

How To Take Standardized Writing Tests

Before Test Day

1. Get to know your testing format and familiarize yourself with the process ahead of time, so you know what to expect.
2. Go to the CBEST website (<http://www.cbest.nesinc.com/>) and read through scoring procedures to understand how your content will be scored.
3. Take the practice test.
4. Get your testing materials, e.g. pen, pencils, scratch paper, together the night before, and get a good night's rest.

On Test Day

1. Arrive on time, well rested, and prepared with your materials.
2. Read and analyze the prompt carefully, including the directions for writing, what you are supposed to write about, and how you are to complete the task.
3. Jot down any thoughts or notes that come into your head on a piece of the provided scratch paper, so you can come back to them during the planning stage.
4. If you are taking multiple tests, and most likely you will be, do them in whatever order you want. However, read the writing prompt first, because your amazing brain can be working on it while you do the other test portions. If you have only the written part of the CBEST to do, then get started right away.

Writing Strategies

1. Use The Prompt – to help you plan and begin your writing.
 - Use wording from the prompt.
 - Identify and circle any key words.
 - Underline any specific details or questions asked in the prompt.
 - Check spelling using language in the prompt.
2. Plan Your Response – even if you don't normally do pre-writing, do it today. Map out where you want to go with your response before you begin your writing.
 - Double, triple-check the prompt to be sure you are meeting expectations for the type of writing, such as purpose, audience, support and detail.
 - Pick a position/point of view and stick to it for the duration of the test. Even if you can argue both sides, don't. Pick a direction and maintain the course!
 - Cluster ideas and make an outline.
 - List details to include in your essay.
3. Take Control of the Time – Use the 25-50-15-10 Formula for Timed Writing Management:
 - 25% of total time is for reading prompt and planning your response.
 - 50% of total time is for writing your response (follow your plan).
 - 15% of total time is for reviewing your response (editing, revising, correcting as necessary).
 - 10% of total time is the buffer (in case you need extra time on one of the previous steps).

- **For Example:** If you have 60 minutes to write:
 - 25% = 15 minutes to read and plan
 - 50% = 30 minutes to write your response
 - 15% = 9 minutes to review and revise
 - 10% = 6 minutes to use as needed
 - Because you will most likely be taking the written test with the English and math portions of the CBEST, you may have a limited amount of time to write your response. Don't worry if you have less time than you anticipated for your written response. Stick with the formula and these tips. It is better to have 10 minutes worth of a well thought out response than 20 minutes worth of unorganized material.
4. Words to Know and Look Out for – From *Becoming a Master Student*, “Words to Watch for in Essay Questions”:
- **Analyze:** Break into separate parts and discuss, examine, or interpret
 - Compare: Examine two or more items. Identify similarities and differences
 - Contrast: Show differences. Set in opposition.
 - Criticize: Make judgments. Evaluate comparative worth. Criticism often involves analysis.
 - Define: Explain the exact meaning – usually, a meaning specific to the course or subject. Definitions are usually short.
 - Describe: Give a detailed account. Make a picture with words. List characters, qualities, and parts.
 - Discuss: Consider and debate or argue the pros and cons of an issue.
 - Explain: Make an idea clear. Show logically how a concept is developed.
 - Prove: Support with facts (especially facts presented in class or in the text).
 - Relate: Show the connections between ideas or events. Provide a larger context for seeing the big picture.
 - State: Explain precisely.
 - Summarize: Give a brief, condensed account. Include conclusions. Avoid unnecessary details.
 - Trace: Show the order of events or the progress of a subject or event.

Don't forget to breathe. Take slow deep breaths whenever you start to feel overwhelmed and then return your focus back to your writing.

References

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