

Writing Proficiency in the Montana University System

Newsletter Twenty-three, May 2007

Score Plateau in Seventh Year of Testing

The Montana University System Writing Assessment was administered for the seventh time during February and March in 110 of Montana's high schools. About 3,000 tests were mailed to schools and 4,453 tests were submitted online. Scores are reported for the 7,270 students who completed the test.

This year, the mean score was 3.5. In 2001, the mean score for 3,365 tests was 3.0; in 2002, the mean for 3,467 tests was 3.2; in 2003, the mean for 4,000 tests was 3.3; in 2004, the mean score for 4,714 tests was 3.4, in 2005, the mean score for 5,969 tests was 3.4, and in 2006, the mean for 6,908 tests was also 3.5.

During the pilot years, different time options, from 30 to 90 minutes, were allowed. Because research showed that

the 40-minute option yielded the best results, other time options are no longer permitted.

This test is scored on a 6-point rubric and the scores of two scorers are averaged. A third reader resolves non-adjacent scores. Every student was given a choice of two prompts, designated as sets one, two, and "makeup." Prompts allow students to offer a third solution to the problem presented. This type of prompt is similar to the prompts that ACT uses in their optional writing test, administered for the first time in February of 2005.

The Board of Regents' Writing Proficiency Policy includes this test as one measure for gaining full admission to four-year programs of the Montana University System.

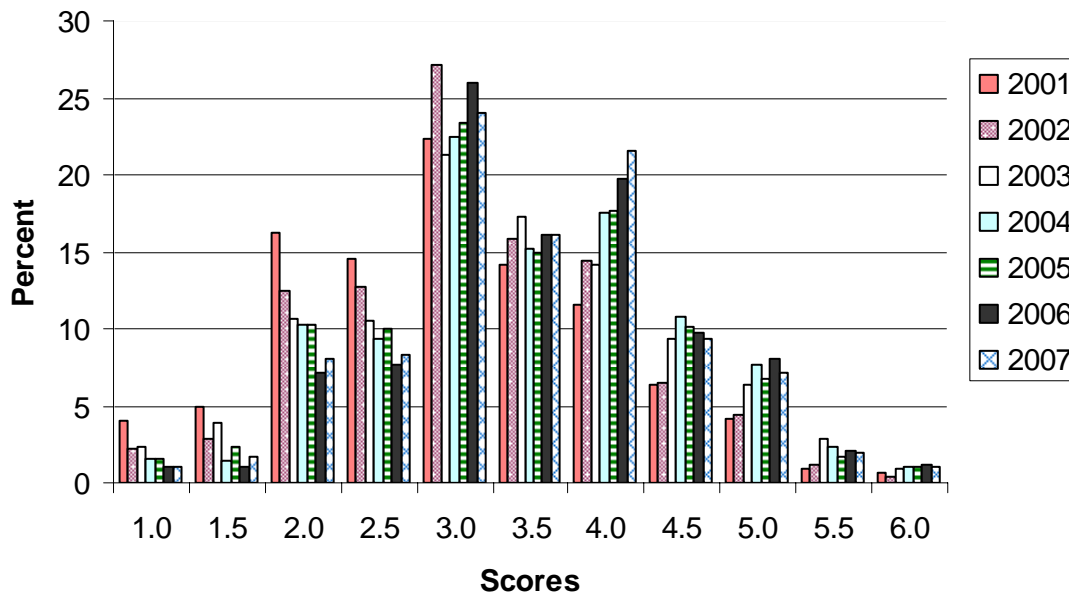
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Visit our website :
www.mus.montana.edu/writingproficiency/index.htm

Distribution of Scores Taken on 40-minute Writing Samples Over Seven Years



Proficiency
Admissions

2007 Statewide Test Results

Score	Total	11th	12th	Ed1	Ed2	Ed3	Ed4	Ed5	Ed6	N/R
1.0	1.0%	0.9%	1.4%	0.5%	0.3%	3.6%	4.1%	0.0%	3.0%	3.8%
1.5	1.7%	1.6%	2.6%	1.0%	1.4%	3.8%	3.8%	21.1%	4.0%	3.8%
2.0	8.0%	8.1%	7.4%	6.6%	5.4%	20.0%	14.7%	21.1%	15.1%	11.3%
2.5	8.3%	8.3%	7.4%	8.1%	6.1%	14.8%	9.2%	10.5%	12.3%	11.3%
3.0	24.0%	23.9%	25.9%	23.9%	20.9%	31.2%	31.5%	5.3%	28.5%	24.5%
3.5	16.1%	16.0%	17.3%	17.4%	15.2%	12.9%	14.7%	21.1%	14.0%	11.3%
4.0	21.5%	21.6%	20.6%	22.8%	24.5%	9.0%	13.0%	15.8%	15.4%	17.0%
4.5	9.3%	9.4%	8.5%	10.0%	11.4%	2.7%	5.5%	5.3%	3.7%	9.4%
5.0	7.1%	7.3%	5.9%	7.3%	10.1%	1.1%	2.1%	0.0%	2.5%	0.0%
5.5	2.0%	1.9%	2.2%	1.7%	2.9%	0.3%	1.0%	0.0%	1.3%	5.7%
6.0	1.0%	1.0%	0.9%	0.8%	2.0%	0.5%	0.3%	0.0%	0.2%	1.9%
Mean	3.5	3.5	3.4	3.5	3.7	2.8	3.0	2.8	3.0	3.3
SD	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.0	1.0	0.9	1.3
N	7270	6608	649	3714	2199	365	292	19	628	53

KEY

- Ed1: Continue my education at a college or university in Montana.
- Ed2: Continue my education at a college or university in another state.
- Ed3: Seek employment after I leave high school.
- Ed4: Join the military after I leave high school.
- Ed5: Stay at home and take care of my family.
- Ed6: Other

Chart Explained

The chart above contains the following information:

- The first column to the left lists the score points from 1 to 6. Two or three people scored each essay and scores were averaged, resulting in scores such as 3.5.
- The second column (*Total*) lists student score distribution, with a **percentage** at each score point.
- Columns 3-4 list score distributions based on student grade level.
- The last 5 columns list score distributions for post-secondary plans. A key at the bottom lists possible answers to the question, "What do you plan to do after high school?"
- Below the *Mean* (average scores) row is the standard deviation (SD).
- *N* is the total number and numbers under each category. Data may be missing if students did not bubble-in information about themselves.

On the back page are two additional statewide charts, one showing scores for handwritten tests, with a mean score of 3.3, and one showing scores for word-processed tests, with a mean of 3.5. Of the handwritten papers,

32.3% scored at 4.0 or above; of the word-processed, 42.1% scored 4.0 or above. At the other end of the scale, while 15.9% of the handwritten papers scored 2 or below, 9.9% of the word-processed scored that low. Only 1,013 students handwrote this year, compared to 3,060 in 2005.

Questions about plans after high school reveal that 81% of the students tested intend to go to college. Of those planning to continue their educations in Montana, 16.2% scored below 3 (compared to 13.3% in 2006).

In 2007, 76 students scored 6.0, 29 of whom answered that they planned to attend a college or university in Montana.

By comparison, in 2006, 84 scored 6; in 2005, 66 students scored 6; in 2004, 42 students earned 6's; in 2003, 33 students earned 6's; in 2002, 14 students scored 6; and in 2001, 21 students scored 6. In previous years, about one third of the highest-scoring students planned to pursue degrees in Montana.

Teachers Evaluate Writing Assessment

99 teachers who administered the Writing Assessment completed questionnaires. They were given a series of ten statements, which they rated from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." Based on this data:

- 93% believe students should take a variety of writing assessments during their school years.
- 88% thought instructions were clear.
- 78% thought their students appeared to be interested in the prompts and engaged in their thinking and writing.
- 90% believe their students understand the Writing Proficiency Policy.
- 70% think they can administer the test during one class period.
- 61% saw their students engage in some pre-writing activity.

In the comment section, some teachers who would prefer to word-process or go online don't trust their networks or don't have adequate access to computers. This year, lack of time seemed to be an issue.

Some commented that having too many instructions was confusing, yet some want more detailed instructions. Multiple modes solves some problems, but creates others.

Eighth Scoring Site Added

In 2001, 100 teachers and college instructors participated in training and scoring at three sites. This year, 310 people scored at eight sites. Glasgow High School teachers added a new site, bringing in 34 scorers, 21 of whom were new to scoring. Scorers are teachers, education students, and college instructors whose interest in student writing and instruction is evident.

For the fourth year, a group of trainers traveled to Helena and spent two days selecting training materials and practicing presentations in order to lead scoring sessions. These trainers are critical to the success of this project and should be commended for their contributions and professionalism.

Bozeman Trainers:

Kirk Branch
Kaci Shober
Art Bangert

Billings Trainers:

Kathy Holt
Glenda Skillen
Jon Moore

Great Falls Trainers:

Joyce Damm
Colleen Hazen
Annette Young
Jana Carter
Holly Pepprock
Stacey Herries
Mandy Knight
Eric Tokerud

Glasgow Trainers:

Bob Rennick
Michael MacDonald
Mike Beyer

Helena Trainers:

Robyn Wingo
Claudette Morton
Jean O'Connor
Kathleen Prody

Whitefish Trainers:

Tari Johnson
Tyler Glidden
Christie harkins
Sarah Langlois
Shannon O'Donnell
Melanie Knadler
Beverly Kahn
Soozi Crosby
Sandy Chestnut
Norma MacKenzie
Matt Holloway
Beth Beaulieu

Miles City Trainers:

Cathy Frye
Tammy Kane
Renee Rasmussen

Missoula Trainers:

Beverly Ann Chin
Cathy Corr

Steve Tull
Anna Baldwin
Deborah Lowe
Carla Hinman
Carol Sullivan
Rob Plakke
Caroline Crittendon
Tiffany Rehbein

At the end of each scoring session, scorers were asked to complete a questionnaire to provide feedback from the scoring session. 63% completed these questionnaires. Of those respondents, this was the first such training session for 70 participants and 43 were not English majors. Based on the survey, 7% were elementary, 15% middle school, 77% high school, and 8% college-level instructors. However, the scorer roll shows 18% of the total scorers representing colleges.

Participants responded to a series of statements:

62% strongly agreed and 34% agreed that the workshop helped them prepare students for college writing and/or other writing assessments.

40% strongly agreed and 55% agreed that the prompts generated useful pieces of writing and were fair and unbiased;

33% strongly agreed and 66% agreed that students took the test seriously;

44% strongly agreed and 53% agreed that they can score reliably with this rubric;

55% strongly agreed and 41% agreed that training materials were useful and appropriate;

46% strongly agreed and 41% agreed that the pacing was appropriate. This statement generated the most disagreement, with 10% of the respondents criticizing the pace.

54% strongly agreed and 44% agreed that they had the right number of papers and amount of time to score accurately.

Scorers identified what they found most useful, most often writing comments such as:

- Reading various approaches to prompts. Seeing what works or does not work.
- Camaraderie with English teachers, sharing ideas and thoughts.
- Familiarization with the rubric and subsequent application of this knowledge to assessment; assessment vocabulary; being able to articulate my

- The chance to network with other teachers and dialogue about common issues of concern.
- The number of practice sets we were given; annotations, and consensus scoring.
- It is always good to hear what others are doing and to read papers generated outside my classes. As one of two English teachers, the connections are priceless.

Scorers gave suggestions for how to improve the training/scoring sessions, typically:

- Nothing. It's all dandy!
- Number the pages in the notebooks.
- The amount of training may be a little short for first-time scorers and a little long for experienced scorers.
- Some of the examples that brought discussion weren't the best.
- This session was the best ever.
- Some people scored too fast and were not accurate.
- Too noisy! Don't rush us.
- Can you make calibration less stressful?
- Place more emphasis on scoring differences that may arise from critical thinking skills.
- None. If you can train me, you're doing very well.

Although the majority of the participants thought the amount of training was "just right," and some thought it too hurried, several were adamant that as English teachers or as experienced scorers, they already know how to score papers and did not need so much training.

This issue has been raised in the past and the general consensus has been that experienced scorers are very important to the training of the new scorers. While we have considered shortening the training time for the experienced scorers, it would still be vital that every table have a leader with experience.

How would you respond to these suggestions? Email jjclinard@montana.edu.

Frequency Distributions for Handwritten Tests Spring 2007

Score	Total	11th	12th	Ed1	Ed2	Ed3	Ed4	Ed5	Ed6	N/R
1.0	2.1%	1.9%	3.1%	1.0%	0.8%	4.7%	8.7%	0.0%	6.7%	5.3%
1.5	3.4%	3.4%	3.1%	1.9%	2.5%	7.0%	8.7%	40.0%	7.9%	5.3%
2.0	10.4%	10.5%	9.4%	8.6%	7.6%	23.3%	17.4%	20.0%	18.0%	15.8%
2.5	10.8%	11.0%	7.3%	11.9%	7.1%	7.0%	13.0%	0.0%	12.4%	21.1%
3.0	23.8%	24.2%	20.8%	23.7%	21.4%	27.9%	21.7%	20.0%	30.3%	21.1%
3.5	17.3%	17.3%	17.7%	19.5%	16.0%	18.6%	13.0%	20.0%	10.1%	5.3%
4.0	19.5%	19.6%	20.8%	20.8%	24.4%	9.3%	10.9%	0.0%	11.2%	10.5%
4.5	7.8%	7.7%	8.3%	7.5%	11.3%	2.3%	4.3%	0.0%	3.4%	15.8%
5.0	4.2%	4.0%	7.3%	4.2%	7.6%	0.0%	2.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
5.5	0.7%	0.5%	2.1%	0.9%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
6.0	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Mean	3.3	3.2	3.4	3.3	3.5	2.8	2.7	2.3	2.7	2.9
SD	0.9	0.9	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.0	0.8	0.9	1.0
N	1013	910	96	573	238	43	46	5	89	19

Frequency Distributions for Word-Processed (and Online) Tests

Score	Total	11th	12th	Ed1	Ed2	Ed3	Ed4	Ed5	Ed6	N/R
1.0	0.8%	0.8%	1.1%	0.4%	0.2%	3.5%	3.3%	0.0%	2.4%	--
1.5	1.4%	1.3%	2.6%	0.8%	1.2%	3.5%	2.5%	14.3%	3.4%	--
2.0	7.7%	7.8%	7.1%	6.3%	5.2%	19.9%	14.4%	21.4%	14.6%	--
2.5	7.9%	8.0%	7.5%	7.5%	6.0%	15.8%	8.6%	14.3%	12.3%	--
3.0	24.1%	23.9%	26.4%	24.1%	20.8%	31.5%	33.7%	0.0%	28.2%	--
3.5	15.9%	15.8%	17.3%	17.0%	15.0%	12.3%	15.2%	21.4%	14.6%	--
4.0	21.7%	21.8%	20.8%	22.9%	24.5%	8.8%	12.8%	21.4%	16.1%	--
4.5	9.5%	9.6%	8.4%	10.3%	11.4%	2.5%	5.8%	7.1%	3.7%	--
5.0	7.6%	7.8%	5.6%	7.9%	10.4%	1.3%	2.1%	0.0%	3.0%	--
5.5	2.1%	2.1%	2.2%	1.9%	3.0%	0.3%	1.2%	0.0%	1.5%	--
6.0	1.2%	1.2%	1.1%	0.9%	2.1%	0.6%	0.4%	0.0%	0.2%	--
Mean	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.6	3.7	2.8	3.1	2.9	3.1	0.0
SD	1.0	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.0	0.9	
N	6190	5635	549	3110	1938	317	243	14	535	0

KEY

- Ed1: Continue my education at a college or university in Montana.
- Ed2: Continue my education at a college or university in another state.
- Ed3: Seek employment after I leave high school.
- Ed4: Join the military after I leave high school.
- Ed5: Stay at home and take care of my family.
- Ed6: Other
- NR: No response (online, students must respond to continue)

In addition to the charts above, participating schools received distribution charts of their schools results. Also, teachers received a chart like this for each of their classes.

Additional data, including disaggregation of scores by gender and ethnicity will be summarized in the next newsletter.