

## How to Prepare for the UM Writing Proficiency Assessment

The WPA is a timed essay based on a 3-4 page published text. Your objective is to answer all parts of the question effectively within the time allotted.

### 1 Before the exam, use this preparation strategy:

**Strategy: Read + Ask + Write = RAW**

#### **R**ead for sense:

Read the text in one sitting to get an overview of the topic and author's point of view.

#### Re-read for details:

Paraphrase each paragraph in a complete sentence.

Underline words or names you don't know and look them up.

Underline important sentences/concepts.

#### Re-read for sense:

Paraphrase in one or two sentences the author's thesis or central claim.

Summarize the examples the author uses.

#### **A**sk yourself some questions about the text:

How persuasive is the author?

Do you agree with the author?

What additional or counter examples could be used to discuss the topic?

What key terms or phrases does the author use in the text? Why?

#### **W**rite a practice essay answering these questions:

What, precisely, is the author's main point?

What reasons or evidence does the author use to support his/her case?

Do you agree or disagree with the author's position?

What reasons or evidence do you have for your position?

How is the text connected to events or experiences in your life?

► As you think about the essay you will write, consider that your essay will be evaluated in all these areas:

**Development:** The complete, logical, and supported expression of a thesis (message, central claim, main idea, controlling idea) related to the text and question.

**Organization:** The presentation of a set of ideas in a manner that a reader can follow without difficulty.

**Voice:** The choice of words and sentence types appropriate to the audience and most likely to convince the audience of the author's reliability.

**Mechanics:** The spelling, punctuation, and basic grammar that convey the author's concern for the shared conventions of written English.

## How to Prepare (cont.)

► The WPA scoring criteria, sample essays, and questions appear at [www.umt.edu/writingcenter](http://www.umt.edu/writingcenter). You should examine these closely. The questions implicitly ask you to show that you understood the author's main points and explicitly ask you to offer your own position, with support, on the issue. Here are two samples:

*Judging from Tutko and Bruns' essay and your own experience, do you think Americans overemphasize winning in their everyday lives? Write a two-to-three page essay that responds to this question in the context of the Tutko and Bruns text. Your essay should include an explicit thesis statement that takes a defensible position as well as reasons and examples from your reading, experience, or observations that support your thesis.*

*James Wilson argues that both gun control advocates and the National Rifle Association offer questionable solutions to the problem of gun control in the U.S. Are you persuaded that Wilson's proposal is a good one? Why or why not? Write a two-to-three page essay...*

## 2 During the exam, use this writing strategy:

**Strategy: Analyze + Plan + Execute + Size up = APES**

Analyze the question. (10-15 minutes)

- Choose one and only one question to answer. Stick to it, ignoring the other.
- Underline the key words and phrases.
- Count the number of questions within the question you choose.
- Restate the question(s) in your own words.

Plan the parts of your answer in advance. (20-30 minutes)

- Use an outline or other pre-writing technique.
- Write a thesis statement to encapsulate your message.
- Organize your ideas for the reader's benefit.
- Group your ideas into focused paragraphs.

Execute your plan. (60-80 minutes)

- Write an opening paragraph that lets the reader know where you are headed.
- Follow with reasons, arguments, details, and evidence to reach the reader.
- Link the ideas with consistent logic and language.
- If you did not outline the essay to begin with, you should be able to make an outline of your essay once you have finished it. Do so.
- Ask yourself: Did I do more than merely repeat the question and the author's statements? Did I flesh out my ideas with examples and support? Does my language say what I meant to say?

Size up your effort. (10-20 minutes)

- Reserve at least 10 minutes to check your essay for sentence-level errors such as misspellings, missing words, or punctuation errors.