

What guidelines might govern a Writing Assessment Consortium?

- A Writing Assessment Consortium would be formed by a group of volunteer schools to administer and score a writing test at regional sites in Montana. OCHE, OPI and Planning Committees would ensure consistency and quality control of prompts, training, scoring, and reporting processes.
- Test booklets would be designed for blind scoring, so that scorers could not know the names of the students, teachers, or schools of the essays they score. In order to ensure reliability, the percentage of tests from one district scored at a site could be limited.
- Prompts would come from the pool of MUS field-tested prompts or follow the pattern developed during the MUS field test. Students could select from two prompts.
- The scoring rubric would be holistic, based on the MUS Writing Assessment rubric, and any modifications would require approval by the MUS and other Writing Assessment Consortia.
- Training and scoring would take place at regional sites. Training would consist of a minimum of five hours of reading and discussing anchor sets, scoring practice sets, and passing a qualification set. Scoring would begin on the training day or on the following day. Each essay would be scored twice; or three times for discrepant scores.
- Data from the tests, including mean scores and distributions, correlations with student plans, instructional methods, etc., would be shared among districts, the Office of Public Instruction, the Montana University System, and other interested parties. Individual student scores would be made available to the student, the teacher, the school, and college admissions offices only.

How much would a district/consortium writing assessment cost and who would fund it?

Printing test booklets, scanning and reporting of data by an outside firm is about \$2.00 per test. Onsite scoring expenses, such as food, adds another \$10.00 per scorer. School districts spend approximately \$20,000 each year for substitute teachers and travel expenses to send 100 teachers to scoring sites. Communications and mailing costs add another \$900 to the total. Therefore, the current cost for the Montana University System Writing Assessment is about \$6.50 per test. In 2005 and beyond, consortium members could be assessed on a per-test basis to cover these and other costs, perhaps \$5 to \$10 per test. OCHE continues to pursue additional funding sources. However, under the current fiscal situation, the Writing Assessment Consortium could be asked to assume logistical, printing, and scoring costs after 2005. A Writing Assessment Committee, with district representation, would oversee the assessment by reviewing new prompts, rubric modifications, test data, and training plans.

Comparing SAT and ACT to a Montana Writing Assessment Consortium

Factors	Montana Writing Assessment	National Admissions Exams
Cost	Districts and OCHE share costs	Students pay additional \$14 for optional ACT Writing Test SAT cost slated for increase
Student Choices	Choice of two prompts Choice to word process	No prompt choice Handwritten only
Timing	40-minutes	ACT: 30 minutes SAT: 25 minutes
Relevancy	Montana-developed prompts; Rubric tied to Montana standards	National prompts National rubric
Scoring	Montana teachers and professors	National, professional scorers
Professional Development	Prompt-writing, scoring, websites, workshops	Information available on Websites

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Beyond 2004:
the Future
of Writing
Proficiency
in Montana



Montana is one of the few states without a state-level writing assessment.

Over the past three years, the University System Writing Sample has filled that void for over half of Montana's high schools. Members of the Writing Proficiency Steering Committee believe that the foundation is now in place to begin instituting a Montana Writing Assessment.



Writing Proficiency

An Opportunity to Sustain a Montana Writing Assessment

In 2000, the Montana Board of Regents (BOR) directed the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE) to study the writing proficiency of Montana's high school juniors. Since March of 2001, 117 Montana high schools have participated in field tests, 312 teachers have learned to score essays, and a tremendous amount of data about writing practices has been collected, analyzed, and reported.

Initially, ACT played an important role in the development of the Montana University System Writing Assessment. The Joint K-16 Committee on Composition Standards and ACT envisioned an assessment designed in Montana and administered by ACT, with students paying directly for the test. After four years of training, Montana teachers and professors could score tests from their home or school computers.

The field test provided the opportunity to experiment timing, prompts, writing modes, and scoring processes. However, since a writing sample will be added to the commercially available admissions exams in 2005, ACT will no longer administer a special Montana Writing Assessment. Considering the success of the Montana experiment, many educators object to simply relinquishing this measure of proficiency to the testing corporations.

What steps are being taken to sustain a Montana Writing Assessment?

In August 2003, representatives from interested school districts, the Board of Public Education, the Office of Public Instruction, and OCHE met to consider the challenge of sustaining a Montana-based writing assessment as an alternate to the new SAT or ACT Writing Tests for Proficiency Admissions. This ad-hoc committee proposed the formation of a **Montana Writing Assessment Consortium** to build on the Montana University System's field tests.

When Higher Education works with K-12, Admissions Standards Can:

- *Clearly define a continuum of standards and assessments across levels*
- *Coordinate state content standards and high school curricula with typical college freshman coursework*
- *Engage educators, K-16, in conversations about standards, curriculum and instruction*
- *Provide prospective students with opportunities to test their college readiness skill*
- *Direct professional development resources to offerings that promote college awareness and preparation.*

To set the stage for this endeavor, OCHE will print tests, scan scores, report results, and host a training of trainers who will train scorers at regional sites in 2004. All Montana high schools are invited to participate in testing, scoring, and planning for future tests. Finally, if guidelines are followed that ensure testing rigor and reliable scoring, the Board of Regents may allow students to submit Montana Writing Assessment Consortium scores as an alternate to ACT or SAT writing scores for admissions.

Office of the Commissioner
of Higher Education

What are the benefits of district collaboration for a college admissions writing assessment?

- *Although applicants to the Montana University System must submit ACT or SAT scores, some may not be able to pay the additional fee for the optional writing assessment.*
- *A state assessment could allow students more time to write and to word process. Both ACT and SAT samples must be written in 30 min. or less*.*
- *Teachers who score believe the experience helps them prepare students for college writing, develop ties with the University System, and "recalibrate" their own grading practices on a yearly basis.*
- *Whereas Montana educators have no input into the prompts, rubric, and scoring procedures of ACT and SAT, in a consortium assessment they could select prompts, use the rubric based on Montana content standards, and score with teachers representing a variety of school sizes and cultures.*
- *By collaborating with local colleges or universities to examine student work, teachers get professional development while generating data useful to both K-12 and higher education, not only for admissions, but also for improving and aligning instruction and as one of the "multiple measures" required by state standards. Unlike ACT and SAT, a Montana Writing Assessment could be given to all students at the junior and/or senior level.*
- *This assessment provides practice for students applying to colleges that require ACT or SAT scores and for schools designing curriculum for the transition to college.*

** Montana students scored significantly higher on 40 minute samples than in 30 minutes, and higher on word processed than handwritten.*



Writing Proficiency in the
Montana University System