

- First Field Test Yields Data for Schools
- Teachers Gain Professional Development by Scoring
- Holistic Rubric Based on Montana Standards
- Test Designed with Input from Participating Schools

# Proficiency Admissions

COMMISSIONER OF  
HIGHER EDUCATION

## Montana/ACT Writing Field Test Administered

In July 2000, the Montana Board of Regents moved to begin implementing proficiency-based admissions standards in writing for the Montana University System. Among the proposed measures for assessing proficiency in writing was a Montana-adapted and scored ACT Writing Sample. This plan is slated to become operational in 2004, after three years of study and refinement.

The first field test of the Montana/ACT Writing Sample was administered to 3,800 juniors and seniors in 73 high schools in early April 2001. Students selected from two writing prompts that asked them to support one of two alternate policies and explain the benefits of their choice.

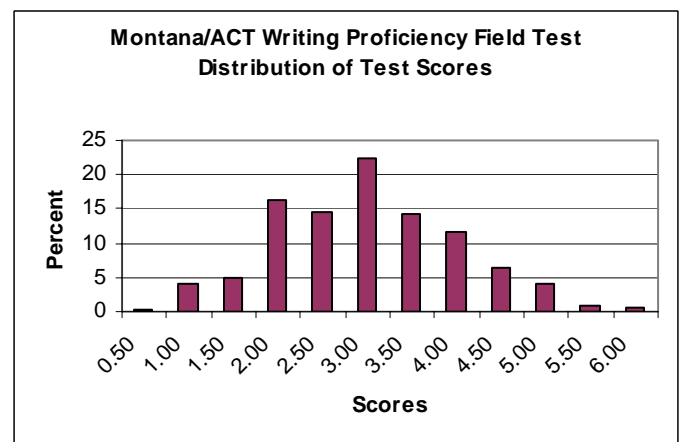
All tests and prompts were scored using the same criteria, a holistic scoring rubric developed by ACT and modified by the project's Steering Committee to reflect the Montana K-12 Writing Standards. Training for scoring was conducted by ACT for one day at each of three sites, followed by about six hours of scoring. Each essay was scored at least twice. Each school's average score and distribution of scores, as well as state averages and distributions were sent to schools in May.

Based on information scanned, preliminary findings indicate that:

- On a 6-point scale, the mean score of all Montana students was 3.0; 39.9% scored below

the mean and 37.8% scored above the mean. 5.6% of the students scored at levels 5 to 6; 18% scored 4 to 4.5; 51.1% scored 2.5 to 3.5; 21.2% scored 1.5 to 2; and 4.2% scored 1 or below. School mean scores ranged from 1.3 to 4.2.

- Both the 592 students who marked themselves as seniors and the 2730 students who marked juniors had mean scores of 3.0.
- For the 1241 students who indicated they intend to continue their educations at a post-secondary school in Montana, the mean score was 3.0.
- For the 1237 students who indicated they intend to continue their education at a post-secondary school in another state, the mean score was 3.3.
- For the 206 students who indicated they intend to seek employment after high school, the mean score was 2.3
- For the 179 students who indicated they intend to join the military after high school, the mean score was 2.5.
- For the 258 students with other plans, the mean score was 2.6.



## Field Test Designed to Gather Data

In addition to writing the essay test, students provide information about ethnicity, class size, school size, district writing assessments, and post-secondary plans. Teachers also answer questions about the test and their schools' writing curriculum. As a result, information is gathered to address the following research questions:

### Test Administration

- ✓ Which prompts yield the most consistent scores?
- ✓ What is the appropriate cut score?
  - High school versus college freshman scores
  - Post-secondary predictions
  - Correlation with freshman GPA

### School Data

- ✓ How are scores influenced by the use of a district writing assessment?
- ✓ Are scores influenced by class size?
- ✓ Are scores influenced by school size?

### Student Data

- ✓ Do scores from seniors differ from those of juniors?
- ✓ Do scores differ based on postsecondary plans?
- ✓ Do scores differ based on gender or ethnicity?

### Teacher Perceptions

In addition to information from the teacher questionnaire, the scoring process itself yields information about teacher and scorer perceptions about the test and scoring procedures.

## Montana/ACT Holistic Scoring Scale Used for 2001

6 These papers take and support a position on the issue defined in the prompt with extensive elaboration. Organization is unified and coherent. Language use is fluent with well-controlled sentences, clear and effective expression of ideas, and precise word choice. While there may be a few errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics, an outstanding command of language is apparent.

5 These papers take and support a position on the issue defined in the prompt with moderate elaboration. Organization is unified and coherent. Sentences are almost always well controlled, expression of ideas is usually clear, and word choice is often precise. While there may be a few errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics, a good command of language is apparent.

4 These papers take and support a position on the issue defined in the prompt with some elaboration or explanation. Organization is generally clear. Sentences are usually well controlled, expression of ideas is usually clear, and word choice is appropriate for the topic. A competency with language is apparent, even though there may be some errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics.

3 These papers take and support a position on the issue defined in the prompt with a little elaboration or explanation. Organization is clear enough to follow without difficulty. Sentences are usually well controlled, expression of ideas is at times awkward or unclear, and word choice may at times be inaccurate or inappropriate. A basic control of language is apparent, even though there may be frequent errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics.

2 These papers take a position on the issue defined in the prompt but show significant problems in one or more of several areas. Support may be minimal. Organization may lack clear movement or connectedness, making the writer's ideas difficult to follow. Sentences may often be unclear, expression of ideas may often be awkward or unclear, and word choice may often be inaccurate or inappropriate. Numerous errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics show poor control of language and may at times impede understanding.

1 These papers show an attempt to engage the issue defined in the prompt, but they have severe problems in one or more of several areas. The writer may not take a position on the issue defined in the prompt. The papers may lack support. Problems with organization and lack of coherence may make the paper very difficult to follow. Sentences may seldom convey meaning clearly, expression of ideas may be very unclear and confusing, and word choice may often be inaccurate or inappropriate. Severe problems with grammar, usage, or mechanics show very poor control of language and may significantly impede understanding.

0 Not ratable.

**During field-testing, modifications may be made to the test itself and the way it is administered and scored.**

● **Visit our Writing Proficiency Website:**

[www.montana.edu/mus/Writing%20Proficiency/index.htm](http://www.montana.edu/mus/Writing%20Proficiency/index.htm)