Strategies for Passing the Writing Proficiency Assessment (WPA)

Presented by

Student Support Services Project for Students with Disabilities
San Diego State University
Spring 2007

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What is the WPA?

According to the office of Student Testing, Assessment and Research (STAAR) at SDSU, “all undergraduates must demonstrate competency in writing skills at the upper division level as a requirement for the baccalaureate degree. The Writing Proficiency Assessment (WPA) is a 90 minute examination used to evaluate writing competency.”

http://www.sa.sdsu.edu/testofc/gradwriting_reqs.htm

Note: If you receive SDS accommodations for extra time on exams, you may also qualify for additional time on the WPA exam. Please verify this additional time with the Test Office.
What do I need on the day of the exam?

1. Two #2 pencils and a pen
2. Valid ID with picture (SDSU ID or driver’s license)
3. Entry Ticket

Note: Exam book is provided.
How will the exam be scored?

The exam will be read by two professionally trained SDSU faculty and/or staff. Each reader scores between 1 and 6. A combined number from both readers determines your overall score.
WPA Format

The WPA format is a short reading selection and a group of questions/prompts. You will be tested on your ability to comprehend a written passage as well as analyze the author’s text from a critical perspective.
What Are the Readers Looking For?

- Focus
- Analysis
- Organization
- Development
- Syntax, Diction, and Grammar
Tips for Reading Comprehension

- First, review the writing prompts and know what you will be asked to discuss in your essay.
- Next, skim the text to get a general idea of the article and identify the author’s main argument.
- On the second and closer reading, annotate—underline key words and phrases. In the margin, note important points that address the exam prompts.
- Spend about 15-20 minutes carefully and thoroughly reading the article.
Tips for Writing Your Essay

- Identify your writing tasks.
- Brainstorm and utilize any prewriting techniques to generate ideas.
- Develop an outline. Include your thesis and the major points that will be addressed in the essay.
- Manage your time and allow time to edit. Do not worry about spelling as you write.
- As you write your essay response, refer to the writing prompt to make sure that you are on task.
Craft a coherent essay (i.e. one that is not just a series of paragraph responses to the prompt) in which you respond (in an appropriate order) to all of the following components:

Identify and provide a brief summary of the author’s argument; Describe and discuss two strategies that the author uses to support his or her argument; Describe the overall structure of the reading selection and explain whether it furthers the aims of the author’s argument; Discuss the premise(s) and/or assumption(s) on which the argument is based; Evaluate the extent to which you find the argument convincing.
Remember!

This essay is not an “agree or disagree” exercise, nor is it intended to generate an extensive summary of the article. Responses that emphasize personal opinion or summary will not earn a passing score.
General Outline of Essay

- Introduction with Thesis Statement
- Summary of Author’s Argument
- Rhetorical Strategy #1
- Rhetorical Strategy #2
- Overall Structure of Article
- Premise and/or assumption of argument
- How convincing is the argument? (concluding paragraph)
Before answering the prompts, you must first create a context for your essay’s discussion.

Begin with general principles and provide introductory statements regarding the topic of article.

Example: Many college students seek valuable opportunities to develop marketable skills within their fields. The internship is one such avenue that students can pursue.

Set up what you are going to do using the thesis statement. This statement should provide organization for the essay.
Many college students seek valuable opportunities to develop marketable skills within their fields. The internship is one such avenue that students can pursue. Anya Kamanetz’s article, “Take This Internship and Shove It,” explores the issue of unpaid internships and its impact on college students. Through careful analysis, I will examine how Kamanetz successfully employs rhetorical strategies to support her argument, how the article’s structure and organization advances its position, and how the assumption shared between the author and her audience strengthens the overall argument.
Points to Remember!

- An introduction for this exam should not be lengthy and can be 4-5 sentences.
- You should state what the purpose of this essay is through a THESIS STATEMENT.
- Do not summarize the article. Readers of the exam are not looking for a summary of the article. The purpose of the introductory paragraph is to establish the context for your essay’s discussion.
Body Paragraph #1

**Writing Component 1:** Identify and provide a brief summary of the author’s argument;

**Points to Consider:**
- From the text, locate the author’s key argument and supporting reasons for her position.
- Ask yourself, “What is the author’s key argument and why does she take this position?”
- Remember, *summarize the author’s argument*, not the entire article.
In “Take This Internship and Shove It,” Kamanetz argues that unpaid internships have little value because they do not adequately prepare college students for careers after college. She also asserts that unpaid work creates financial hardships for these “lowly interns.” Moreover, Kamanetz contends that unpaid internships have an adverse affect on the American economic system because college students become “an oversupply” of individuals who work without pay and consequently disrupt the balance within America’s economy.
Points to Remember!

- Do not summarize the entire article.
- Readers of the exam are only looking for a brief summary of the author's argument.
- Sample Format: Author X argues that ________________ because ___________________________________________________.


Body Paragraphs #2 & #3

Writing Component 2: Describe and discuss two strategies that the author uses to support his or her argument;

Points to Consider:
- Refer to your annotations and choose 2 strategies used to support the author’s argument.
- Use the language of the prompt to establish your topic sentence and to begin your discussion: In her essay, Kamenetz effectively employs various rhetorical strategies to further her argument. One strategy that she uses to support her argument is exemplification, specifically the use of numbers and statistical representations.
What are the most commonly used Rhetorical Strategies?

- **Irony**: Exposes absurdity or something opposite to its literal meaning, often using humor or sarcasm.
  
  Example: As the rain poured down, Anne commented, “What a beautiful day it is!”

- **Repetition**: The repeated use of the same word, word pattern, or key ideas.

- **Metaphors**: An expression used to represent another idea in order to suggest similarity. An implicit comparison.
  
  Example: “Life is like a box of chocolates”—Forrest Gump

- **Aristotle’s Persuasive Appeals**:
  
  - **Ethos**: Ethics, morals, values, and conscience.
  - **Logos**: Logic, numbers, explanations, and facts.
  - **Pathos**: Emotions and sympathy.

- **Exemplification**: The use of examples, factual information, and statistics.
  
  Example: According to the 2000 Census Bureau, 20% of all Americans...
Rhetorical Strategies (cont.)

- **Analogy:** Drawing a comparison to show similarity between two things.
  Example: hot is to cold as fire is to ice

- **Symbolism:** A representation of something because of close association.
  Example: The tree as a symbol of life.

- **Anecdotes:** A short account of an event.

- **Rhetorical Question:** A device used to encourage reflection or curiosity within the reader, rather than illicit a direct response.
  Example: "Will there ever be peace on earth?"

- **Appeal to Authority:** Use of research, professional opinions, and the author’s own authority.
  Example: According to extensive research conducted by Sociologist James Bruin, American society has...
In her essay, Kamenetz effectively employs various rhetorical strategies to further her argument. One strategy that she uses to support her argument is exemplification, specifically the use of numbers and statistical representations. She states, for example, that “…50,000 unpaid interns are employed full time for 12 weeks each summer at an average minimum wage of $5.15 an hour.” The number of unpaid internships at such a meager wage clearly illustrates the reality of the situation and the exploitation of students. In addition, Kamanetz provides data from national surveys that clearly support her argument. The use of exemplification, as a result, helps the audience visualize the magnitude of unpaid interns and its impact on the economy. Without this data, it would be difficult to conceptualize the problem that exists for college students seeking to gain relevant work experience.
Points to Remember!

- Use specific examples to support your choice of rhetorical strategy.
- Certain strategies, such as exemplification and appeal to authority, are often used to further an argument.
- Explain how the strategy chosen supports the argument.
- As you introduce the next rhetorical strategy in Body Paragraph #3, use a transition: "Another strategy used to expand Kamenetz’s argument is the appeal to authority..."
Writing Component 3: Describe the overall structure of the reading selection and explain whether it furthers the aims of the author’s argument;

Points to Consider:
• How is the article structured? Sequence of paragraphs?
• How are examples arranged? How do they advance the writer’s argument?
• How does the structure affect the coherence of the reading as a whole?
The structure of Kamenetz’s article furthers the aims of her argument. She first begins with a short anecdote and introduction of the topic, internships. In order to provide more background on paid and unpaid internships, Kamenetz refers to a professional survey that was conducted. The context for the discussion is established within the first few paragraphs, and the audience does not learn about the argument until paragraph four, when it is implicitly stated through a rhetorical question. The sequence of paragraphs effectively addresses the reasoning of the author’s argument and each supporting point is laid out with clearly stated examples and various rhetorical strategies. As a whole, the organization enables Kamanetz to develop her ideas and examples, and most importantly, leaves the reader with a better understanding of the negative impact of unpaid internships.
Writing Component 3: Discuss the premise(s) and/or assumption(s) on which the argument is based.

Points to Consider:

• Considered to be synonymous in this writing exercise, premises/assumptions are the values or beliefs upon which arguments rest.

• Address components of the argument that are generally accepted as true by both the writer and audience. Find common ground.

• Use specific examples from the reading that support your position.

• Do not summarize the article.
Sample Response: Body Paragraph #5

The assumption within Kamanetz’s article is that work by an individual should be compensated and that an unpaid internship contradicts this belief. It can be argued that this concept is supported by the general population, as well as the majority of college students, and the article argues in more specific terms that unpaid internships do more harm than good to an individual and to the economy. This assumption validates both the author’s argument as well as the points developed throughout the article. For this reason, the assumption presented in this article creates a shared understanding between the author and audience and provides an overwhelmingly convincing argument.
Writing Task: Evaluate the extent to which you find the argument convincing.
“Take This Internship and Shove It,” by Anya Kamenetz, proved to be a convincing article. The belief that college students should be paid for their work, which is the premise for the article as well as common ground between the author and audience, strengthens her argument. Furthermore, through the use of specific examples, the use of Logos and appeal to authority as rhetorical devices, and a carefully structured line of argument, Kamanetz establishes a persuasive argument for the reader. By the end of the article, readers have a clearer understanding of how the unpaid internship can plague both the student as well as the economy and that one should “Take This Internship and Shove It.”
As you take your exam, remember to...

- Refer to your annotations of the article.
- Refer to your outline and to the writing prompts.
- Refer to specific paragraphs when providing examples. (For example, in Paragraph 5, Singleton reiterates his key argument by addressing...)
- Save 10-15 minutes at the end for editing.

Good Luck and call us at 619-594-5315 to schedule a follow-up appointment!