



Show-Me

The "Official" Newsletter of Literacy in Missouri

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Literacy.....

GED as Project

Pathways to Passing the GED®

Language Arts, Writing

Reprinted from the following web site:

<http://www.valrc.org/publications/gedasproject/index.htm>

The Writing Template

1) Identifying the Problem

Step 1 of the writing template addresses two tasks that are crucial to beginning the writing process. The first task is recognizing the topic of the essay to be written. In the GED® test, writers will be presented with a prompt, a very general statement upon which writers can develop a personal essay. The second task is identifying the prospective audience of one's writing. Step 1 helps learners understand that their essay will be read by two readers who will be assessing their writing according to a set of evaluation standards. In this step, learners are asked to read the writing prompt and the directions carefully and to identify any areas they do not understand. Misreading the topic is a frequent mistake that causes test-takers to not pass the GED® Language Arts, Writing test. As in the other *GED® as Project* subject areas, we ask learners to slow down, read carefully, and become grounded in the material with which they are presented.

2) Becoming Familiar with the Problem

The second step of the *GED as Project* writing template targets the research stage of the writing process. Before writing can begin, writers research the essay topic to provide themselves as much information and detail as possible. This step requires considering all possible topics, exploring the details of the topics, and thinking about how to present the topics to the intended audience. While GED essay topics do not require research in the traditional sense, they do require some thought. In identifying a topic to write about, learners are asked to think about subjects they are already familiar with. Learners are asked to choose topics that they would feel comfortable teaching to others. These topics tend to hold the most detail and meaning for learners.

3) Planning, Assigning, and Performing Tasks

Planning

Based on the work they have done in Steps 1 & 2, learners will develop a writing plan.

Assigning

This would generally be an individual activity so there would be no assigning of tasks.

Performing Tasks

Doing the Work

The first two Learning Projects place focus on preparing to write, the writing process itself, and evaluating essays based on the scoring rubric used on the GED Language Arts, Writing test. Beginning in Learning Project 3 the focus shifts to the process of revising an essay.

- *Writing*

Here learners will begin the actual writing of the essay. Learners begin by developing a list of topics they know well enough to teach others. From there, they narrow down the list to a handful of topics that they know very well and continue by choosing one topic they know and understand better than any other. Once the final topic, the topic for the essay, has been decided, learners are asked to develop a list of details that describe, characterize, and summarize the topic. Using a number of detail-generating techniques, learners develop a long list of details they can use in their essay. After the details have been generated, learners revisit the list and remove all of the irrelevant details. Learning to separate relevant details from irrelevant details is one of the most important elements of good writing. Learners need to understand that some details are interesting, but they do not serve a purpose in the essay. Once the irrelevant details have all been removed, learners begin the process of organizing the relevant details into groups based on their similarities. All of this pre-writing work pays off when the learners start to write their first draft. Having a well-developed topic accompanied by supporting details helps the learners focus on the act of writing. Instead of thinking of details on the fly, learners already have everything they need to write in front of them.

- *Revising*

The last three Learning Projects focus on developing skills in revision. These projects break down the revision process, allowing learners to focus on one aspect of revision at a time – organization, clear expression, mechanics and usage and style. Ultimately, learners integrate their learning to incorporate all of these aspects of revision at once. The multiple-choice portion of the GED Language Arts test is actually a test of revision skills. As such, the revising Inquiry Activities integrate the multiple-choice items from the Practice Test PA into the process of revising one's own work.

The result is that, in addition to the learners gaining skills in revising their own writing for clear expression, organization, mechanics and usage, and style in their own work, they are also equipped to answer the multiple-choice questions on the test. In test-taking circumstances, learners take the multiple-choice test first. The GED test designers developed the test in this way because they want to see that test takers have honed the revision skills necessary for revising their own essays in the second portion of the writing test. The skills learned in this step of the writing template allow learners to experience revision not only within the context of their own writing, but also in the multiple-choice format of the test.

4) Sharing with Others

Sharing with Others is an activity that every GED® content area shares in the *GED as Project* approach. Communicating an understanding of the writing process reinforces the learners' ability to use and make meaning of the process. Discussing writing and the approaches taken in the writing process helps learners think through their processes more thoroughly than keeping it all internalized. Having learners share their writing and their strategies places them in the role of teaching others. It is our continued belief that one learns best when one teaches. In this step, learners discuss and report to the class how they approached the writing process, how what they have learned may benefit them in their daily lives, and any of the questions covered in Steps 1 through 3. Learners should be encouraged to lead the class in discussion and to share what they know and what they have learned. Doing so allows learners to further build their communication skills while extending what they have learned by teaching it to others.

5) Reflecting, Extending, and Evaluating

Step 5 in the template is devoted to the learner, whose aim is broader than that of simply a test-taker. The learner is encouraged to learn the process of writing through the activities presented in *GED as Project, Volume 4*. An important reason for continuing beyond step 3 in each IA is to allow the learners to apply what has been learned to other types of writing, both test-based writing and real life writing. Learners have to explore other ramifications of the process of writing in order to handle the essay portion of the GED test. Step 5 gives the learners that chance.

Reflecting: Think about how well you understood what you have done.

Each reflecting step is introduced with the following comment to reinforce this very important thinking skill: *Here are some questions to start you thinking about the experience you just had. Thinking about what you have experienced is part of the learning process. When the focus is only on the answer, you don't get much time to think about what you learned.*

Reflecting questions tend to be analytical in Sternberg's *Successful Intelligence* model. There are numerous issues you can ask learners to reflect on, including:

- Thinking skills learned
- Why writing is important
- What has surprised them about the writing process
- Test-taking skills developed

Extending: Extend what you learned to new situations.

Learners now get a chance to build on the knowledge gained by making connections to the world around them. Understanding the generation of ideas, the importance of strong supporting details, and the power of the revising process are all important in gaining a deeper understanding of writing concepts. These concepts are important not just in test writing, but also in everyday practical writing. The skills learned in this writing volume of *GED as Project* help learners think like writers, a kind of thinking that learners will carry with them far beyond the GED test. All of these extending activities can be done in groups and reported to the rest of the class.

Evaluating: Assess what you learned and how you learned it.

Each evaluating step is introduced with the following comment to reinforce this highest thinking level in Bloom's Cognitive Taxonomy: *In this last step, you get a chance to review the methods used to learn. There are no right or wrong answers in these questions; it is your chance to look more closely at your learning style and the opportunity to state how you benefited or didn't benefit from the content and/or the methods to help you pass the GED test.* The evaluation process is similar to the reflecting process, but it tends to be more personal to each learner. Here are some questions that could be asked. These questions tend to be analytical in Sternberg's *Successful Intelligence* model.

- What parts of the activity worked best for you?
- Explain.
- What parts of this Inquiry Activity will you use when writing the essay on the GED test? Why?
 - What kinds of essay writing strategies did you learn from this Inquiry Activity?
 - What have you learned about revising?

The Inquiry Activity template is dynamic and can be applied to different situations in multiple ways.

The Appendices contain:

- A) The GED Scoring Guide
- B) Sample Essays
- C) 5 Tips for Improving Peer Review
- D) Frequently Asked Questions about the GED
- E) Writing and Teaching Resources

Student versions of all of the Inquiry Activities that follow may be downloaded from the *GED as Project* web site: <http://www.jmu.edu/gedproject>.

The Writing Template

1. Identifying The Problem

2. Becoming Familiar With The Problem

- *Developing*
- *Organizing*

3. Planning, Assigning, And Performing Tasks

- *Writing*
- *Revising*

4. Sharing With Others

5. Reflecting, Extending, Evaluating

The following articles are a continuance from the February Newsletter.

Perceptions and Stereotypes of ESL Students

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What Makes Students Good?

The researcher asked professors, "What are some personality characteristics of good students?" The professors' answers fell into two large groups:

- intrinsic mental states
- behavioral traits

Within the first group, answers clustered around work ethic (hardworking, reliable, responsible, etc.), motivation (self-motivating, interested in the subject, etc.), intellectual curiosity (willing to ask questions, wants to learn, etc.), and disposition (friendly, mature, respectful, honest, etc). While these types of characteristics were mentioned frequently, intelligence was only cited by two professors. In general professors do not believe that innate intelligence is the only key, or even the most important key, to academic success. Being a good student means having a positive attitude. The behavioral traits (comes to class, sits in the front, punctual, takes notes, etc.) are constructive habits anyone can practice. In all, good students appear to be self-made, not just born. The characteristics of good students are ones which imply making a choice to perform and adopting routines which further that goal..

What Makes Students Bad?

The responses to the question, "what are some personality characteristics of bad students?" follow the same categories as the question regarding good students. (In fact, two professors simply stated "opposite of the good ones.") Mental states clustered around lack of work ethic (lazy, irresponsible), lack of intrinsic motivation (disinterested, not attentive, more interested in earning points than learning, inability to see anything above the letter grade), lack of intellectual curiosity (indifferent, doesn't want to learn, etc.), and disposition (dishonest, sneaky, free-riding, poor attitude, whiny, etc.). Behavioral traits included such items as not coming to class, pushing things off, not turning in homework, "partying," and sitting in the back of the class. Once again, these traits are under the control of the students. They imply a choice not to succeed, not some inherent inability to do good work.

Stereotypes of Foreign Students

Unlike the questions about good students and bad students, which professors answered readily, the question concerning characteristics of foreign students received some opposition. In fact, four of the professors declined to answer this question at all. The most common answer was a safe one, some variation on the fact that foreign students have difficulties with the English language (difficulty understanding what you say, accents can be difficult to understand, they have to filter the material through "Texan" into English and their own language, etc.)

However, evidence of stereotyping did emerge. The first set of answers clustered around work ethic (hardworking, organized, high standards, Asians are very dedicated) or the lack thereof (want to beat the system, work the angle, crafty, know ways around things, some cooperate more than they should - they cheat off each other). Individual professors tended to hold one belief or the other about foreign students in terms of work ethic. That is, some professors responded only with the positive values, and others responded only with the negative values, indicating that professors hold stable beliefs about the work ethic of foreign students. Thus, some professors grouped foreign students with good students while others grouped them with bad students. The obvious danger is that professors who believe that foreign

students in general are sneaky and lazy will project that image onto students regardless of evidence to the contrary. Williams (1971) found that student teachers tended to judge minority children according to their stereotypes of those minorities; they did not judge them solely on their actual performance. It is entirely possible that university professors who hold stereotypes of international students will do the same. Another possible danger is that professors will fault international students who are not as hardworking as the professors think they should be. Professors might set the standard so high that students who work hard (but not heroically) cannot meet it. The students will then fall short, and thus receive less positive evaluations.

The second component of the mental state, disposition, showed a consensus that the stereotypical foreign student is retiring and introverted. Specific descriptions included shy, quiet, serious, less vocal, non-argumentative, polite, attentive, not wanting to lose face, and lacking self-confidence. While professors undoubtedly view some of these characteristics positively (who would not want polite students?), there seems to be a danger that professors view foreign students as a timorous mass instead of as individuals, some of whom are introverted and some of whom are opinionated and extroverted. While being introverted was not specifically mentioned in the interviews as a trait of bad students, Vollmer (2000) notes that American teachers admire character attributes that are seen as more "American," namely being aggressive and outgoing. Lalonde, Lee, and Gardner (1987) also found significant results that teachers equated sociability, extroversion, and self assurance with good students. Thus, professors who believe that nonnative speakers of English are quiet and lacking in confidence might well also believe that these students are inferior. In addition, many professors actively encourage and reward class participation, and if foreign students are prejudged to be less vocal, they might well be perceived as participating less in class regardless of the actual amount of student involvement. Indeed, a lack of self-confidence was one of the stereotypes that Williams (1971) found to affect teachers' perceptions of students.

The third component of mental state mentioned by the university professors was motivation. Business professors believed that foreign students are more motivated and have a greater commitment to study than American students. At first glance this seems to be a positive opinion of foreign students; however, some of the professors elaborated on the reasons behind students' motivation, and these elaborations demonstrated a judgment that the motivation was purely external. One professor correlated foreign students' commitment to their being required to attend school full time. Another professor stated that foreign students' motivation is the fear that if they do not perform well at school, they will have to return to their country of origin. In other words, while there is some consensus that international students are motivated, not all professors believe that the motivation is internal. Some believe that the motivation stems more from university regulations or fear.

Behavioral traits included good class attendance, doing as the professor says, and working with other students (both from their own countries and from other countries) to help each other learn. Much like the behavioral traits listed for good students, these behaviors are examples of constructive practices. In other words, they are methods any student could adopt to achieve academic success.

While certainly not the basis for generalizations on professors' opinions of foreign students, some of the idiosyncratic answers are the most interesting. For instance, one professor stated that foreign students are the underdog. Another professor, perhaps accessing the stereotype of the mathematically gifted Asian, stated that foreign students are good quantitatively. Yet another stated that while at other schools, foreign students are more dedicated, hardworking, and responsible, at the school where the professor currently taught, foreign students lacked respect for instructors and were belligerent. Clearly, professors form opinions of their students and sometimes extremely astringent ones.

This study suggests that the stereotyping of ESL students is indeed an issue at the university level. Some professors believe that foreign students are hard working while others believe the opposite. Many professors believe that foreign students are disposed to be quiet and reserved, and many also view them as highly motivated (although that motivation is viewed as being external by some and internal by others). Professors also believe that foreign students often adopt positive behaviors that help them in their college careers. These opinions show that professors hold both positive and negative stereotypes of nonnative speakers of English.

Where Do We Go From Here?

The researcher sees two important steps in the process of trying to eliminate stereotypes.

- First, we must work to move beyond viewing students as Russian students, Taiwanese students, etc. and approach each person as a unique individual.
- Second, members of the ESL profession must take a greater responsibility towards our students, going beyond teaching them listening, reading, speaking, and writing.

We must also serve as intermediaries between our students and our colleagues in other fields. We must help professors in other content areas understand that while ESL students are to some degree products of their home cultures, they are to a greater degree individuals with individual likes, dislikes, strengths, and weaknesses. Specifically, we can contact advisors in other departments to talk with them about working with ESL students. By keeping in contact with former students who are now studying other fields, we can offer to serve as liaisons between them and their current professors. We can talk with the chairs of other academic departments to discuss the progress of foreign students in their programs. We, the experts on foreign students, should create these opportunities for an exchange of information. The researcher's own experience with contacting instructors in other fields has been very positive; many professors have expressed pleasure in meeting someone who has training and experience in ESL and have used the opportunity to ask questions about issues they had encountered in their teaching of ESL students. Moving outside our own classrooms and becoming advocates calls for extra effort and work, but ridding our educational system of stereotyping and prejudice is a meaningful and worthwhile goal.

PDC Upcoming Calendar

Date	Topic	Time
Tuesday, Feb. 23	Law and Order of Grammar	6-8 p.m.
Friday, Feb. 26	Law and Order of Grammar	6-8 p.m.
Saturday, Feb. 27	Law and Order of Grammar	9-11 a.m.
Tuesday, March 9	NCIS: Investigating Sentence Structure	6-8 p.m.
Saturday, March 13	NCIS: Investigating Sentence Structure	9-11 a.m.
Wednesday, March 24	NCIS: Investigating Sentence Structure	6-8 p.m.

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