

# **ISAT Writing Frequently Asked Questions**

*Updated 2/9/09*

## **Is there one preferred method to use for writing instruction?**

No. There is no “best writing program.” Instruction should reflect the needs of students; however, it is important to note that the ISAT writing rubrics assess fundamental features which should be present in any effective writing program. The rubrics do not suggest only one way to teach these features; rather they reinforce the fact that students should understand and apply knowledge of these features as part of the skill of writing.

## **Is ISAT writing formulaic?**

No. There is no formula for effective ISAT writing. Students’ scores are determined by how the features of the rubrics have been applied. Illinois students use a variety of strategies and techniques based upon their knowledge, experience, and ability. ISBE does not expect student writing to look identical across the state.

## **Can a student write off-mode?**

No. If a student writes a narrative composition that should be expository, for example, his composition will be considered off-mode. Off-mode responses will receive lower scores in both Focus and Organization. This will not necessarily affect scores of the Support/Elaboration or Conventions features.

## **Does the introduction have to include a preview?**

No. A student may include a preview, or he may use a thematic introduction or more sophisticated introduction as outlined in the rubrics.

## **Do students have to write five paragraphs?**

No. There is no set number of paragraphs required. Students should develop a composition that contains a beginning, a middle, and an end. On rare occasions very sophisticated writers may develop a one-paragraph composition that fulfills all the requirements of the rubric. A score is based upon the development and support of the features of the rubric, not the number of paragraphs.

## **How are scores computed?**

Each feature of the rubric is scored on a 1 to 6 scale with the exception of Conventions, which is scored on a 1 to 3 scale. The Integration score is doubled, resulting in 33 possible points. Third graders (beginning in 2009) and fifth graders write one expository composition. The scale score is determined from this composition. Sixth and eighth graders write one narrative and one persuasive composition. The scores of these two compositions are averaged to determine the student’s scale score.

## **What reports will we receive for writing?**

You will receive Individual Student Reports which will include scale scores, performance levels, and a breakdown of scores by features; School Rosters; District Rosters; School Performance Profiles, and District Performance Profiles. Writing scores will be reported with the other ISAT scores.

### **How are teachers involved in the development of ISAT Writing?**

Illinois teachers write, review, and help select prompts to be pilot tested. Teachers also contribute to the process of setting the scoring guides.

### **Who scores the tests?**

Our writing contractor takes part in the process of setting the scoring guides along with Illinois teachers and ISBE writing staff. The contractor then trains scorers according to the Illinois writing rubrics and scoring guides. The scorers are all college graduates, and a majority of them are teachers or retired teachers. During the scoring process there is a constant check of their scoring consistency and reliability. Scorers who cannot maintain consistency may be retrained or dismissed. The scoring process is monitored by ISBE Writing staff and Illinois teachers.

### **Can teachers put up posters and graphic organizers in their classrooms?**

If graphic organizers and general information posters have been up in the classroom prior to testing, they may remain on the walls. Posting organizers only for the assessment period or providing posters which guide students step-by-step is considered unethical because it sends the message that the answer can be copied from the wall, not demonstrated from what the student knows.

### **Can students use graphic organizers at their desks during testing?**

Except in the case of students with IEP's, teacher-created graphic organizers may not be given to students during testing. Students may have only their test materials and writing utensils at their desks during testing. Students may use the designated space in the writing folder to create their own graphic organizers or to make notes.

### **Can a student use additional paper if he runs out of room in the test booklet?**

No. When the test booklet is processed, it goes through a slitting machine. Loose pages will be lost; stapled or taped pages will jam the machine. Students must write their compositions on the lines provided in the writing folder. Students should be cautioned not to skip lines to reduce the possibility of running out of room.

### **Can students who require accommodations use software to create their compositions?**

If the student's IEP specifies the use of such software, he may use it; however, word prediction, spell/grammar check, and dictionary features must be turned off during testing. Also, school personnel must transcribe the student's response into the writing folder so that it can be scored. Only what is written on the lined pages in the writing folder will be scored.

### **Can student responses be photocopied?**

No. Student responses may not be read, reviewed, analyzed, or copied. In fact, no part of ISAT may be photocopied unless it is necessary to provide a particular accommodation as specified in a student's IEP or Section 504 Plan, or for a student who is LEP.