Assessment Archive:
Florida Writing Assessment Program - Florida Writes! (1993-1999)

This assessment is no longer actively administered in Florida.

The Florida Writing Assessment was implemented in grades 4, 8, and 10 as required by a law passed by the 1990 legislature. The assessment was designed to measure students' proficiency in writing responses to assigned topics within a designated testing period. The assessment of writing proficiency, by its nature, incorporates the assessment of higher order skills, since students are required to generate and develop the ideas that form the basis for their written responses.

The Office of Assessment at the Florida Department of Education, which administered the **FLORIDA WRITES!**, was also responsible for reporting information about student writing proficiency to students, parents, educators, legislators, and citizens. Students and their parents or guardians receive individual student reports, and teachers and administrators receive school and district reports.

FCAT Writing (2000-2011)

This assessment is no longer actively administered in Florida.

FCAT Writing measured student writing achievement in grades 4, 8, and 10. Beginning in 2000, the Florida Writing Assessment Program (FWAP), also known as Florida Writes, was called FCAT Writing, and writing summary scores were reported for all curriculum groups combined. The test required students to write responses to assigned topics in a single testing period. In 2006, a multiple-choice portion was added to the assessment, and the test was renamed FCAT Writing+. The test was administered in two sessions, and student Achievement Levels were calculated by combining performance on the prompt portion and the multiple-choice portion of the test. In 2009, the multiple-choice items were removed from the statewide writing assessment; therefore, the test name was changed back to FCAT Writing, and Achievement Levels are no longer reported for the statewide writing assessment.

When reviewing FCAT Writing essay results from 2010 and beyond, comparisons to previous years' writing scores should be avoided. This caution is given for three reasons. First, in spring 2010 and spring 2011, each essay was scored by one rater. In previous years and in 2012, two raters were used and the scores were averaged allowing for half-point scores, such as 4.5; whereas in 2010 and 2011, no half-point scores were

possible. Second, beginning in 2010, each student within the same grade level was required to write an essay using the same writing purpose, which is also called the mode (narrative, expository, or persuasive). In previous years, with the exception of grade 10 in 2008, there were two modes assessed at each grade level with half of the students responding to each mode. For example, the 2010 Grade 4 FCAT Writing required all students to write a narrative essay. In 2009, half of the students wrote a narrative essay, and half of the students were required to write an expository essay. Third, in 2012, scoring decisions included expanded expectations regarding the following: (1) increased attention to the correct use of standard English conventions, and (2) increased attention to the quality of details, requiring use of relevant, logical, and plausible support, rather than contrived statistical claims or unsubstantiated generalities.

FCAT Writing Summary

Description of Effective Writing

A well-written piece can best be described as incorporating elements of writing in such a way that a reader can experience the writer's intended meaning, understand the writer's premise, and accept or reject the writer's point of view. Effective writing

- is focused on the topic and does not contain extraneous or loosely related information;
- has an organizational pattern that enables the reader to follow the flow of ideas because it contains a beginning, middle, and end and uses transitional devices;
- contains supporting ideas that are developed through the use of details, examples, vivid language, and mature word choice; and
- follows the conventions of standard written English (i.e., punctuation, capitalization, and spelling) and has variation in sentence structure.

Achieving Effective Writing

- The best way to teach writing is to engage students in the writing process. This recursive process includes planning, writing, revising, and editing.
  As students become more proficient, the amount of time spent on each step in the process may shorten, and the necessity for teacher involvement should lessen.

Linking Writing Instruction, Blueprint 2000, and Assessment

- Florida's plan for school improvement and accountability, Blueprint 2000, provides direct guidance for writing instruction. Of the seven goals set forth in Blueprint 2000, Goal 3 - Student Performance, is of particular importance to the instruction of writing. Goal 3 states, "Students successfully compete at the highest levels nationally and internationally and are prepared to make well-reasoned, thoughtful, and healthy lifelong decisions." Further, Florida students are expected to "accurately use language, graphic representations, styles, organizations, and format appropriate to

the language, information, concept, or idea and the subject matter, purpose, and audience."

- The competencies listed in Blueprint 2000 are integral to all aspects of writing instruction and, with the arts, foreign language, health, language arts, math, science, and social studies, form the basis of learner expectancies and lifelong writing skills.
- In the past decade, teachers, school districts, state departments of education, and national assessment programs have attempted to move away from multiple-choice tests and toward the direct assessment of writing proficiency. Direct writing assessment applies many of the principles used by exemplary teachers to develop effective writing.
- In striving to standardize direct writing assessment, large-scale assessments involve inherent limitations. While a classroom teacher has the luxury of making notes and adding personal comments on students' papers, this is impossible in a large-scale assessment in which several hundred thousand student papers must be read and scored. On the other hand, the strength of a large-scale assessment is that all student papers can be judged against a common standard. The end result is a source of statewide information that can be used to characterize writing performance on a consistent basis. This information can be used as one indicator of a writing instruction program's strengths and weaknesses.

Florida's Direct Writing Assessment

- Florida's direct writing assessment can best be described as demand writing. Demand writing assessments are completed within a designated time period (e.g., 45 minutes) and involve the scoring of student responses to assigned topics. This kind of assessment has been used in classrooms (e.g., essay questions on a social studies test), in several large-scale assessments (e.g., National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP], the Scholastic Aptitude Test [SAT], and the American College Testing Program [ACT]), and by many employers during the job interview process. For a statewide assessment, demand writing involves limited preparation time for students and teachers and less time and money to score than project or portfolio assessments.
- The Florida Writing Assessment Program has adopted demand writing as an efficient and effective method of assessing Florida's eighth graders. For this program, students are expected to produce within a 45-minute time period a focused, organized, supported **draft** in response to an assigned topic.

Preparing Students for the Florida Writing Assessment

- Students' success in writing can be enhanced by giving them frequent opportunities to express themselves through writing, beginning in kindergarten. The skill of effective writing cannot be taught in several easy lessons. A sustained curriculum that emphasizes reading and the use of spoken and written language in all subject areas and all grade levels will increase students' ability to write effectively for a variety of purposes.

Description of *FLORIDA WRITES!*

- The *FLORIDA WRITES!* requires students to produce a piece of writing within established guidelines and specific parameters.
- Each student receives a writing folder containing one writing prompt (topic) with two lined pages for the written response. Students are given 45 minutes to read the prompts independently, plan their responses, and write their responses in the folders. A separate sheet is provided for planning or prewriting activities (e.g., outlining, clustering, mapping, and jotting down ideas).
- The student responses are scored by trained readers using the holistic method to evaluate a piece of writing for its overall quality. The readers consider four elements: focus, organization, support, and conventions. In this type of scoring, readers make a judgment about the entire response and do not focus on any one aspect of writing.
- Focus refers to how clearly the paper presents and maintains a main idea, theme, or unifying point. Papers representing the higher end of the point scale demonstrate a consistent awareness of the topic and do not contain extraneous information.
- Organization refers to the structure or plan of development (beginning, middle, and end) and whether the points logically relate to one another. Organization also refers to (1) the use of transitional devices to relate the supporting ideas to the main idea, theme, or unifying point and (2) the evidence of a connection between sentences. Papers representing the higher end of the point scale use transitions to signal the plan of development or text structure and end with summary or concluding statements.
- Support refers to the quality of details used to explain, clarify, or define. The quality of support depends on word choice, specificity, depth, and thoroughness. Papers representing the higher end of the point scale provide examples and illustrations in which the relationship between the supporting ideas and the topic is clear.
- Conventions refers to punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and variation in sentence structure. The conventions are basic writing skills included in Florida's Minimum Student Performance Standards. Papers representing the higher end of the point scale follow, with few exceptions, the conventions of punctuation, capitalization, and spelling and use a variety of sentence structures to present ideas.

Types of Writing Prompts

- The 1995 assessment tested student achievement in writing for two different purposes at each grade level: narrative and expository in grade 4 and persuasive and expository in grades 8 and 10. These are defined as follows: (1) expository is a type of writing that gives information, explain why or how, clarifies a process, or defines a concept; (2) narrative is a type of writing that recounts a personal or fictional experience or tells a story based on a real or imagined event; and (3) persuasive is a type of writing that convinces the reader that a point of view is valid or that the reader should take a specific action.

- Prompts are written to elicit writing for specific purposes. For instance, expository prompts may ask students to explain why or how, narrative prompts may direct students to recount or tell, and persuasive prompts may require students to convince or persuade.
- Prompts to Florida's writing assessment are carefully selected to ensure that the subject matter will be interesting and appropriate for the students. In addition, these prompts are reviewed for any bias relating to gender, religion, race, or ethnic background.
- Prompts have two basic components: the writing situation and directions for writing. The writing situation orients students to the subject on which they are to write. The directions-for-writing component sets the parameter for writing and, in the case of persuasive prompts, identifies the audience to whom the writing is directed.

Example of an Expository Prompt:

Below is an example of an expository prompt. The first component orients the student to the topic: jobs or chores. The second component suggests that the student think about various jobs or chores and then explain why a particular job or chore is done.

Writing Situation:
Everyone has jobs or chores.
Directions for Writing:
Before you begin writing, think about why you do one of your jobs or chores.

Now explain why you do one of your jobs or chores.

Example of a Persuasive Prompt:

In the prompt below, the topic is the effects of watching television. The second component suggests that the student think about how watching television affects grades and then write to convince the school principal to accept the student's point view.

Writing Situation:
The principal of your school has been asked to discuss with a parent group the effect watching TV has on students' grades.
Directions for Writing:
Think about the effect watching TV has on your grades and your friends' grades
Now write to convince your principal to accept your point of view on the effect watching TV has on grades.

Which Student Populations Were Tested?

In 1995, the ***FLORIDA WRITES!*** was administered to fourth, eighth, and tenth grade students enrolled in Florida's 67 counties and four laboratory schools. The report in the *FLORIDA WRITES!* Report Web page includes the test results for the 144,502 fourth graders, the 125,454 eighth graders, and the 105,704 tenth graders who participated in the assessment.

The results for certain exceptional education students are excluded from the statistics presented in the report. In the *FLORIDA WRITES!* and other state-administered tests, the scores for deaf, hard of hearing, specific learning disabled, orthopedically impaired, emotionally handicapped, educable mentally handicapped, and other health impaired students are not included in any classroom, school, district, and state results.

Holistic Scoring Method

Definition of Holistic Scoring
>Holistic scoring is a method by which trained readers evaluate a piece of writing for its overall quality. The holistic scoring used in Florida requires readers to evaluate the work as a whole, while considering four elements: focus, organization, support, and conventions. This method is sometimes called focused holistic scoring. In this type of scoring, readers are trained not to become overly concerned with any one aspect of writing but to look at a response as a whole.

Focus
>Focus refers to how clearly the paper presents and maintains a main idea, theme, or unifying point. Papers representing the higher end of the point scale demonstrate a consistent awareness of the topic and do not contain extraneous information.

Organization
>Organization refers to the structure or plan of development (beginning, middle, and end) and whether the points logically relate to one another. Organization refers to (1) the use of transitional devices to signal the relationship of the supporting ideas to the main idea, theme, or unifying point and (2) the evidence of a connection between sentences. Papers representing the higher end of the point scale use transitions to signal the plan or text structure and end with summary or concluding statements.

Support
>Support refers to the quality of the details used to explain, clarify, or define. The quality of support depends on word choice, specificity, depth, credibility, and thoroughness. Papers representing the higher end of the point scale provide fully developed examples and illustrations in which the relationship between the supporting ideas and the topic is clear.

Conventions
>Conventions refer to punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and variation in sentence used in the paper. These conventions are basic writing skills included in Florida's Minimum Student Performance Standards and the Uniform Student Performance Standards for Language Arts. Papers representing the higher end of the scale follow,

with few exceptions, the conventions of punctuation, capitalization, and spelling and use a variety of sentence structures to present ideas.

Score Points in Rubric

The rubric further interprets the four major areas of consideration into levels of achievement. The rubric used to score papers in spring 1995 is shown below.

6 Points

The writing is focused, purposeful, and reflects insight into the writing situation. The paper conveys a sense of completeness and wholeness with adherence to the main idea, and its organizational pattern provides for a logical progression of ideas. The support is substantial, specific, relevant, concrete, and/or illustrative. The paper demonstrates a commitment to and an involvement with the subject, clarity in presentation of ideas, and may use creative writing strategies appropriate to the purpose of the paper. The writing demonstrates a mature command of language (word choice) with freshness of expression. Sentence structure is varied, and sentences are complete except when fragments are used purposefully. Few, if any, convention errors occur in mechanics, usage, and punctuation.

5 Points

The writing focuses on the topic, and its organizational pattern provides for a progression of ideas, although some lapses may occur. The paper conveys a sense of completeness or wholeness. The support is ample. The writing demonstrates a mature command of language, including precision in word choice. There is variation in sentence structure, and, with rare exceptions, sentences are complete except when fragments are used purposefully. The paper generally follows the conventions of mechanics, usage, and spelling.

4 Points

The writing is generally focused on the topic but may include extraneous or loosely related material. An organizational pattern is apparent, although some lapses may occur. The paper exhibits some sense of completeness or wholeness. The support, including word choice, is adequate, although development may be uneven. There is little variation in sentence structure, and most sentences are complete. The paper generally follows the conventions of mechanics, usage, and spelling.

3 Points

The writing is generally focused on the topic but may include extraneous or loosely related material. An organizational pattern has been attempted, but the paper may lack a sense of completeness or wholeness. Some support is included, but development is erratic. Word choice is adequate but may be limited, predictable, or occasionally vague. There is little, if any, variation in sentence structure. Knowledge of the conventions of mechanics and usage is usually demonstrated, and commonly used words are usually spelled correctly.

2 Points

2 Points

The writing is related to the topic but include extraneous or loosely related material. Little evidence of an organizational pattern may be demonstrated, and the paper may lack a sense of completeness or wholeness. Development of support is inadequate or illogical. Word choice is limited, inappropriate or vague. There is little, if any, variation in sentence structure, and gross errors in sentence structure may occur. Errors in basic conventions of mechanics and usage may occur, and commonly used words may be misspelled.

1 Point

The writing may only minimally address the topic. The paper is a fragmentary or incoherent listing of related ideas or sentences or both. Little, if any, development of support or an organizational pattern or both is apparent. Limited or inappropriate word choice may obscure meaning. Gross errors in sentence structure and usage may impede communication. Frequent and blatant errors may occur in the basic conventions of mechanics and usage, and commonly used words may be misspelled.

Unscorable

The paper is unscorable because

- the response is not related to what the prompt requested the student to do.
- the response is simply a rewording of the prompt.
- the response is a copy of a published work.
- the student refused to write.
- the response is illegible.
- the response is incomprehensible (words are arranged in such a way that no meaning is conveyed).
- the response contains an insufficient amount of writing to determine if the student was attempting to address the prompt.
  the writing folder is blank.

Description of Writing Scores

For the Florida Writing Assessment, students are given 45 minutes to read their assigned topic, plan what to write, and then write their responses. The descriptions of eleven possible scores from 6.0 - 1.0 are given below.

Score 6.0:

The writing focuses on the topic, is logically organized, and includes ample development of supporting ideas or examples. It demonstrates a mature command of language, including precision in word choice. Sentences vary in structure. Punctuation, capitalization, and spelling are generally correct.

Score 5.5:

The writing was given a 5 by one reader and 6 by the other reader.

Score 5.0:

The writing focuses on the topic with adequate development of supporting ideas or examples. It has an organizational pattern, though lapses may occur. Word choice is adequate. Sentences vary in structure. Punctuation, capitalization, and spelling are generally correct.

Score 4.5:

The writing was given a 4 by one reader and a 5 by the other reader.

Score 4.0:

The writing focuses on the topic, though it may contain extraneous information. An organizational pattern is evident, but lapses may occur. Some supporting ideas contain specifics and details, but others are not developed. Word choice is adequate. Sentences vary somewhat in structure, though many are simple. Punctuation and capitalization are sometimes incorrect, but most commonly used words are spelled correctly.

Score 3.5:

The writing was given a 3 by one reader and a 4 by the other reader.

Score 3.0:

The writing generally focuses on the topic, though it may contain extraneous information. An organizational pattern has been attempted, but lapses may occur. Some of the supporting ideas or examples may not be developed. Word choice is adequate. Sentences vary somewhat in structure, though many are simple. Punctuation and capitalization are sometimes incorrect, but most commonly used words are spelled correctly.

Score 2.5:

The writing was given a 2 by one reader and a 3 by the other reader.

Score 2.0:

The writing may be slightly related to the topic or offer little relevant information and few supporting ideas or examples. There is little evidence of an organizational pattern. Word choice may be limited or immature. Sentences may be limited to simple constructions. Frequent errors may occur in punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.

Score 1.5:

The writing was given a 1 by one reader and a 2 by the other reader.

Score 1.0:

The writing may only minimally address the topic because there is little or no development of supporting ideas or examples. No organizational pattern is evident. Ideas are provided through lists, and word choice is limited or immature. Unrelated information may be included. Frequent errors in punctuation, capitalization, and spelling may impede communication.

Use of Results

Interpretations of the *FLORIDA WRITES!* achievement results are subject to several limitations. Writing achievement is limited in definition to the writing task completed during the assessment: during a 45-minute time period, students write in response to an assigned topic for the purposes of writing specified by the program without access to dictionaries or other reference materials. Because only one example of writing is collected from each student under these conditions, scores for individual students are not reliable measures of a student's general writing achievement. For each student, scores from the *FLORIDA WRITES!* must be considered in relation to how well the student writes when given a variety of classroom writing assignments.

The *FLORIDA WRITES!* results will provide a basis for identifying trends in writing over a period of several years, but do not provide an exact index of changes in performance from one year to the next year. The writing assessment employs one topic for each type of writing at each grade level. Because a topic given in any one year, by its nature, may be somewhat easier or harder for students to respond to than the topic given the previous year, differences seen in results from one year to the next are generally due to both differences in the difficulty of the topics as well as actual changes in student achievement. Performance tests like the Florida Writing Assessment that rely on the use of one topic do not lend themselves to statistical methods that can control for differences in the difficulty of the tests.

Taking into account these limitations, the results can assist in the identification of strengths and weaknesses in programs of writing instruction. Teachers and administrators may find it useful to examine the number of students scoring at different levels and the differences in student scores for each type of writing. The scores for students in a classroom or school can be interpreted in reference to sample student papers provided in the **Florida Writes!** publications for each grade level assessed and other materials available from the Department. Student writing performance can be further evaluated through carefully designed classroom or schoolwide writing assignments.

The **FLORIDA WRITES!** results do not represent a comprehensive evaluation of writing instruction programs. The *FLORIDA WRITES!* does not measure all important aspects of writing. For example, student achievement in writing an extended manuscript or a report involving detailed information is currently not measured by the *FLORIDA WRITES!*. A comprehensive evaluation of student writing would take into consideration writing for a

number of purposes under different conditions and would utilize information from a number of sources, such as student portfolios, classroom teacher observations, and interviews with students.

FCAT Certificates of Achievement

Students who score at the highest levels on FCAT receive Certificates of Achievement.

The following achievement levels are required for FCAT Writing:

Writing Certificates of Achievement				
			Number of Students Who Will Receive Certificates in 2000	
Grade	Outstanding	Notable	1999*	2000
4	Score of 6	Scores of 5 and 5.5	3,194 (2%)	8,274 (4%)
8	Score of 6	Score of 5.5	1,445 (1%)	5,398 (3%)
10	Score of 6	Score of 5.5	2,924 (2%)	11,024 (8%)

* Standard Curriculum Students