

Chapter 1

Analytical Writing Assessment

The Analytical Writing Assessment on the GMAT is one question, presented at the beginning of your test. You are given the question prompt and then a reading passage of several paragraphs that presents an argument. Your task is to write a response to that passage that analyzes the logic presented in the passage. You need to agree or disagree with the argument's logic and explain why the flaws you see in the argument are problematic.

The Problems You'll Work On

When working through the Analytical Writing Assessment questions presented here, be prepared to do the following:

- » Read a longer passage than at any other point on the GMAT. It will present an argument, often around something related to business, education, or science, and that argument will contain flaws.
- » Analyze the argument for logical flaws and outline a response.
- » Write a four- to six-paragraph essay based on your outline in which you agree or disagree with the argument, and analyze the flaws within it.
- » Proofread the essay carefully before submitting it.

What to Watch Out For

To increase your chances of scoring well, make sure to do the following:

- » Firmly agree or disagree with the argument.
- » Give yourself enough time to plan, write, and proofread your essay.
- » Don't get drawn into an entirely personal response. Your essay must show logic and intelligence.

For Questions 1 through 5, you will be asked to write a critique of the argument presented below. You may, for example, consider what questionable assumptions underline the thinking, what alternative explanations or counterexamples might weaken the conclusion, or what sort of evidence could help strengthen or refute the argument.

Read the argument and the instructions that follow it, and then make any notes that will help you plan your response. Write your response on a separate sheet of paper. If possible, type your essay on a computer or laptop. Observe the 30-minute time limit.

1. A speaker at a role playing games event made the following statement:

“Although role playing games — or RPGs — such as Dungeons & Dragons have been widely criticized for having a negative effect on our youth, encouraging them to be ‘nerds without social skills’ as one reporter put it, this is not a valid viewpoint. If we look at a survey from last year, more young adults who play RPGs value social skills and courtesy than ever before by almost a 2 to 1 margin compared to the same survey from 10 years ago. This evidence suggests that RPGs are actually promoting social interaction and friendship among the young adults playing them. More people should play them.”

Discuss how well-reasoned you find this argument. In your discussion, be sure to analyze the line of reasoning and the use of evidence in the argument. For example, you may need to consider what questionable assumptions underlie the thinking and what alternative examples or counterexamples might weaken the conclusion. You can also discuss what sort of evidence would strengthen or refute the argument, what changes in argument would make it more logically sound, and what, if anything, would help you better evaluate its conclusion.

2. The following appeared in a promotional mailing sent by the publishers of a community directory, encouraging local businesses to buy an ad in the next edition:

“One of the best ways to reach new customers is also one of the cheapest. That’s why it makes sense to purchase an ad in the Stipeville Business Directory! Local business owners who have purchased an ad in years past will tell you the same thing! Did you know that three of our town’s top-ten doctors, two of our top-five caterers, and several of our top pet groomers bought ads last year? And we don’t want to name names, but a local hairdresser forgot to place her ad before our deadline last year, and she reports that her business dropped by 5%! Well, she’s buying an ad this year, and so should you! The Stipesville Business Directory is a must-buy for all local businesses!”

Discuss how well-reasoned you find this argument. In your discussion, be sure to analyze the line of reasoning and the use of evidence in the argument. For example, you may need to consider what questionable assumptions underlie the thinking and what alternative examples or counterexamples might weaken the conclusion. You can also discuss what sort of evidence would strengthen or refute the argument, what changes in argument would make it more logically sound, and what, if anything, would help you better evaluate its conclusion.

3. A school board member recently made the following statement at a meeting:

“I’m concerned about how poorly the students at Richmeade Senior High School are scoring on their standardized tests. Their math tests scores were, in particular, dreadful, scoring about 20 points lower than the students at Richmeade Prep School, which you all know is just down the road. I’ve been investigating what the Prep School does differently and noticed that in April, they do not offer any extracurricular or special activities, including school field trips, dances, and shows, before the tests are given. They also require all students to take the exam in order to graduate. Therefore, I propose that we also ban extracurricular and special activities for the month of May since we give the test in June. That should help our students focus.”

Discuss how well-reasoned you find this argument. In your discussion, be sure to analyze the line of reasoning and the use of evidence in the argument. For example, you may need to consider what questionable assumptions underlie the thinking and what alternative examples or counterexamples might weaken the conclusion. You can also discuss what sort of evidence would strengthen or refute the argument, what changes in argument would make it more logically sound, and what, if anything, would help you better evaluate its conclusion.

4. A recent column in a conventional cosmetic industry newsletter noted:

“Many customers buy organic makeup products because they are concerned about the consequences of the widespread use of chemical class Zbt in the conventional cosmetics industry. It’s part of our job to convince those customers that they’re misinformed. You might begin by pointing out that while chemical class Zbt has been shown — in very high dosages — to cause scarring in animal studies, no study has ever show that its presence causes scarring on human test subjects. You can conclude by noting that there is clearly no reason for even the most concerned customer to waste her money on organic makeup products. Perfectly safe makeup, you can say, is available without the hassle of searching out organic cosmetics.”

Discuss how well-reasoned you find this argument. In your discussion, be sure to analyze the line of reasoning and the use of evidence in the argument. For example, you may need to consider what questionable assumptions underlie the thinking and what alternative examples or counterexamples might weaken the conclusion. You can also discuss what sort of evidence would strengthen or refute the argument, what changes in argument would make it more logically sound, and what, if anything, would help you better evaluate its conclusion.

5. A banking executive recently made the following comments in an address to shareholders:

“North Bank was once run out of a single storefront on Main Street. Now we have five satellite locations around North Town. However, North Bank was more profitable when it only had that single storefront than it is today with 6 locations. Therefore, I’m proposing that we close our five satellite locations and move all of our business to our original location. This will improve our profitability and customers will enjoy the nostalgic feel of doing their business at a single location.”

Discuss how well-reasoned you find this argument. In your discussion, be sure to analyze the line of reasoning and the use of evidence in the argument. For example, you may need to consider what questionable assumptions underlie the thinking and what alternative examples or counterexamples might weaken the conclusion. You can also discuss what sort of evidence would strengthen or refute the argument, what changes in argument would make it more logically sound, and what, if anything, would help you better evaluate its conclusion.