest of your life—the ability to write clearly and effectively. For example, when you apply for a job, you need to write about your previous experience. Put yourself in the place of an employer looking for a new worker. Which of the following statements would impress you more?

I done alot's of Restrant work, so I wants to be a Manger.

After ten years as a hostess, waitress, cook, and assistant manager in two different restaurants, I feel qualified to become a manager.

There are many times when you need to write, both on the job and at home. No matter what you write, you want your writing to reflect well on you. Improving your writing will not only help you pass the GED but also help you communicate clearly and present yourself as a careful, well-educated person.

## What the GED Essay Is Like

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In Part II of the Language Arts, Writing Test, you will have 45 minutes to write a well-developed essay on an assigned topic. An **essay** is a group of related paragraphs about one topic. The assigned topic will draw on your personal observations, knowledge, and experiences. The question will require you to explain something, such as your opinion about a common issue or the causes and effects of an everyday problem. Here is a sample topic:

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### T O P I C

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What is the perfect way for you to spend a day off?

In your essay, describe a perfect day off. Explain the reason for your choice.

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As you can see, this essay topic draws on your general knowledge. You do not have to know any special information in order to write your essay. In fact, just being an adult should give you enough knowledge to handle it.

Your score on the essay portion represents 35 percent of your total score on the Language Arts, Writing Test. The remaining 65 percent is from the multiple-choice portion of the test.

Two readers trained to use holistic scoring will evaluate your completed essay. With holistic scoring, readers do not read your paper and mark each misspelled word or missing comma, nor do they write comments about the content and structure of your writing. Rather, they read your paper and rate its overall effectiveness. The readers will consider features such as these as they read each essay:

- Does the essay have well-focused main points?
- Does the essay have clear organization?
- Does the essay develop its main ideas with specific details?
- Does the essay have correct sentence structure, punctuation, grammar, word choice, and spelling?

The two readers will read your paper and each will rate it on a four-point scale. A copy of this scale appears on the following page. A rating of 1, the lowest score, indicates inadequate writing; a rating of 4, the highest score, indicates effective writing. The two readers' scores are averaged to produce a final score for Part II.

Your final score from Part II is combined with the score from Part I to produce a single total score on the test. Though the essay portion is only 35 percent of the total score, you must achieve a score greater than 1.5 in order to obtain a passing score on the Language Arts, Writing Test. Otherwise, you will have to take both parts of the test again.

## Essay Scoring Guide

	1	2	3	4
	<b>Inadequate</b>	<b>Marginal</b>	<b>Adequate</b>	<b>Effective</b>
	Reader has difficulty identifying or following the writer's ideas.	Reader occasionally has difficulty understanding or following the writer's ideas.	Reader understands the writer's ideas.	Reader understands and easily follows the writer's expression of ideas.
<b>Response to the Prompt</b>	Attempts to address prompt but with little or no success in establishing a focus.	Addresses the prompt, though the focus may shift.	Uses the writing prompt to establish a main idea.	Presents a clearly focused main idea that addresses the prompt.
<b>Organization</b>	Fails to organize ideas.	Shows some evidence of an organizational plan.	Uses an identifiable organizational plan.	Establishes a clear and logical organization.
<b>Development and Details</b>	Demonstrates little or no development; usually lacks details or examples or presents irrelevant information.	Has some development but lacks specific details; may be limited to a listing, repetitions, or generalizations.	Has focused but occasionally uneven development; incorporates some specific detail.	Achieves coherent development with specific and relevant details and examples.
<b>Conventions of EAE</b>	Exhibits minimal or no control of sentence structure and the conventions of Edited American English (EAE).	Demonstrates inconsistent control of sentence structure and the conventions of EAE.	Generally controls sentence structure and the conventions of EAE.	Consistently controls sentence structure and the conventions of EAE.
<b>Word Choice</b>	Exhibits weak and/or inappropriate words.	Exhibits a narrow range of word choice, often including inappropriate selections.	Exhibits appropriate word choice.	Exhibits varied and precise word choice.

## How This Section Will Help You

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This section of the book will give you three specific strategies for writing a strong essay.

**1. You will learn a simple four-step writing process you can use to write a good essay in 45 minutes.**

Forty-five minutes does not allow time to write a first draft and then write a final draft. Instead, you need to plan your work so that you can write a good final draft. In this book, you will learn to follow these four simple steps in order to plan, write, and check your essay:

- **Gathering ideas** (figuring out the main idea of your essay and making a list of supporting details from your personal experiences)
- **Organizing** (putting your ideas in an order that makes sense; making sure that you have enough supporting details, and ensuring that your details are all about your main idea)
- **Writing** (using your organized list to write your essay)
- **Revising** (reviewing and correcting your essay)

**2. You will learn a standard, five-paragraph pattern you can use to organize an essay on any topic.**

One of the rating criteria on the scoring guide is organization. The five-paragraph essay is a pattern many writers use to organize their writing. It consists of an introductory paragraph, three body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph.

**3. You will learn to check your essay to see how well it matches the requirements of the GED scoring guide.**

By comparing your work to the GED scoring guide, you will learn specific ways you can raise your score to ensure that you will score well on Part II of the Language Arts, Writing Test.

## The Writing Process

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Most good writers follow the steps of gathering ideas, organizing, writing, and revising when they write. Following these steps will ensure that you write a good essay in 45 minutes.

### Gathering Ideas

When a writer gathers ideas, he or she thinks of specific things to write about the assigned topic. Although this is a thinking stage, it helps to write your ideas on paper. First, examine the writing assignment and decide what you want to say about it. Then, begin to jot down notes on the topic. Write words and phrases. Use your experiences to help you think of ideas. Do not worry about organizing your list, spelling words correctly, or writing complete sentences. You will take care of these details in later steps.

Using the question on page 208, here is a sample idea list for a paragraph about the morning of a perfect day off:

*take a long shower and read the newspaper and  
drink a cup of coffee*

*take my time getting ready*

*sleep late*

*not have to get up at 4:30 as on a workday*

*cook dinner*

*get up at 10:00*

Notice that the writer simply jotted down a few specific ideas to use in the paragraph. What else might the writer add to the list? Write one or two ideas on the lines above.

## Organizing

In the organizing stage, the writer checks the ideas and puts them in a logical order. In this stage, the writer makes sure that there are plenty of good ideas on the list, crosses off ideas that are not about the topic, and then puts the items on the list in the order in which he or she will use them. Look again at the list about the morning of a perfect day off. Cross off any ideas that are not about the topic.

If you crossed off *cook dinner*, your answer is correct. *Cook dinner* does not fit the topic of the morning of a perfect day off.

Now look at how the writer organized the list.

5. *take a long shower and read the newspaper and drink a cup of coffee*
4. *take my time getting ready*
1. *sleep late*
2. *not have to get up at 4:30 as on a workday*  
~~*cook dinner*~~
3. *get up at 10:00*

Now the writer is ready to start writing.

## Writing

In the writing stage, the writer puts the ideas he or she gathered or organized into sentence and paragraph form. For instance, the paragraph about the morning of a perfect day off might look like this:

*In the morning of a perfect day off I will sleep late. On most days I have to get up at 4:30. Then I have to rush to get to work by 5:30. When I have a day off I really like to sleep until 10:00 and then take my time getting up and getting ready. So on my perfect day off after I get up, I will take a long shower. Then have a cup of coffee while I read the newspaper.*

Notice that the writer made a few mistakes. Good writers don't worry if they make a few mistakes while they write. They just focus on getting their ideas down on paper. Then they go back and check their work in the final step of the writing process.

## Revising

In this stage, good writers check their work. They make sure that the sentences are complete, the words are spelled correctly, and there are no other mistakes. Look back at the paragraph on a perfect morning off. Circle any errors you find.

Now look at the writer's revised paragraph. Notice how the writer improved the final product.

In the morning of a <sup>perfect</sup> ~~perfe~~ day off I will sleep late. On most days I have to get up at 4:30. Then I have to rush to get to work by 5:30. When I have a day off I really like to sleep until 10:00 and then take my time getting up and <sup>getting ready</sup> ~~geting ready~~. So on my perfect day off after I get up, I will take a long shower. Then <sup>I'll</sup> have a cup of coffee while I read the newspaper.

Chapters 9–12 will each focus in detail on one of the steps of the writing process. If you use this simple four-step strategy, 45 minutes will be enough time to create a good GED essay.

### EXERCISE 1

**Part A Directions:** Match the step of the writing process with what a writer does in that step. Write the letter on the appropriate line.

- |                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| _____ 1. Write        | a. check the essay to make sure it is well-written    |
| _____ 2. Gather ideas | b. put the list of ideas in an order that makes sense |
| _____ 3. Revise       | c. create a list of ideas                             |
| _____ 4. Organize     | d. create a draft of the essay                        |

**Part B Directions:** Put the steps of the writing process in order. Write numbers from 1 (first) to 4 (last) on the line.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Write
- \_\_\_\_\_ Gather ideas
- \_\_\_\_\_ Revise
- \_\_\_\_\_ Organize

## The Five-Paragraph Essay

In order to score a 4, your essay needs to have a clear and logical organizational plan. Good writers can use the five-paragraph format to structure an essay on any topic. The five-paragraph essay is made up of the following components:

- **An introductory paragraph.** This paragraph indicates the issue your essay is going to address and states what your main idea is going to be. For example, the introductory paragraph of an essay on the topic of a perfect day off might say that the best way to spend a day off is relaxing and spending time with your family.
- **Three body paragraphs.** Each of these paragraphs expresses an idea that supports the main idea of your essay. For example, your body paragraphs might develop ideas on what you would do in the morning (sleep late), afternoon (go to the park with your family), and evening (watch a video).
- **A concluding paragraph.** Your concluding paragraph should summarize your essay and give a final idea about the topic. For example, a good concluding paragraph could restate the three activities you would do on your day off and conclude by saying that after such a relaxing day you would be ready for the rest of the week.

Here is an example of a good five-paragraph essay with the introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion marked:

### *A Perfect Day Off*

#### **Introduction**

*There are many good ways to spend a day off. People like to do many different things. They like to watch TV, go shopping, or visit relatives. People also like to work in their yards or wash their pets. I love to relax and spend time with my family. So for me, a perfect day off consists of sleeping late, going to the park with my children, and staying up late to watch a good video.*

#### **Body Paragraph 1**

*On a perfect day off I will sleep late. On most days I have to get up at 4:30. Then I have to rush to get to work by 5:30. When I have a day off I really like to sleep until 10:00 and then take my time getting up and getting ready. So on my perfect day off after I get up, I will take a long shower and then have a cup of coffee while I read the newspaper.*



**Body Paragraph 2**

*My children and I really love going to the park. In the afternoon of my perfect day off, I will take my children to Lakerview Park. My kids love to play on the swings there. We also like to walk along the beach and watch the swimmers and boaters. If the weather is warm, we like to go swimming too. After a few hours we usually get some ice cream or drinks from the refreshment stand.*

**Body Paragraph 3**

*In the evening I will rent a nice video to watch after the kids go to bed. I love old comedies, so maybe I will rent a Charlie Chaplin video. Of course, I will make some popcorn to enjoy during the movie.*

**Conclusion**

*On my perfect day off I will rest and relax by sleeping late, spending time with my kids, and watching a good video. I am sure that after spending a day off in this way, I will be rested and ready for the rest of the week.*

Chapter 11 will give more detail on writing a five-paragraph essay.

**EXERCISE 2**

**Directions:** Match each part of the five-paragraph essay with its description. Write the letter on the appropriate line.

- |                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| _____ 1. Body paragraph | a. states the issue the essay is about and gives the main idea  |
| _____ 2. Conclusion     | b. summarizes the ideas the reader saw in the body of the essay |
| _____ 3. Introduction   | c. gives details that support the main idea of the essay        |

**Answers are on page 382.**

**EXERCISE 3**

**Directions:** Label the parts of the essay. Write *introduction*, *body paragraph*, or *conclusion* on the appropriate line. Remember, a five-paragraph essay has three body paragraphs.

**A Terrible Day**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Everyone has a bad day once in a while. Last Tuesday everything went wrong. I had trouble getting to work, work was terrible, and after work I got sick.
  
2. \_\_\_\_\_ The trouble started in the morning. First of all I overslept because the alarm clock didn't go off. When I looked at it, I found out that it was broken and that I needed a new one. I got ready in a hurry, but then I couldn't find my keys. It took me 20 minutes to find them. When I finally left the house, I still had time to make it to work on time. But the bus was behind schedule, so I got to work late.
  
3. \_\_\_\_\_ When I got to work, my boss yelled at me because I was late. The store was really busy all day, and the customers were in bad moods because they had to wait in line to check out. We were so busy at lunchtime that I could not take my break until 2:30. By that time I was hungry and had a headache. After lunch a customer's child spilled a huge bottle of cooking oil, and I had to clean it up. It took more than an hour, and I got oil on my clothes.
  
4. \_\_\_\_\_ By the end of work I began feeling sick. I had a sore throat, and my headache was worse. When I left work it was raining, and the bus was late again. I got completely soaked. By the time I got home, I was shivering, and my headache and sore throat were worse. I checked my temperature and found that it was 101 degrees. So I took some medicine, ate some soup, drank some juice, and got in bed.
  
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Last Tuesday turned out to be a really terrible day. Everything went wrong—morning, noon, and night. I hope that next Tuesday turns out better.

## Using the GED Scoring Guide to Improve Your Work

Chapters 9–12 will each examine one or more of the criteria in the GED scoring guide and help you use it to make sure that your work is the best it can be. These strategies will appear in the section called Raising Your Score toward the end of each chapter. Remember, the higher your score on the essay, the higher your overall score on the Language Arts, Writing Test.



### RAISING YOUR SCORE

Read the topic and the idea list below:

#### TOPIC

What is the perfect way for you to spend a day off?

In your essay, describe a perfect day off. Explain the reason for your choice.

take a long shower and read the newspaper and drink a cup of coffee

take my time getting ready

sleep late

not have to get up at 4:30 as on a workday

get up at 10:00

Now look at the criteria on responding to the prompt from the GED Essay Scoring Guide. Circle the number of the score that best describes the idea list.

**LEVEL 4** writing presents a clearly focused main idea that addresses the prompt.

**LEVEL 3** writing uses the writing prompt to establish a main idea.

**LEVEL 2** writing addresses the prompt, though the focus may shift.

**LEVEL 1** writing attempts to address the prompt but with little or no success in establishing a focus.

What number did you circle? If you circled 4, you are correct. The writer has listed five ideas that address the topic of a perfect morning.

**Chapter 8 Highlights: Preparing for the GED Essay**

- Part II of the GED Language Arts, Writing Test asks candidates to write a well-developed essay on an assigned topic in 45 minutes. The topic draws on your personal observations, experiences, and knowledge. You don't need any special information.
- The essay portion is 35 percent of the total score of the GED Language Arts, Writing Test. Candidates need to score higher than 1.5 on a scale of 4 to pass the test.
- In order to write a good essay in 45 minutes, it helps to follow the four steps of the writing process—gathering ideas, organizing, writing, and revising.
- The five-paragraph essay format is a good way to organize an essay on any topic. A five-paragraph essay consists of an introductory paragraph, three body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph.
- Understanding the scoring guide that the readers use to evaluate your essay will help you develop ways to improve your writing and raise your score.