

The Montana Board of Regents of Higher Education is committed to ensuring that you and the other students who enter the Montana University System are prepared for college. By taking a test in writing as a high school junior, you can find out if you will qualify for a college-level composition course or need a remedial course as a college freshman. Students who want to avoid spending time and tuition on courses that do not count toward college degrees are encouraged to use the senior year in high school to improve their writing skills.

## What are the proficiency admission standards?

Students who enter college without basic proficiencies struggle to communicate effectively in the higher education community. Writing proficiency ensures genuine access by giving you tools to complete assignments and to demonstrate your knowledge and thinking skills.

Current admissions policy requires that students take the College Preparatory Program AND earn a 2.5 GPA, OR rank in the upper half of the school's graduating class, OR

for MSU-Northern and UM-Western  
obtain a composite score of 20 on the ACT  
or 1440 total on the SAT ;  
for MSU, UM, MT-Tech, and MSU-Billings  
obtain a composite score of 22 on the ACT  
or 1540 total on the SAT.

AND, the class of 2009 must earn at least 18 on the math section of the ACT, 440 on the math section of the SAT, OR take four years of math and three years of science. The class of 2010 will need to earn higher math scores (ACT 22 or SAT 520) for full admission to the four-year campuses.

AND, for full admission status to any four-year degree program in the Montana University System, the class of 2009 must earn at least a 3.5 on this Montana Writing Assessment; OR 7 on the essay or 18 on the combined writing score of the ACT; OR 7 on the essay or 440 on the total writing section of the SAT.

Although the threshold scores for "full admission" for previous classes were lower, those lower scores place students into developmental courses. Scores from the Montana Writing Assessment are automatically reported to the University System. Students can take the ACT, SAT, or this writing assessment more than once.

Students who score below the threshold may be "provisionally" admitted to a four-year program. This means they must take a developmental composition course within their first three semesters in college.

A student receiving a score of 5.5 or higher on the MUS Writing Assessment will be issued a certificate of merit from the Montana Board of Regents for use in applying for college admissions or scholarships.

**"An assessment of proficiency is not a barrier to higher education; the inability to write is the barrier."**


*--Richard A. Crofts, Ph.D., former  
Commissioner of Higher Education*



Office of the Commissioner  
of Higher Education  
46 North Last Chance Gulch  
Helena, MT 59620-3201  
<http://mus.edu>  
Phone: (406) 444-0652  
[jclinard@montana.edu](mailto:jclinard@montana.edu)

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Writing  
Proficiency  
for the  
Montana  
University  
System

# The Montana University System Writing Assessment: A Message to Students

The Montana University System Writing Assessment (MUSWA), ACT Optional Writing Test scores and SAT writing scores are now used by the four-year campuses to determine admission status and by all the MUS campuses to predict placement.

High schools volunteer to participate in the Montana Writing Assessment in order to provide students with a writing assessment score at no cost (unlike the ACT or SAT). If you have more than one writing assessment score approved within the writing proficiency policy (the MUSWA, ACT, SAT, AP or CLEP), your highest score will be considered by the University System.

## How should students prepare for the test?

You will be well prepared if your school's writing curriculum provides opportunities to write about sophisticated topics; to practice persuasive essays; to demonstrate critical thinking, organizational and language skills; and to back up writing with opinions, facts, experiences, examples, and logical reasons. Teachers can participate in writing assessment workshops in order to become familiar with the type of writing prompt, scoring rubric, and test characteristics.

In addition, <http://webwriters.msugf.edu> (Sponsored by the Student Assistance Foundation) provides direct instruction to students and an interactive feature for practice essays.

## What Skills are Tested?

The Writing Assessment tests your skills in writing a persuasive essay. You will write an essay in response to one of two "prompts." The essay is written in the form of a letter. Your response will be evaluated on your ability to:

- ✓ focus on the topic of the question you have chosen;
- ✓ organize ideas clearly;
- ✓ develop ideas with relevant reasons, experiences, examples, and counter-arguments;
- ✓ use appropriate language, with reasonably correct grammar, usage, and mechanics;
- ✓ demonstrate language fluency through effective word choice and sentence structure.

## How Are the tests scored?

Groups of "Holistic Scoring Trainers" lead Montana high school and college teachers through a scoring process each spring at regional sites across the state. Your teacher may volunteer to help.

The scoring rubric is designed to align with Montana's K-12 Writing Standards, rubrics most commonly used in Montana's high schools, and skills basic to freshman composition. ACT and several Montana teachers and professors contributed to the scoring rubric.

Student scores, school data, and an analysis of the collected data are sent to your high school teacher, counseling office, and college admissions offices before the end of each school year.

## How is the field test administered?

First, you must accurately provide information about yourself and your plans after high school. You have a choice of two prompts and are given 40 minutes to pre-write, draft, edit, and revise a persuasive essay.

You may be able to use a word processor or take the test online if your school has adequate computer labs. The choice of handwritten, word-processed, or online will not affect your score.



## Who takes the Montana University System Writing Assessment?

Schools volunteer to test their students. Although designed for college-bound students, many schools test all juniors to analyze the effectiveness of their writing curriculum. Also, seniors who did not score 3.5 or above when they tested as juniors and who want to qualify for a college-level composition course in college may elect to retake the test.

In 2008, over 7,000 students will take the Montana University System Writing Assessment.

Newsletters and analysis of score results can be found on the OCHE website, <http://mus.edu/writingproficiency/index.htm>.