Writing Skills Test (WST)
Frequently Asked Questions

Test Preparation:

- **Is there any way to prepare in advance for the WST?**

Yes. Currently you may attend one of the WST Workshops that are offered each quarter at the Student Center for Academic Achievement (the SCAA). Check each quarter's workshop schedule to see when and where the WST sessions will be. SCAA Workshop url:
http://www20.csueastbay.edu/library/scaa/Workshops,%20WST%20Info.html

Sample Test Prompts:

• **Are there any sample test prompts?**

Yes. Sample prompts can be found at: http://testing.csueastbay.edu/uwsr/wst/wsteassaytopics.php

On the Day of the Test:

• **Will the WST essay require outside sources?**

No. You may not bring any outside sources to the test. You will rely on your own experience and knowledge to generate examples and evidence for the position you take.

• **Can I write in pencil?**

Yes, as long as your write dark enough and legibly.

• **If I've handwritten my essay and want to change or add something, how do I do that?**

You can write notes in the margins and/or draw arrows to show that you have added something. The readers will follow these notes as long as the notes are clear.

• **Referring to the WST rubric, can you explain the "task" category?**

"Task" refers to an essay being on-topic. Do not go off on tangents. Always respond to the *Command Sentences* of the WST prompt in your thesis. Another good strategy to help keep you on track is to refer to your thesis and your prewriting *while* you are drafting the essay.

Argument/Thesis Statement:

• **Can I state arguments about both positions?**

Yes, but your position must favor one side more than the other.

• **Can I have separate paragraphs for presenting opposing views and a rebuttal?**

Yes.

• **Can I have two body paragraphs of supporting reasons and then two more paragraphs to present and refute the opposing view?**

Having 3-4 supporting reasons (in addition to the other two paragraphs) is recommended. However, one of the common ways to refute an opposing view *is* to give a reason. To refute an opposing view, you can also point out an error in logic in the opposing view or point out how the opposing view is impractical or too expensive, or is built upon inaccurate facts or faulty assumptions, or has overlooked something.

• **What if I have more than one counterargument?**

That's fine, but be sure that you are clearly taking a position that favors one side. You cannot be "in the middle." And make sure to have clear language indicating that you are *presenting* an opposing

view, and then also make sure to *refute* that view
.
• **If one of my paragraphs is a counterargument, do I have to preview that in my thesis?**
Not always. However, if your first body paragraph is going to present the opposing view, you might want to preview your counterargument as the first clause of your thesis.

Organization:
• **Do people tend to put their counterargument paragraph(s) in a certain location?**
Yes. Usually, they place it as either their first or last body paragraph.

• **How do I have better coherence in my essay?**
There are many ways to accomplish this: you can use transitional words or phrases (such as "therefore" or "on the other hand"), you can substitute pronouns for nouns (but be careful to avoid ambiguous pronoun references), or you can repeat key words and/or terms or use synonyms for key words/terms. For more information, visit:
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/574/01/

• **What is the minimum number of recommended paragraphs?**
At least six. You need to avoid a formulaic essay with a thesis that lists three points and a formulaic 5-paragaph essay.

Content/Development:
• **What makes a good body paragraph?**
A strong body paragraph needs a clear topic sentence that explains one part of your thesis statement. The detail sentences in the paragraph then support the main claim (the topic sentence) of the paragraph with a variety of development strategies, such as thoughtful analysis, concrete examples, quotes, concise explanations, personal experience, etc. For more information, visit: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/724/02/

• **What are the most effective types of evidence?**
Relevant facts, incidents, examples, personal observations and experiences, testimony, statistics, and references to things you have heard or read or learned in classes or elsewhere.

• **How many sentences do I need in a paragraph?**
As many as it takes to fully explain and support the point that you are making.

• **What should I do in my introduction?**
In your introduction, you should do one or more of the following: a) set the context for your paper by providing background information on the topic, b) present some of the various views on the topic, or c) use an introductory strategy, such as an anecdote, a question (that you will then answer), etc. *Remember, you must state your thesis very clearly*, and the typical place for your thesis is at the end of the introduction. A very effective strategy for an introduction for the WST is to paraphrase the prompt, *not* plagiarize it, but put the ideas of the prompt in your own words. For more information, visit:
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/engagement/index.php?category_id=2&sub_category_id=2&article_id=5 8

• **What should I do in my conclusion?**
In your conclusion, you should do one or more of the following: a) restate your topic and supporting points, b) restate your thesis, or c) use a culminating strategy, such as "calling your reader to action," making a prediction, offering a solution, etc. Remember do *not* include any new information in a

conclusion. For a WST essay, you do not need a long conclusion. And if for some reason, you run out of time for a conclusion, in the last 30 seconds of the test write, "Ran out of time." For more information, visit:
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/engagement/index.php?category_id=2&sub_category_id=2&article_id=60

• **If I have a lack of ideas, what can I do?**
Prewrite! Use a prewriting technique, such as clustering. Also once you have your position on the issue, ask yourself "why" or "how." The answers to these questions will help you brainstorm more reasons for your position. Also, consider adding a counterargument paragraph. Or if you are not completely *for* or completely *against* the issue, one body paragraph could present your exception.

• **Can you tell me a little more about what a logical fallacy is?**
Logical fallacies often consist of broad generalizations or narrow points of reasoning which can undermine your argument: "everyone knows," "it is obvious," "X is always or never true," or "We must do either X or Y" are all phrases which lead to logical fallacies. Avoid the temptation to generalize or to make broad, sweeping claims, with little or no content value. For more information, visit:
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/659/03/

Vocabulary:
• **What level of language should I use? Can I use simple words?**
You may use "simple" words if you are unsure of the correct meaning of more academic words. It is better to use a simpler word correctly than a more academic word incorrectly. But you should maintain a formal, academic tone throughout your essay. Imagine you are writing a cover letter for your dream job. That is the level of formality you should use when writing the WST.

• **Can I use the word "you"?**
Avoid using "you." Use a specific noun if possible. I am using "you" here because I know specifically who my audience is: students wishing to score better of the WST.

• **Is it not good to repeat words/phrases/ideas?**
It is fine to repeat words (or to use synonyms) if you are doing so as a coherence strategy. However, do not use the same reason in different body paragraphs. Each body paragraph needs to present a different reason for your position. You want to avoid being repetitive.

• **Can I begin my conclusion with "in conclusion"?**
You can, but it is not necessary because the reader should get a clear sense that your paper is "wrapping up" if you are writing an effective conclusion. Again, as with any transition device such as "in conclusion," you want to avoid being formulaic
.
• **Regarding the prompt and thesis statement, should I use my own words?**
Yes! Do not plagiarize the prompt.