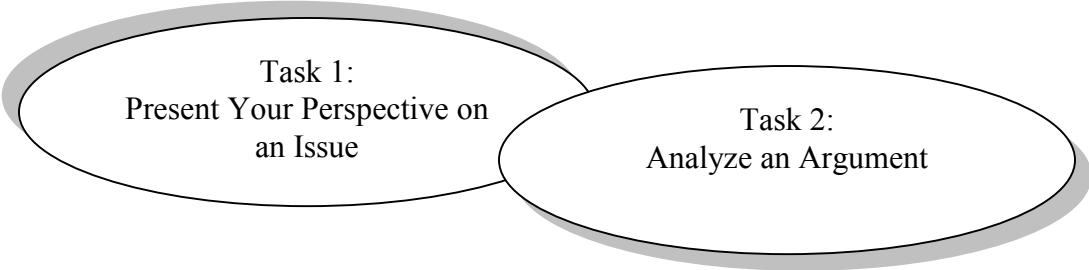


An Introduction to the Analytical Writing Section of the GRE[®] General Test



Task 1:
Present Your Perspective on
an Issue

Task 2:
Analyze an Argument

This publication includes a description of the GRE analytical writing section, strategies for each task, scoring information, scoring guides, score level descriptions, a sample test, and essay responses with reader commentary.



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Overview of the Analytical Writing Section

The analytical writing section is a new section of the GRE General Test introduced beginning in October 2002 that tests your critical thinking and analytical writing skills. It assesses your ability to articulate and support complex ideas, analyze an argument, and sustain a focused and coherent discussion. It does not assess specific content knowledge.

The analytical writing section consists of two separately-timed analytical writing tasks:

- a 45-minute "Present Your Perspective on an Issue" task
- a 30-minute "Analyze an Argument" task

You will be given a choice between two Issue topics. Each states an opinion on an issue of broad interest and asks you to discuss the issue from any perspective(s) you wish, so long as you provide relevant reasons and examples to explain and support your views.

You will not have a choice of Argument topics. The Argument task presents a different challenge from that of the Issue task: it requires you to critique a given argument by discussing how well reasoned you find it. You will need to consider the logical soundness of the argument rather than to agree or disagree with the position it presents.

The two tasks are complementary in that one requires you to construct your own argument by taking a position and providing evidence supporting your views on the issue, whereas the other requires you to critique someone else's argument by assessing its claims and evaluating the evidence it provides.

Preparing for the Analytical Writing Section

Everyone—even the most practiced and confident of writers—should spend some time preparing for the analytical writing section before arriving at the test center. It is important to review the skills measured, how the section is scored, scoring guides and score level descriptions, sample topics, scored sample essay responses, and reader commentary.

The topics in the analytical writing section relate to a broad range of subjects—from the fine arts and humanities to the social and physical sciences—but no topic requires specific content knowledge. In fact, each topic has been field-tested to ensure that it possesses several important characteristics, including the following:

- GRE test takers, regardless of their field of study or special interests, understood the topic and could easily discuss it.
- The topic elicited the kinds of complex thinking and persuasive writing that university faculty consider important for success in graduate school.
- The responses were varied in content and in the way the writers developed their ideas.

To help you prepare for the analytical writing section of the General Test, the GRE Program has published the entire pool of topics from which your test topics will be selected. You might find it helpful to review the Issue and Argument pools and to discuss some of the topics with a friend or teacher. You can view the published pools on the Web at www.gre.org/pracmats.html or you can obtain a copy by writing to GRE Program, PO Box 6000, Princeton, NJ 08541-6000.

Test-Taking Strategies for the Analytical Writing Section

It is important to budget your time. Within the 45-minute time limit for the Issue task, you will need to allow sufficient time to choose one of the two topics, think about the issue you've chosen, plan a response, and compose your essay. Within the 30-minute time limit for the Argument task, you will need to allow sufficient time to analyze the argument, plan a critique, and compose your response. Although GRE readers understand the time constraints under which you write and will consider your response a "first draft," you still want it to be the best possible example of your writing that you can produce under the testing circumstances.

Save a few minutes at the end of each timed task to check for obvious errors. Although an occasional spelling or grammatical error will not affect your score, severe and persistent errors will detract from the overall effectiveness of your writing and thus lower your score.

Following the analytical writing section, you will have the opportunity to take a 10-minute break. There is a one-minute break between the other test sections. You might want to replenish your supply of scratch paper during each scheduled break.

How the Analytical Writing Section is Scored

Each response is holistically scored on a 6-point scale according to the criteria published in the GRE analytical writing scoring guides (see pages 27 and 28). Holistic scoring means that each response is judged as a whole: readers do not separate the response into component parts and award a certain number of points for a particular criterion or element such as ideas, organization, sentence structure, or language. Instead, readers assign scores based on the overall quality of the response, considering all of its characteristics in an integrated way. Excellent organization or poor organization, for example, will be part of the readers' overall impression of the response and will therefore contribute to the score, but organization, as a distinct feature, has no specific weight.

In general, GRE readers are college and university faculty experienced in teaching courses in which writing and critical thinking skills are important. All GRE readers have undergone careful training, passed stringent GRE qualifying tests, and demonstrated that they are able to maintain scoring accuracy.

To ensure fairness and objectivity in scoring

- responses are randomly distributed to the readers
- all identifying information about the test takers is concealed from the readers
- each response is scored by two readers
- readers do not know what other scores a response may have received
- the scoring procedure requires that each response receive identical or adjacent scores from two readers; any other score combination is adjudicated by a third GRE reader

The scores given for the two tasks are then averaged for a final reported score. The score level descriptions, presented on page 29, provide information on how to interpret the total score on the analytical writing section. The primary emphasis in scoring the analytical writing section is on critical thinking and analytical writing skills.

Present Your Perspective on an Issue Task

Understanding the Issue Task

The "Present Your Perspective on an Issue" task assesses your ability to think critically about a topic of general interest and to clearly express your thoughts about it in writing. Each topic, presented in quotation marks, makes a claim about an issue that test takers can discuss from various perspectives and apply to many different situations or conditions. Your *task* is to present a compelling case for your own position on the issue. Be sure to read the claim carefully and think about it from several points of view, considering the complexity of ideas associated with those perspectives. Then, make notes about the position you want to develop and list the main reasons and examples that you could use to support that position.

The Issue task allows considerable latitude in the way you respond to the claim. Although it is important that you address the central issue, you are free to take any approach you wish. For example, you might

- agree absolutely with the claim, disagree completely, or agree with some parts and not others
- question the assumptions the statement seems to be making
- qualify any of its terms, especially if the way you define or apply a term is important to developing your perspective on the issue
- point out why the claim is valid in some situations but not in others
- evaluate points of view that contrast with your own perspective
- develop your position with reasons that are supported by several relevant examples or by a single extended example

The GRE readers scoring your response are not looking for a "right" answer—in fact, there is no correct position to take. Instead, the readers are evaluating the skill with which you articulate and develop an argument to support your position on the issue.

Understanding the Context for Writing: Purpose and Audience

The Issue task is an exercise in critical thinking and persuasive writing. The purpose of this task is to determine how well you can develop a compelling argument supporting your own perspective on an issue and to effectively communicate that argument in writing to an academic audience. Your audience consists of college and university faculty who are trained as GRE readers to apply the scoring criteria identified in the scoring guide for "Present Your Perspective on an Issue" (see page 27).

To get a clearer idea of how GRE readers apply the Issue scoring criteria to actual responses, you should review scored sample Issue essay responses and readers' commentaries. The sample responses, particularly at the 5 and 6 score levels, will show you a variety of successful strategies for organizing, developing, and communicating a persuasive argument. The readers' commentaries discuss specific aspects of analysis and writing, such as the use of examples, development and support, organization, language fluency, and word choice. For each response, the commentary points out aspects that are particularly persuasive as well as any that detract from the overall effectiveness of the essay.

Preparing for the Issue Task

Because the Issue task is meant to assess the persuasive writing skills that you have developed throughout your education, it has been designed neither to require any particular course of study nor to advantage students with a particular type of training.

Many college textbooks on composition offer advice on persuasive writing that you might find useful, but even this advice might be more technical and specialized than you need for the Issue task. You will not be expected to know specific critical thinking or writing terms or strategies; instead, you should be able to use reasons, evidence, and examples to support your position on an issue. Suppose, for instance, that an Issue

topic asks you to consider whether it is important for government to provide financial support for art museums. If your position is that government should fund art museums, you might support your position by discussing the reasons art is important and explain that museums are public places where art is available to anyone. On the other hand, if your position is that government should not support museums, you might point out that, given limited governmental funds, art museums are not as deserving of governmental funding as are other, more socially important, institutions. Or, if you are in favor of government funding for art museums only under certain conditions, you might focus on the artistic criteria, cultural concerns, or political conditions that you think should determine how—or whether—art museums receive government funds. It is not your position that matters so much as the critical thinking skills you display in developing your position.

An excellent way to prepare for the Issue task is to practice writing on some of the published topics. There is no "best" approach: some people prefer to start practicing without regard to the 45-minute time limit; others prefer to take a "timed test" first and practice within the time limit. No matter which approach you take when you practice the Issue task, you should review the task directions, then

- carefully read the claim made in the topic and make sure you understand the issue involved; if it seems unclear, discuss it with a friend or teacher
- think about the issue in relation to your own ideas and experiences, to events you have read about or observed, and to people you have known; this is the knowledge base from which you will develop compelling reasons and examples in your argument that reinforce, negate, or qualify the claim in some way
- decide what position on the issue you want to take and defend—remember you are free to agree or disagree completely or to agree with some parts or some applications but not others
- decide what compelling evidence (reasons and examples) you can use to support your position

Remember that this is a task in critical thinking and persuasive writing. Therefore, you might find it helpful to explore the complexity of a claim in one of the topics by asking yourself the following questions:

- What, precisely, is the central issue?
- Do I agree with all or with any part of the claim? Why or why not?
- Does the claim make certain assumptions? If so, are they reasonable?
- Is the claim valid only under certain conditions? If so, what are they?
- Do I need to explain how I interpret certain terms or concepts used in the claim?
- If I take a certain position on the issue, what reasons support my position?
- What examples—either real or hypothetical—could I use to illustrate those reasons and advance my point of view? Which examples are most compelling?

Once you have decided on a position to defend, consider the perspective of others who might not agree with your position. Ask yourself:

- What reasons might someone use to refute or undermine my position?
- How should I acknowledge or defend against those views in my essay?

To plan your response, you might want to summarize your position and make brief notes about how you will support the position you're going to take. When you've done this, look over your notes and decide how you will organize your response. Then write a response developing your position on the issue. Even if you don't write a full response, you should find it helpful to practice with a few of the Issue topics and to sketch out your possible responses. After you have practiced with some of the topics, try writing responses to some of the topics within the 45-minute time limit so that you have a good idea of how to use your time in the actual test.

It would probably be helpful to get some feedback on your response from an instructor who teaches critical thinking or writing or to trade papers on the same topic with other students and discuss one another's responses in relation to the scoring guide. Try to determine how each paper meets or misses the criteria for

each score point in the guide. Comparing your own response to the scoring guide will help you see how and where you might need to improve.

Deciding Which Issue Topic to Choose

Remember that the General Test will contain two Issue topics from the published pool; you must choose *one* of these two. Because the 45-minute timing begins when you first see the two topics, you should not spend too much time making a decision. Instead, try to choose fairly quickly the issue that you feel better prepared to discuss.

Before making a choice, read each topic carefully. Then decide on which topic you could develop a more effective and well-reasoned argument. In making this decision, you might ask yourself:

- Which topic do I find more interesting or engaging?
- Which topic more closely relates to my own academic studies or other experiences?
- On which topic can I more clearly explain and defend my perspective?
- On which topic can I more readily think of strong reasons and examples to support my position?

Your answers to these questions should help you make your choice.

The Form of Your Response

You are free to organize and develop your response in any way that you think will effectively communicate your ideas about the issue. Your response may, but need not, incorporate particular writing strategies learned in English composition or writing-intensive college courses. GRE readers will not be looking for a particular developmental strategy or mode of writing; in fact, when GRE readers are trained, they review hundreds of Issue responses that, although highly diverse in content and form, display similar levels of critical thinking and persuasive writing. Readers will see, for example, some Issue responses at the 6 score level that begin by briefly summarizing the writer's position on the issue and then explicitly announcing the main points to be argued. They will see others that lead into the writer's position by making a prediction, asking a series of questions, describing a scenario, or defining critical terms in the quotation. The readers know that a writer can earn a high score by giving multiple examples or by presenting a single, extended example. Look at the sample Issue responses, particularly at the 5 and 6 score levels, to see how other writers have successfully developed and organized their arguments.

You should use as many or as few paragraphs as you consider appropriate for your argument—for example, you will probably need to create a new paragraph whenever your discussion shifts to a new cluster of ideas. What matters is not the number of examples, the number of paragraphs, or the form your argument takes but, rather, the cogency of your ideas about the issue and the clarity and skill with which you communicate those ideas to academic readers.

Sample Issue Topic

“In our time, specialists of all kinds are highly overrated. We need more generalists—people who can provide broad perspectives.”

Strategies for this Topic

This claim raises several related questions: What does it mean to be a generalist or a specialist, and what value do they have for society? Does society actually need more generalists, and are specialists, in fact, “highly overrated?”

There are several basic positions you could take on this issue: Yes, society needs more generalists and places too high a value on specialists. No, the opposite is true. Or, it depends on various factors. Or, both groups are important in today’s culture; neither is overvalued. Your analysis might draw examples from a particular society or country, from one or more areas of society, or from various situations. It might focus on the role of generalists and specialists in relation to communications, transportation, politics, information, or technology. Any of these approaches is valid, so long as you use relevant reasons and examples to support your position.

Before you stake out a position, take a few moments to reread the claim. To analyze it, consider questions such as these:

- What are the main differences between specialists and generalists? What are the strong points of each?
- Do these differences always hold in various professions or situations? Could there be some specialists, for example, who also need to have very broad knowledge and general abilities to perform their work well?
- How do generalists and specialists function in your field?
- What value do you think society places on specialists and generalists? Are specialists overvalued in some situations, and not in others?
- Does society really need more generalists than it has? If so, what needs would they serve?

Now you can organize your thoughts into two groups:

- Reasons and examples to support the claim
- Reasons and examples to support an opposing point of view

If you find one view clearly more persuasive than the other, consider developing an argument from that perspective. As you build your argument, keep in mind the other points, which you could argue against.

If both groups have compelling points, consider developing a position supporting, not the stated claim, but a more limited or more complex claim. Then you can use reasons and examples from both sides to justify your position.

Essay Responses and Reader Commentary

Essay Response* – Score 6

In this era of rapid social and technological change leading to increasing life complexity and psychological displacement, both positive and negative effects among persons in Western society call for a balance in which there are both specialists and generalists.

* All responses in this publication are reproduced exactly as written, including errors, misspellings, etc., if any.

Specialists are necessary in order to allow society as a whole to properly and usefully assimilate the masses of new information and knowledge that have come out of research and have been widely disseminated through mass global media. As the head of Pharmacology at my university once said (and I paraphrase): "I can only research what I do because there are so many who have come before me to whom I can turn for basic knowledge. It is only because of each of the narrowly focussed individuals at each step that a full and true understanding of the complexities of life can be had. Each person can only hold enough knowledge to add one small rung to the ladder, but together we can climb to the moon." This illustrates the point that our societies level of knowledge and technology is at a stage in which there simply must be specialists in order for our society to take advantage of the information available to us.

Simply put, without specialists, our society would find itself bogged down in the Sargasso sea of information overload. While it was fine for early physicists to learn and understand the few laws and ideas that existed during their times, now, no one individual can possibly digest and assimilate all of the knowledge in any given area.

On the other hand, Over specialization means narrow focii in which people can lose the larger picture. No one can hope to understand the human body by only inspecting one's own toe-nails. What we learn from a narrow focus may be internally logically coherent but may be irrelevant or fallacious within the framework of a broader perspective. Further, if we inspect only our toe-nails, we may conclude that the whole body is hard and white. Useful conclusions and thus perhaps useful inventions must come by sharing among specialists. Simply throwing out various discoveries means we have a pile of useless discoveries, it is only when one can make with them a mosaic that we can see that they may form a picture.

Not only may over-specialization be dangerous in terms of the truth, purity and cohesion of knowledge, but it can also serve to drown moral or universal issues. Generalists and only generalists can see a broad enough picture to realize and introduce to the world the problems of the environment. With specialization, each person focusses on their research and their goals. Thus, industrialization, expansion, and new technologies are driven ahead. Meanwhile no individual can see the wholisitic view of our global existence in which true advancement may mean stifling individual specialists for the greater good of all.

Finally, over-specialization in a people's daily lives and jobs has meant personal and psychological compartmentalization. People are forced into pigeon holes early in life (at least by university) and must conciously attempt to consume external forms of stimuli and information in order not to be lost in their small and isolated universe. Not only does this make for narrowly focussed and generally poorly-educated individuals, but it guarantees a sense of loss of community, often followed by a feeling of psychological displacement and personal dissatisfaction.

Without generalists, society becomes inward-looking and eventually inefficient. Without a society that recongnizes the imptance of braod-mindedness and fora for sharing generalities, individuals become isolated. Thus, while our form of society necessitates specialists, generalists are equally important. Specialists drive us forward in a series of thrusts while generalists make sure we are still on the jousting field and know what the stakes are.

Reader Commentary for Essay Response – Score 6

This is an outstanding analysis of the issue—insightful, well reasoned, and highly effective in its use of language. The introductory paragraph announces the writer's position on the issue and provides the context within which the writer will develop that position: "In this era of rapid social and technological change leading to increasing life complexity and psychological displacement"

The argument itself has two parts. The first part presents a compelling case for specialization, primarily in the field of medicine. The second part presents an equally compelling, well-organized case against overspecialization based on three main reasons:

- logical (narrowly trained specialists often fail to understand the whole)
- moral (usually generalists understand what is needed for "the greater good")
- personal (specializing/pigeonholing too early can be psychologically damaging)

The argument's careful line of reasoning is further strengthened by the skillful use of expert testimony (quotation from a prominent medical researcher) and vivid metaphor (to inspect only one's toenails is to ignore the whole body).

It is not only the reasoning that distinguishes this response. The language is precise and often figurative ("bogged down in a Sargasso sea of information overload," "a pile of useless discoveries," and "specialists drive us forward in a series of thrusts, while generalists make sure we are still on the jousting field"). The reader is constantly guided through the argument by transitional phrases and ideas that help organize the ideas and move the argument forward. This is an exceptionally fine response to the topic.

Essay Response – Score 5

Specialists are not overrated today. More generalists may be needed, but not to overshadow the specialists. Generalists can provide a great deal of information on many topics of interest with a broad range of ideas. People who look at the overall view of things can help with some of the large problems our society faces today. But specialists are necessary to gain a better understanding of more in depth methods to solve problems or fixing things.

One good example of why specialists are not overrated is in the medical field. Doctors are necessary for people to live healthy lives. When a person is sick, he may go to a general practitioner to find out the cause of his problems. Usually, this kind of "generalized" doctor can help most ailments with simple and effective treatments. Sometimes, though, a sickness may go beyond a family doctor's knowledge or the prescribed treatments don't work the way they should. When a sickness progresses or becomes diagnosed as a disease that requires more care than a family doctor can provide, he may be referred to a specialist. For instance, a person with constant breathing problems that require hospitalization may be suggested to visit an asthma specialist. Since a family doctor has a great deal of knowledge of medicine, he can decide when his methods are not effective and the patient needs to see someone who knows more about the specific problem; someone who knows how it begins, progresses, and specified treatments. This is an excellent example of how a generalied person may not be equipped enough to handle something as well as a specialized one can.

Another example of a specialist who is needed instead of a generalist involves teaching. In grammar school, children learn all the basic principles of reading, writing, and arithmetic. But as children get older and progress in school, they gain a better understanding of the language and mathematical processes. As the years in school increase, they need to learn more and more specifics and details about various subjects. They start out by learning basic math concepts such as addition, subtraction, division, and multiplication. A few years later, they are ready to begin algebraic concepts, geometry, and calculus. They are also ready to learn more advanced vocabulary, the principles of how all life is composed and how it functions. One teacher or professor can not provide as much in depth discussion on all of these topics as well as one who has learned the specifics and studied mainly to know everything that is currently known about one of these subjects. Generalized teachers are required to begin molding students at a very early age so they can get ready for the future ahead of them in gaining more facts about the basic subjects and finding out new facts on the old ones.

These are only two examples of why specialists are not highly overrated and more generalists are not necessary to the point of overshadowing them. Generalists are needed to give the public a broad understanding of some things. But , specialists are important to help maintain the status, health, and safety of our society. Specialists are very necessary.

Reader Commentary for Essay Response – Score 5

This writer presents a well-developed analysis of the complexities of the issue by discussing the need for both the generalist and the specialist.

The argument is rooted in two extended examples, both well chosen. The first (paragraph 2) begins with a discussion of the necessity for medical generalists (the general practitioner) as well as specialists and moves into an example within the example (breathing problems and the need for an asthma specialist). This extension from the general to the specific characterizes the example in the next paragraph as well. There, the discussion centers on education from elementary to high school, from basic arithmetic to calculus.

The smooth development is aided by the use of appropriate transitions: "but," "usually," and "for instance," among others. The essay ends by revisiting the writer's thesis.

While the writer handles language and syntax well, several lapses in clarity keep this otherwise well-argued response out of the 6 category. The problems vary from the lack of a pronoun referent ("When a sickness progresses or becomes diagnosed, . . . he may be referred to a specialist") to an error in parallel structure ("how it begins, progresses and specified treatments"), to loose syntax and imprecise language ("Generalized teachers are required to begin molding students at a very early age so they can get ready for the future ahead of them in gaining more facts about the basic subjects.")

Essay Response – Score 4

Specialists are just what their name says: people who specialize in one part of a very general scheme of things. A person can't know everything there is to know about everything. This is why specialists are helpful. You can take one general concept and divide it up three ways and have three fully developed different concepts instead of one general concept that no one really knows about. Isn't it better to really know something well, than to know everything half-way.

Take a special ed teacher compared to a general ed teacher. The general ed teacher knows how to deal with most students. She knows how to teach a subject to a student that is on a normal level. But what would happen to the child in the back of the room with dyslexia? She would be so lost in that general ed classroom that she would not only not learn, but be frustrated and quite possibly, have low self-esteem and hate school. If there is a special ed teacher there who specializes in children with learning disabilities, she can teach the general ed teacher how to cope with this student as well as modify the curriculum so that the student can learn along with the others. The special ed teacher can also take that child for a few hours each day and work with her on her reading difficulty one-on-one, which a general ed teacher never would have time to do.

A general ed teacher can't know what a special ed teacher knows and a special ed teacher can't know what a general ed teacher knows. But the two of them working together and specializing in their own things can really get a lot more accomplished. The special ed teacher is also trained to work on the child's self-esteem, which has a big part in how successful this child will be. Every child in the United States of America has the right to an equal education. How can a child with a learning disability receive the same equal education as a general ed student if there was no specialist there to help both teacher and child?

Another thing to consider is how a committee is supposed to work together. Each person has a special task to accomplish and when these people all come together, with their tasks finished, every aspect of the community's work is completely covered. Nothing is left undone. In this case there are many different specialists to meet the general goal of the committee.

When you take into account that a specialist contributes only a small part of the generalist aspect, it seems ridiculous to say that specialists are overrated. The generalists looks to the specialists any time they need

help or clarification on their broad aspect. Specialists and generalists are part of the same system, so if a specialist is overrated, then so is a generalist.

Reader Commentary for Essay Response – Score 4

This is an adequate analysis of the issue. After a somewhat confusing attempt to define "specialists" in the introductory paragraph, the writer presents a pertinent example (the special education teacher) to illustrate the importance of specialists. The example dominates the response and contributes positively to the overall score of 4.

The second example, how a committee works, is less persuasive. However, it does seem to help clarify the writer's definition of "general" as an umbrella term meaning the total collection of what specialists know about a topic.

Although the writer's views about the relationship between "generalist" and "specialist" are unusual, they do become clear in the conclusion of the essay. Yet, these ideas are not developed in sufficient depth or with enough logical control to earn a score higher than 4.

The writing is generally error free. There are few problems in sentence structure, grammar, and usage, although the phrasing is at times imprecise and wordy. Overall, this response displays clearly adequate control of the elements of written English.

Essay Response – Score 3

To quote the saying, "Jack of all trades, master of none," would be my position on the statement. I feel specialists in all areas of knowledge lead to a higher standard of living for everyone. Specializing in different areas allows us to use each others talents to the highest level and maximize potential. As an example, if a person required brain surgery, would they rather have a brain surgeon or a general practitioner doing the work? Clearly a specialist would do the better job and give the patient a chance at a better life.

A university education starts by laying the groundwork for general knowledge but then narrows down to a specific field. General knowledge and a broad perspective are important, but if there was no focus on specific areas, our overall knowledge as a population would be seriously lessened.

Another example of specialists not being overated would be international trade. Not every nation can provide for themselves. They need to get products and ideas from other parts of the world because they are better at providing them. This allows for a growing economy if two different nations can provide each other with two different products. If one country can produce oranges better than another, it should trade the oranges for the fish that it can not produce. If generalizing was the normal thing to do and both countries tried to produce all kinds of products, the countries would probably survive, but not have the standard of living they presently have.

Reader Commentary for Essay Response – Score 3

The writer's position is clear: specialists are important and necessary. However, the position is not adequately supported with reasons or logical examples.

Paragraph 1 presents an appropriate example of the brain surgeon versus the general practitioner. However, the example of an increasingly narrow university education in paragraph 2, contains only two sentences and is seriously undeveloped. It does little to advance the writer's position.

Paragraph 3 offers yet another example, the most developed of all. Unfortunately, this example is not clearly logical. The writer tries to argue that the "specialist" country (one that is a better producer of oranges) is superior to the "generalist" country (presumably one that produces oranges as well as other

products). This generalist country, the writer tells us, would be inferior to the other. This conclusion does not emerge logically from the writer's argument, and it seems to be at odds with everyday reality.

Although language is used with some imprecision throughout the essay, the writer's meaning is not obscured. The main reasons for the score of 3 are the lack of sufficient development and inappropriate use of examples.

Essay Response – Score 2

In the situation of health I feel that specialists are very important. For example if a person has heart problems, choose a heart specialist over a general medicine Dr. However if a person is having a wide range of symptoms, perhaps choose a Dr. with a wide range of experience might be more helpful.

It also depends on the type of problem you are having. For example I would not suggest taking a troubled child to a therapist who specializes in marriage problems. In some cases have a specialist helps to insure that you are getting the best possible treatment. On the other hand dealing with a person who has a wide range of experience may be able to find different ways of dealing with a particular problem.

Since the quotation did not state exactly what type of specialist we are dealing with it is also hard to determine the importance of having a specialist is. For example they could be health or problems with a car, or basically anything else. I feel that this information should not have been left out. I guess the bottom line is that I feel sometimes a specialist is very important.

Reader Commentary for Essay Response – Score 2

This is a seriously flawed analysis of the issue. The response argues in favor of specialists, but neither the reasons nor the examples are persuasive. The example of not taking "a troubled child to see a therapist who specializes in marriage problems" is both simplistic and off the mark since it differentiates between two specialists, not between a generalist and a specialist.

The sentences are so poorly formed and phrased that the argument is at times hard to follow. Nevertheless, this is not a 1 essay: the writer presents a position on the issue, develops that position with some very weak analysis, and communicates some ideas clearly.

Essay Response – Score 1

I disagree with the statement about specialists, we need specialists who take individual areas and specialize. A generalist can pinpoint a problem. He or she cannot determine the magnitude of the problem. A specialist can find the root of the problem. When he or she has years working in that specific field. For example, when I got sick I went to a doctor. He did blood work, x-ray, talk to me, etc. He prescribed me a medicine. I got worse. So I decided to go to another doctor. Now, I am doing great. A specialist knows the facts right away. Otherwise, it will take longer or not at all.

Reader Commentary for Essay Response – Score 1

This response presents a fundamentally deficient discussion of the issue.

The first sentence states the writer's position in support of specialists, but that position is not followed by a coherent argument. Some of the ideas seem contradictory (e.g., "generalists can pinpoint a problem") and the example is confusing. If the essay explained that the first (unsuccessful) doctor was a generalist and the second (successful) doctor was a specialist, the example would be useful. However, as written, the example is unclear and even misleading. The concluding statement only adds to the confusion.

Since most of the sentences are short and choppy, the ideas they try to communicate are also choppy. The writer needs to provide transitional phrases and ideas to bring logical cohesion to this response. Also, basic errors in usage and grammar are pervasive, but it is primarily the lack of a coherent argument that makes this response a 1.

Analyze an Argument Task

Understanding the Argument Task

The "Analyze an Argument" task assesses your ability to understand, analyze, and evaluate arguments and to clearly convey your analysis in writing. The task consists of a brief passage in which the author makes a case for some course of action or interpretation of events by presenting claims backed by reasons and evidence. Your task is to discuss the logical soundness of the author's case by critically examining the line of reasoning and the use of evidence. This task requires you to read the argument very carefully. You might want to read it more than once and possibly make brief notes about points you want to develop more fully in your response. In reading the argument, you should pay special attention to

- what is offered as evidence, support, or proof
- what is explicitly stated, claimed, or concluded
- what is assumed or supposed, perhaps without justification or proof
- what is not stated, but necessarily follows from what is stated

In addition, you should consider the *structure* of the argument—the way in which these elements are linked together to form a *line of reasoning*; that is, you should recognize the separate, sometimes implicit steps in the thinking process and consider whether the movement from each one to the next is logically sound. In tracing this line, look for transition words and phrases that suggest that the author is attempting to make a logical connection (e.g., *however, thus, therefore, evidently, hence, in conclusion*).

An important part of performing well on the Argument task is remembering what you are not being asked to do. You are not being asked to discuss whether the statements in the argument are true or accurate; instead, you are being asked whether conclusions and inferences are validly drawn from the statements. You are not being asked to agree or disagree with the position stated; instead, you are being asked to comment on the thinking that underlies the position stated. You are not being asked to express your own views on the subject being discussed (as you were in the Issue task); instead, you are being asked to evaluate the logical soundness of an argument of another writer and, in doing so, to demonstrate the critical thinking, perceptive reading, and analytical writing skills that university faculty consider important for success in graduate school.

"Analyze an Argument" is primarily a critical thinking task requiring a written response. Consequently, the analytical skills displayed in your critique carry great weight in determining your score.

Understanding the Context for Writing: Purpose and Audience

The purpose of the task is to see how well equipped you are to insightfully analyze an argument written by someone else and to effectively communicate your critique in writing to an academic audience. Your audience consists of college and university faculty who are trained as GRE readers to apply the scoring criteria identified in the scoring guide for the "Analyze an Argument" task (see page 28).

To get a clearer idea of how GRE readers apply the Argument scoring criteria to actual essays, you should review scored sample Argument essay responses and readers' commentaries. The sample responses, particularly at the 5 and 6 score levels, will show you a variety of successful strategies for organizing and developing an insightful critique. You will also see many examples of particularly effective uses of language. The readers' commentaries discuss specific aspects of analytical writing, such as cogency of ideas, development and support, organization, syntactic variety, and facility with language. These commentaries will point out aspects that are particularly effective and insightful as well as any that detract from the overall effectiveness of the responses.

Preparing for the Argument Task

Because the Argument task is meant to assess analytical writing and informal reasoning skills that you have developed throughout your education, it has been designed so as not to require any specific course of study or to advantage students with a particular type of training. Many college textbooks on rhetoric and composition have sections on informal logic and critical thinking that might prove helpful, but even these might be more detailed and technical than the task requires. You will not be expected to know methods of analysis or technical terms. For instance, in one topic an elementary school principal might conclude that the new playground equipment has improved student attendance because absentee rates have declined since it was installed. You will not need to see that the principal has committed the *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* fallacy; you will simply need to see that there are other possible explanations for the improved attendance, to offer some common-sense examples, and perhaps to suggest what would be necessary to verify the conclusion. For instance, absentee rates might have decreased because the climate was mild. This would have to be ruled out in order for the principal's conclusion to be valid.

Although you do not need to know special analytical techniques and terminology, you should be familiar with the directions for the Argument task and with certain key concepts, including the following:

- **alternative explanation**—a possible competing version of what might have caused the events in question; an alternative explanation undercuts or qualifies the original explanation because it too can account for the observed facts
- **analysis**—the process of breaking something (e.g., an argument) down into its component parts in order to understand how they work together to make up the whole; also a presentation, usually in writing, of the results of this process
- **argument**—a claim or a set of claims with reasons and evidence offered as support; a line of reasoning meant to demonstrate the truth or falsehood of something
- **assumption**—a belief, often unstated or unexamined, that someone must hold in order to maintain a particular position; something that is taken for granted but that must be true in order for the *conclusion* to be true
- **conclusion**—the end point reached by a line of reasoning, valid if the reasoning is sound; the resulting assertion
- **counterexample**—an example, real or hypothetical, that refutes or disproves a statement in the *argument*

An excellent way to prepare for the "Analyze an Argument" task is to practice writing on some of the published Argument topics. There is no one way to practice that is best for everyone. Some prefer to start practicing without adhering to the 30-minute time limit. If you follow this approach, take all the time you need to analyze the argument. No matter which approach you take, you should

- carefully read the argument—you might want to read it over more than once
- identify as many of its claims, conclusions, and underlying assumptions as possible
- think of as many alternative explanations and counterexamples as you can
- think of what additional evidence might weaken or lend support to the claims
- ask yourself what changes in the argument would make the reasoning more sound

Write down each of these thoughts as a brief note. When you've gone as far as you can with your analysis, look over the notes and put them in a good order for discussion (perhaps by numbering them). Then write a critique by fully developing each of your points in turn. Even if you choose not to write a full essay response, you should find it very helpful to practice analyzing a few of the arguments and sketching out your responses. When you become quicker and more confident, you should practice writing some Argument responses within the 30-minute time limit so that you will have a good sense of how to pace yourself in the actual test. For example, you will not want to discuss one point so exhaustively or to provide so many equivalent examples that you run out of time to make your other main points.

You might want to get feedback on your response(s) from a writing instructor, a philosophy teacher, or someone who emphasizes critical thinking in his or her course. It can also be very informative to trade papers on the same topic with fellow students and discuss one another's responses in terms of the scoring guide. Focus not so much on giving the "right scores" as on seeing how the papers meet or miss the performance standards for each score point and what you therefore need to do in order to improve.

How to Interpret Numbers, Percentages, and Statistics in Argument Topics

Some arguments contain numbers, percentages, or statistics that are offered as evidence in support of the argument's conclusion. For example, an argument might claim that a certain community event is less popular this year than it was last year because only 100 people attended this year in comparison with 150 last year, a 33 percent decline in attendance. It is important to remember that you are not being asked to do a mathematical task with the numbers, percentages, or statistics. Instead you should evaluate these as evidence that is intended to support the conclusion. In the example above, the conclusion is that a community event has become less popular. You should ask yourself: does the difference between 100 people and 150 people support that conclusion? Note that, in this case, there are other possible explanations; for example, the weather might have been much worse this year, this year's event might have been held at an inconvenient time, the cost of the event might have gone up this year, or there might have been another popular event this year at the same time. Each of these could explain the difference in attendance, and thus would weaken the conclusion that the event was "less popular." Similarly, percentages might support or weaken a conclusion depending on what actual numbers the percentages represent. Consider the claim that the drama club at a school deserves more funding because its membership has increased by 100 percent. This 100 percent increase could be significant if there had been 100 members and now there are 200 members, whereas the increase would be much less significant if there had been 5 members and now there are 10. Remember that any numbers, percentages, or statistics in Argument topics are used only as evidence in support of a conclusion, and you should always consider whether they actually support the conclusion.

The Form of Your Response

You are free to organize and develop your critique in any way that you think will effectively communicate your analysis of the argument. Your response may, but need not, incorporate particular writing strategies learned in English composition or writing-intensive college courses. GRE readers will not be looking for a particular developmental strategy or mode of writing. In fact, when faculty are trained to be GRE readers, they review hundreds of Argument responses that, although highly diverse in content and form, display similar levels of critical thinking and analytical writing. Readers will see, for example, some essays at the 6 score level that begin by briefly summarizing the argument and then explicitly stating and developing the main points of the critique. The readers know that a writer can earn a high score by analyzing and developing several points in a critique or by identifying a central flaw in the argument and developing that critique extensively. You might want to look at the sample Argument responses, particularly at the 5 and 6 score levels, to see how other writers have successfully developed and organized their critiques.

You should make choices about format and organization that you think support and enhance the overall effectiveness of your critique. This means using as many or as few paragraphs as you consider appropriate for your critique—for example, creating a new paragraph when your discussion shifts to a new point of analysis. You might want to organize your critique around the organization of the argument itself, discussing the argument line by line. Or you might want to first point out a central questionable assumption and then move on to discuss related flaws in the argument's line of reasoning. Similarly, you might want to use examples if they help illustrate an important point in your critique or move your discussion forward (remember, however, that, in terms of your ability to perform the Argument task effectively, it is your critical thinking and analytical writing, not your ability to come up with examples, that is being assessed). What matters is not the form the response takes, but how insightfully you analyze the argument and how articulately you communicate your analysis to academic readers within the context of the task.

Sample Argument Topic

Hospital statistics regarding people who go to the emergency room after roller skating accidents indicate the need for more protective equipment. Within this group of people, 75 percent of those who had accidents in streets or parking lots were not wearing any protective clothing (helmets, knee pads, etc.) or any light-reflecting material (clip-on lights, glow-in-the-dark wrist pads, etc.). Clearly, these statistics indicate that by investing in high-quality protective gear and reflective equipment, roller skaters will greatly reduce their risk of being severely injured in an accident.

Strategies for this Topic

This argument cites a particular hospital statistic to support the general conclusion that “investing in high-quality protective gear and reflective equipment” will reduce the risk of being severely injured in a roller skating accident.

In developing your analysis, you should ask yourself whether the hospital statistic actually supports the conclusion. You might want to ask yourself such questions as:

- What percentage of all roller skaters goes to the emergency room after roller skating accidents?
- Are the people who go to the emergency room after roller skating accidents representative of roller skaters in general?
- Are there people who are injured in roller skating accidents who do not go to the emergency room?
- Were the roller skaters who went to the emergency room severely injured?
- Were the 25 percent of roller skaters who were wearing protective gear injured just as severely as the 75 percent who were not wearing the gear?
- Are streets and parking lots inherently more dangerous for roller skating than other places?
- Would mid-quality gear and equipment be just as effective as high-quality gear and equipment in reducing the risk of severe injury while roller skating?
- Are there factors other than gear and equipment—e.g., weather conditions, visibility, skill of the skaters—that might be more closely correlated with the risk of roller skating injuries?

Considering possible answers to questions such as these will help you identify assumptions, alternative explanations, and weaknesses that you can develop in your critique of the argument.

Essay Responses and Reader Commentary

Essay Response* – Score 6

The notion that protective gear reduces the injuries suffered in accidents seems at first glance to be an obvious conclusion. After all, it is the intent of these products to either prevent accidents from occurring in the first place or to reduce the injuries suffered by the wearer should an accident occur. However, the conclusion that investing in high quality protective gear greatly reduces the risk of being severely injured in an accident may mask other (and potentially more significant) causes of injuries and may inspire people to over invest financially and psychologically in protective gear.

First of all, as mentioned in the argument, there are two distinct kinds of gear - preventative gear (such as light reflecting material) and protective gear (such as helmets). Preventative gear is intended to warn others, presumably for the most part motorists, of the presence of the roller skater. It works only if the "other" is a responsible and caring individual who will afford the skater the necessary space and attention.

* All responses in this publication are reproduced exactly as written, including errors, misspellings, etc., if any.

Protective gear is intended to reduce the effect of any accident, whether it is caused by another, the skater or some force of nature. Protective gear does little, if anything, to prevent accidents but is presumed to reduce the injuries that occur in an accident. The statistics on injuries suffered by skaters would be more interesting if the skaters were grouped into those wearing no gear at all, those wearing protective gear only, those wearing preventative gear only and those wearing both. These statistics could provide skaters with a clearer understanding of which kinds of gear are more beneficial.

The argument above is weakened by the fact that it does not take into account the inherent differences between skaters who wear gear and those who do not. It is at least likely that those who wear gear may be generally more responsible and/or safety conscious individuals. The skaters who wear gear may be less likely to cause accidents through careless or dangerous behavior. It may, in fact, be their natural caution and responsibility that keeps them out of the emergency room rather than the gear itself. Also, the statistic above is based entirely on those who are skating in streets and parking lots which are relatively dangerous places to skate in the first place. People who are generally more safety conscious (and therefore more likely to wear gear) may choose to skate in safer areas such as parks or back yards.

The statistic also does not differentiate between severity of injuries. The conclusion that safety gear prevents severe injuries suggests that it is presumed that people come to the emergency room only with severe injuries. This is certainly not the case. Also, given that skating is a recreational activity that may be primarily engaged in during evenings and weekends (when doctors' offices are closed), skaters with less severe injuries may be especially likely to come to the emergency room for treatment.

Finally, there is absolutely no evidence provided that high quality (and presumably more expensive) gear is any more beneficial than other kinds of gear. For example, a simple white t-shirt may provide the same preventative benefit as a higher quality, more expensive, shirt designed only for skating. Before skaters are encouraged to invest heavily in gear, a more complete understanding of the benefit provided by individual pieces of gear would be helpful.

The argument for safety gear based on emergency room statistics could provide important information and potentially save lives. Before conclusions about the amount and kinds of investments that should be made in gear are reached, however, a more complete understanding of the benefits are needed. After all, a false confidence in ineffective gear could be just as dangerous as no gear at all.

Reader Commentary for Essay Response – Score 6

This outstanding response demonstrates the writer's insightful analytical skills. The introduction, which notes that adopting the topic's fallacious reasoning could ". . . inspire people to over invest financially and psychologically in protective gear," is followed by a comprehensive examination of each of the argument's root flaws. Specifically, the writer exposes several points that undermine the argument:

- that preventive and protective gear are not the same
- that skaters who wear gear may be less prone to accidents because they are, by nature, more responsible and cautious
- that the statistics do not differentiate by the severity of the injuries
- that gear may not need to be high-quality to be beneficial

The discussion is smoothly and logically organized, and each point is thoroughly and cogently developed. In addition, the writing is succinct, economical, and generally error-free. Sentences are varied and complex, and diction is expressive and precise.

In sum, this response exemplifies the very top of the 6 range described in the scoring guide. If the writer had been less eloquent or provided fewer reasons to refute the argument, the paper could still have received a 6.

Essay Response – Score 5

The argument presented is limited but useful. It indicates a possible relationship between a high percentage of accidents and a lack of protective equipment. The statistics cited compel a further investigation of the usefulness of protective gear in preventing or mitigating roller-skating related injuries. However, the conclusion that protective gear and reflective equipment would "greatly reduce risk of being severely injured" is premature. Data is lacking with reference to the total population of skaters and the relative levels of experience, skill and physical coordination of that population. It is entirely possible that further research would indicate that most serious injury is averted by the skater's ability to react quickly and skillfully in emergency situations.

Another area of investigation necessary before conclusions can be reached is identification of the types of injuries that occur and the various causes of those injuries. The article fails to identify the most prevalent types of roller-skating related injuries. It also fails to correlate the absence of protective gear and reflective equipment to those injuries. For example, if the majority of injuries are skin abrasions and closed-head injuries, then a case can be made for the usefulness of protective clothing mentioned. Likewise, if injuries are caused by collision with vehicles (e.g. bicycles, cars) or pedestrians, then light-reflective equipment might mitigate the occurrences. However, if the primary types of injuries are soft-tissue injuries such as torn ligaments and muscles, back injuries and the like, then a greater case could be made for training and experience as preventative measures.

Reader Commentary for Essay Response – Score 5

This strong response gets right to the work of critiquing the argument, observing that it "indicates a possible relationship" but that its conclusion "is premature." It raises three central questions that, if answered, might undermine the soundness of the argument:

- What are the characteristics of the total population of skaters?
- What is the usefulness of protective or reflective gear in preventing or mitigating roller skating-related injuries?
- What are the types of injuries sustained and their causes?

The writer develops each of these questions by considering possible answers that would either strengthen or weaken the argument. The paper does not analyze the argument as insightfully or develop the critique as fully as required for a 6 paper, but the clear organization, strong control of language, and substantial degree of development warrant more than a score of 4.

Essay Response – Score 4

Although the argument stated above discusses the importance of safety equipment as significant part of avoiding injury, the statistics quoted are vague and inconclusive. Simply because 75 percent of the people involved in roller-skating accidents are not wearing the stated equipment does not automatically implicate the lack of equipment as the cause of injury. The term "accidents" may imply a great variety of injuries. The types of injuries one could incur by not wearing the types of equipment stated above are minor head injuries; skin abrasions or possibly bone fracture of a select few areas such as knees, elbows, hands, etc. (which are in fact most vulnerable to this sport); and/or injuries due to practising the sport during low light times of the day. During any physically demanding activity or sport people are subjected to a wide variety of injuries which cannot be avoided with protective clothing or light-reflective materials. These injuries include inner trauma (e.g., heart-attack); exhaustion; strained muscles, ligaments, or tendons; etc. Perhaps the numbers and percentages of people injured during roller-skating, even without protective equipment, would decrease greatly if people participating in the sport had proper training, good physical health, warm-up properly before beginning (stretching), as well as take other measures to prevent possible injury, such as common-sense, by refraining from performing the activity after proper lighting has ceased and knowing

your personal limitations as an individual and athlete. The statistics used in the above reasoning are lacking in proper direction considering their assertions and therefore must be further examined and modified so that proper conclusions can be reached.

Reader Commentary for Essay Response – Score 4

This adequate response targets the argument's vague and inconclusive "statistics." The essay identifies and critiques the illogical reasoning that results from the misguided use of the argument's statistics:

- that non-use of equipment may be "automatically" assumed to be the cause of injury
- that "accidents" may refer to minor injuries
- that injuries may result from other causes — skating in the dark, failure to train or warm-up properly, failure to recognize one's physical limitations

The writer competently grasps the weaknesses of the argument. The ideas are clear and connected, but the response lacks transitional phrases. Development, too, is only adequate.

Control of language is better than adequate. The writer achieves both control and clarity and ably conforms to the conventions of written English. Overall, though, this 4 response lacks the more thorough development that would warrant a score of 5.

Essay Response – Score 3

The argument is well presented and supported, but not completely well reasoned. It is clear and concisely written. The content is logically and smoothly presented. Statistics cited are used to develop support for the recommendation, that roller skaters who invest in protective gear and reflective equipment can reduce their risk of severe, accidental injuries. Examples of the types of protective equipment are described for the reader. Unfortunately, the author of the argument fails to note that merely by purchasing gear and reflective equipment that the skater will be protected. This is, of course, fallacious if the skater fails to use the equipment, or uses it incorrectly or inappropriately. It is also an unnecessary assumption that a skater need purchase high-quality gear for the same degree of effectiveness to be achieved. The argument could be improved by taking these issues into consideration, and making recommendations for education and safety awareness to skaters.

Reader Commentary for Essay Response – Score 3

The first half of this generally well-written but limited response merely describes the argument. The second half of the paper identifies two assumptions of the argument:

- that people who purchase protective gear will use the gear
- that high-quality gear is more effective than other gear

These points are sufficient to constitute some analysis and thus warrant a score of 3. However, neither of these analytic points is developed sufficiently to merit a score of 4.

Essay Response – Score 2

To reduce the accidents from roller skating we should consider about its causes and effects concurrently to find the best solution. Basically the roller-skating players are children, they had less experiences to protect themselves from any kind of dangerous. Therefore, it should be a responsible of adult to take care them. Adult should recommend their child to wear any protective clothing, set the rules and look after them while they are playing.

In the past roller-skating is limited in the skate yard but when it became popular people normally play it on the street way) Therefore the number of accidents from roller-skating is increased. The skate manufacturer should have a responsibility in producing a protective clothing. They should promote and sell them together with skates. The government or state should set the regulation of playing skate on the street way like they did with the bicycle.

To prevent this kind of accident is the best solution but it needs a cooperation among us to have a concious mind to beware and realize its dangerous.

Reader Commentary for Essay Response – Score 2

This seriously flawed response, rather than critiquing the argument, suggests ways for adults and skate manufacturers to ensure that children wear protective clothing. In essence, the writer is uncritically accepting the argument.

The response exhibits serious and frequent problems in sentence structure and language use. Errors—word choice, verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, punctuation—are numerous and sometimes interfere with meaning, e.g., ". . . it needs a cooperation among us to have a concious mind to beware and realize its dangerous."

This essay earns a 2 because it demonstrates both serious linguistic weaknesses and failure to construct a critique based on logical analysis.

Essay Response – Score 1

the protective equipment do help to reduce the risk of being severly injured in an accident since there are 75% Of those who had accidents in streets or parking lots were not wearing any protectivel clothing. such as hemlets, kenn pads, etc. or any light-reflecting materials such as clip-on lights, glow-in-the-dark wrist pads ets. if they do have protective equipment that only a quarter accident may happen, also that can greatly reduce their risk ofbeing severly injured in an accident, that can save some lives and a lot of energy and money for the treatment. the protective equipment do help to reduce the risk of being severly injured in an accident since there are 75% Of those who had accidents in streets or parking lots were not wearing any protectivel clothing. such as hemlets, kenn pads, etc. or any light-reflecting materials such as clip-on lights, glow-in-the-dark wrist pads ets. if they do have protective equipment that only a quarter accident may happen, also that can greatly reduce their risk ofbeing severly injured in an accident, that can save some lives and a lot of energy and money for the treatment. the protective equipment do help to reduce the risk of being severly injured in an accident since there are 75% Of those who had accidents in streets or parking lots were not wearing any protectivel clothing. such as hemlets, kenn pads, etc. or any light-reflecting materials such as clip-on lights, glow-in-the-dark wrist pads ets. if they do have protective equipment that only a quarter accident may happen, also that can greatly reduce their risk ofbeing severly injured in an accident, that can save some lives and a lot of energy and money for the treatment.

Reader Commentary for Essay Response – Score 1

This fundamentally deficient response uncritically accepts the reasoning of the topic: "the protective equipment do help to reduce the risk of being severly injured in an accident." There is no evidence, though, that the writer is able to understand or analyze the argument; what follows, except for a few additional words, merely copies the topic. This two-sentence response is repeated—verbatim—two more times. Language and usage are equally problematic. The few words that have been added, in combination with the words of the topic, results in incoherence. In sum, this essay fits all of the scoring guide descriptors for a 1.

Sample Test

The Graduate Record Examinations® Analytical Writing 1

PRESENT YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON AN ISSUE

45 minutes

You will have 45 minutes to plan and compose a response that presents your perspective on a topic you select. A response on any topic other than one you select will receive a score of zero. You will have a choice between two Issue topics. Each topic will appear as a brief quotation that states or implies an issue of general interest. You are free to accept, reject, or qualify the claim made in the topic, as long as the ideas you present are clearly relevant to the topic you select. Support your views with reasons and examples drawn from such areas as your reading, experience, observations, or academic studies.

Before you make your choice, read each topic carefully. Then decide on which topic you could write a more effective and well-reasoned response. GRE readers who are college and university faculty will read your response and evaluate its overall quality, based on how well you

- consider the complexities and implications of the issue
- organize, develop, and express your ideas about the issue
- support your ideas with relevant reasons and examples
- control the elements of standard written English

You may want to take a few minutes to think about the issue you have chosen and to plan a response before you begin writing. Be sure to develop your ideas fully and organize them coherently, but leave time to read what you have written and make any revisions that you think are necessary.

Issue Topic Choice

Present your perspective on one of the issues below, using relevant reasons and/or examples to support your views.

TOPIC 1:

“Both the development of technological tools and the uses to which humanity has put them have created modern civilizations in which loneliness is ever increasing.”

TOPIC 2:

“Our declining environment may bring the people of the world together as no politician, philosopher, or war ever could. Environmental problems are global in scope and respect no nation’s boundaries. Therefore, people are faced with the choice of unity and cooperation on the one hand or disunity and a common tragedy on the other.”

Sample Test

The Graduate Record Examinations® Analytical Writing 2

ANALYZE AN ARGUMENT

30 minutes

You will have 30 minutes to plan and write a critique of an argument presented in the form of a short passage. A critique of any other argument will receive a score of zero.

Analyze the line of reasoning in the argument. Be sure to consider what, if any, questionable assumptions underlie the thinking and, if evidence is cited, how well it supports 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 additional information might help you better evaluate its conclusion. Note that you are not being asked to present your views on the subject.

GRE readers who are college and university faculty will read your critique and evaluate its overall quality, based on how well you

- identify and analyze important features of the argument
- organize, develop, and express your critique of the argument
- support your critique with relevant reasons and examples
- control the elements of standard written English

Before you begin writing, you may want to take a few minutes to evaluate the argument and to plan a response. Be sure to develop your ideas fully and organize them coherently, but leave time to read what you have written and make any revisions that you think are necessary.

Argument Topic

Discuss how well reasoned you find this argument.

TOPIC:

Six months ago the region of Forestville increased the speed limit for vehicles traveling on the region's highways by ten miles per hour. Since that change took effect, the number of automobile accidents in that region has increased by 15 percent. But the speed limit in Elmsford, a region neighboring Forestville, remained unchanged, and automobile accidents declined slightly during the same six-month period. Therefore, if the citizens of Forestville want to reduce the number of automobile accidents on the region's highways, they should campaign to reduce Forestville's speed limit to what it was before the increase.

GRE Scoring Guide: Present Your Perspective on an Issue

Score 6

A 6 paper presents a cogent, well-articulated analysis of the complexities of the issue and conveys meaning skillfully.

A typical paper in this category

- presents an insightful position on the issue
- develops the position with compelling reasons and/or persuasive examples
- sustains a well-focused, well-organized analysis, connecting ideas logically
- expresses ideas fluently and precisely, using effective vocabulary and sentence variety
- demonstrates facility with the conventions (i.e., grammar, usage, and mechanics) of standard written English but may have minor errors

Score 5

A 5 paper presents a generally thoughtful, well-developed analysis of the complexities of the issue and conveys meaning clearly.

A typical paper in this category

- presents a well-considered position on the issue
- develops the position with logically sound reasons and/or well-chosen examples
- is focused and generally well organized, connecting ideas appropriately
- expresses ideas clearly and well, using appropriate vocabulary and sentence variety
- demonstrates facility with the conventions of standard written English but may have minor errors

Score 4

A 4 paper presents a competent analysis of the issue and conveys meaning adequately.

A typical paper in this category

- presents a clear position on the issue
- develops the position on the issue with relevant reasons and/or examples
- is adequately focused and organized
- expresses ideas with reasonable clarity
- generally demonstrates control of the conventions of standard written English but may have some errors

Score 3

A 3 paper demonstrates some competence in its analysis of the issue and in conveying meaning but is obviously flawed.

A typical paper in this category exhibits ONE OR MORE of the following characteristics:

- is vague or limited in presenting or developing a position on the issue
- is weak in the use of relevant reasons or examples
- is poorly focused and/or poorly organized
- has problems in language and sentence structure that result in a lack of clarity
- contains occasional major errors or frequent minor errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics that can interfere with meaning

Score 2

A 2 paper demonstrates serious weaknesses in analytical writing.

A typical paper in this category exhibits ONE OR MORE of the following characteristics:

- is unclear or seriously limited in presenting or developing a position on the issue
- provides few, if any, relevant reasons or examples
- is unfocused and/or disorganized
- has serious problems in the use of language and sentence structure that frequently interfere with meaning
- contains serious errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics that frequently obscure meaning

Score 1

A 1 paper demonstrates fundamental deficiencies in analytical writing skills.

A typical paper in this category exhibits ONE OR MORE of the following characteristics:

- provides little or no evidence of the ability to understand and analyze the issue
- provides little or no evidence of the ability to develop an organized response
- has severe problems in language and sentence structure that persistently interfere with meaning
- contains pervasive errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics that result in incoherence

Score 0

Off topic, in a foreign language, merely copies the topic, consists of only keystroke characters, or is illegible, blank, or nonverbal

GRE Scoring Guide: Analyze an Argument

Score 6

A 6 paper presents a cogent, well-articulated critique of the argument and conveys meaning skillfully.

A typical paper in this category

- 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 appropriate word choice and sentence variety
- demonstrates facility with the conventions (i.e., grammar, usage, and mechanics) of standard written English but may have minor errors

Score 5

A 5 paper presents a generally thoughtful, well-developed critique of the argument and conveys meaning clearly.

A typical paper in this category

- clearly identifies important features of the argument and analyzes them in a generally perceptive 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 appropriate word choice and sentence variety
- demonstrates facility with the conventions of standard written English but may have minor errors

Score 4

A 4 paper presents a competent critique of the argument and conveys meaning adequately.

A typical paper in this category

- 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 express ideas with reasonable clarity
- generally demonstrates control of the conventions of standard written English but may have some errors

Score 3

A 3 paper demonstrates some competence in its critique of the argument and in conveying meaning but is obviously 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
- lacks clarity in expressing ideas
- contains occasional major errors or frequent minor errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics that can interfere with meaning

Score 2

A 2 paper demonstrates serious weaknesses in analytical writing.

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 problems in the use of language and in sentence structure that frequently interfere with meaning
- contains serious errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics that frequently obscure meaning

Score 1

A 1 paper demonstrates fundamental deficiencies in both analysis AND writing .

A typical paper in this category exhibits MORE THAN ONE of the following characteristics:

- provides little or no evidence of the ability to understand and analyze the argument
- provides little or no evidence of the ability to develop an organized response
- has severe problems in language and sentence structure that persistently interfere with meaning
- contains pervasive errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics that result in incoherence

Score 0

Off topic, in a foreign language, merely copies the topic, consists of only keystroke characters, or is illegible, blank, or nonverbal.

Score Level Descriptions

Although the GRE Analytical Writing section contains two discrete analytical writing tasks, a single combined score is reported because it is more reliable than is a score for either task alone. The reported score, the average of the scores for the two tasks, ranges from 6 to 0, in half-point increments.

The statements below describe, for each score level, the overall quality of analytical writing demonstrated across both the Issue and Argument tasks. Because the test assesses "analytical writing," critical thinking skills (the ability to reason, assemble evidence to develop a position, and communicate complex ideas) weigh more heavily than the writer's control of fine points of grammar or the mechanics of writing (e.g., spelling).

SCORES 6 and 5.5 – Sustains insightful, in-depth analysis of complex ideas; develops and supports main points with logically compelling reasons and/or highly persuasive examples; is well focused and well organized; skillfully uses sentence variety and precise vocabulary to convey meaning effectively; demonstrates superior facility with sentence structure and language usage but may have minor errors that do not interfere with meaning.

SCORES 5 and 4.5 – Provides generally thoughtful analysis of complex ideas; develops and supports main points with logically sound reasons and/or well-chosen examples; is generally focused and well organized; uses appropriate sentence variety and vocabulary to convey meaning clearly; demonstrates good control of sentence structure and language usage but may have minor errors that do not interfere with meaning.

SCORES 4 and 3.5 – Provides competent analysis of complex ideas; develops and supports main points with relevant reasons and/or examples; is adequately organized; conveys meaning with reasonable clarity; demonstrates satisfactory control of sentence structure and language usage but may have some errors that affect clarity.

SCORES 3 and 2.5 – Displays some competence in analytical writing, although the writing is flawed in at least one of the following ways: limited analysis or development; weak organization; weak control of sentence structure or language usage, with errors that often result in vagueness or lack of clarity.

SCORES 2 and 1.5 – Displays serious weaknesses in analytical writing. The writing is seriously flawed in at least one of the following ways: serious lack of analysis or development; lack of organization; serious and frequent problems in sentence structure or language usage, with errors that obscure meaning.

SCORES 1 and .5 – Displays fundamental deficiencies in analytical writing. The writing is fundamentally flawed in at least one of the following ways: content that is extremely confusing or mostly irrelevant to the assigned tasks; little or no development; severe and pervasive errors that result in incoherence.

SCORE 0 – The examinee's analytical writing skills cannot be evaluated because the responses do not address any part of the assigned tasks, are merely attempts to copy the assignments, are in a foreign language, or display only indecipherable text or no text whatsoever.