

New Mexico

Teacher Assessments™

Study Guide

New Mexico Assessment of Teacher Basic Skills™

01 Basic Skills



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An Overview of the Testing Program, How to Prepare for the Assessments, and the Day of the Test: Helpful Hints

The first three sections of the study guide are available in a separate PDF file. Click the link below to view or print these sections.

[An Overview of the Testing Program, How to Prepare for the Assessments, and the Day of the Test:
Helpful Hints](#)



An Introduction to the New Mexico Assessment of Teacher Basic Skills

The New Mexico Assessment of Teacher Basic Skills is designed to measure fundamental communication and mathematical skills that New Mexico requires of classroom teachers and that are needed to effectively complete a New Mexico teacher preparation program. This test assesses the following three broad areas of knowledge and skills:

- Reading comprehension
- Written communication
- Mathematics

The New Mexico Assessment of Teacher Basic Skills consists of the following:

- A set of 100 selected-response questions, and
- 1 constructed-response assignment.

For the constructed-response assignment, a two-page (four sides) answer document will be provided. Your response to the constructed-response assignment may be up to four pages in length.



Test Framework

Reading Comprehension
Foundations of Written Communication
Mathematics
Written Communication—Composition

The New Mexico Assessment of Teacher Basic Skills comprises 17 competencies that are provided below.

SUBAREA I—READING COMPREHENSION

0001 Understand the main idea and supporting details in written material.

For example:

- identifying the explicit main idea of a paragraph or passage
- identifying the statement that best expresses the implied main idea of a paragraph or passage
- recognizing ideas that support, illustrate, or elaborate the main idea of a paragraph or passage

0002 Identify a writer's purpose, point of view, and intended meaning.

For example:

- recognizing a statement of a writer's expressed or implied purpose for writing (e.g., to persuade, to describe)
- evaluating the appropriateness of written material for a specific purpose or audience
- recognizing the likely effect on an audience of a writer's choice of a particular word or words (e.g., to provoke sympathy)
- using the content, word choice, and phrasing of a passage to determine a writer's opinions or point of view (e.g., belief, position on an issue)

0003 Analyze the relationships among ideas in written material.

For example:

- identifying explicit and implicit cause-effect relationships from information in a passage
- analyzing relationships between ideas in opposition (e.g., pro and con)
- identifying a solution to a problem presented in a passage
- drawing conclusions inductively and deductively from information stated or implied in a passage

0004 Use critical reasoning skills to evaluate written material.

For example:

- recognizing the stated or implied assumptions on which the validity of an argument depends
- judging the relevance or importance of particular facts, examples, or visual data to a writer's argument
- evaluating the logic of a writer's argument
- evaluating the validity of analogies used in written material
- distinguishing between fact and opinion in written material
- assessing the credibility or objectivity of the writer or source of written material

0005 Understand the meaning of words and phrases in context.

For example:

- using context clues to understand the meaning of a word with multiple meanings
- using the context of a paragraph or passage as a clue to the meaning of an unfamiliar or uncommon word or phrase
- understanding the meaning of a figurative expression from its context in a paragraph or passage

SUBAREA II—FOUNDATIONS OF WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

0006 Recognize writing for a given purpose and audience.

For example:

- recognizing writing that is appropriate for a given purpose
- recognizing writing that is appropriate for a given audience

0007 Recognize unity, focus, and development in writing.

For example:

- recognizing unnecessary shifts in point of view (e.g., shifts from first to third person) or distracting details that impair the development of the main idea in a piece of writing
- recognizing revisions that improve the unity and focus of a piece of writing
- recognizing examples of well-developed writing

0008 Recognize effective organization in writing.

For example:

- recognizing methods of paragraph organization
- reorganizing sentences to improve cohesion and sequence of ideas
- recognizing the appropriate use of transitional words or phrases to convey text structure (e.g., however, therefore)

0009 Recognize the standards of American English usage.

For example:

- recognizing the use of verb forms
- recognizing the use of pronouns and their referents
- recognizing the formation and use of adverbs, adjectives, comparatives and superlatives, plural and possessive forms of nouns, and proper and common nouns
- recognizing punctuation

0010 Recognize effective and ineffective sentences.

For example:

- recognizing ineffective repetition and inefficiency in sentence construction
- identifying sentence fragments and run-on sentences
- identifying subject-verb agreement
- identifying correct placement of modifiers, parallel structure, and use of negatives in sentence formation
- recognizing imprecise and inappropriate word choice

SUBAREA III—MATHEMATICS

0011 Solve word problems involving integers, fractions, decimals, and units of measurement.

For example:

- solving word problems involving integers, fractions, and decimals (including percentages)
- solving word problems involving ratio and proportions
- solving word problems involving units of measurement and conversions (including customary and metric units, scientific notation, and time)

0012 Solve problems involving data interpretation and analysis.

For example:

- interpreting information from line graphs, bar graphs, histograms, pictographs, and pie charts
- interpreting data from tables
- recognizing appropriate representations for various data

0013 Graph, express, and solve algebraic equations.

For example:

- representing relationships using graphs
- finding the value of the unknown in a given one-variable equation
- expressing one variable in terms of a second variable in two-variable equations

0014 Solve problems involving geometric figures.

For example:

- solving problems involving two-dimensional geometric figures (e.g., perimeter and area problems)
- solving problems involving three-dimensional geometric figures (e.g., volume and surface area problems)
- recognizing relationships between two- and three-dimensional geometric figures

0015 Apply mathematical reasoning skills to analyze patterns and solve problems.

For example:

- drawing conclusions using inductive reasoning
- drawing conclusions using deductive reasoning

0016 Solve applied problems using a combination of mathematical skills.

For example:

- applying combinations of algebraic skills to solve problems
- applying combinations of mathematical skills to solve a series of related problems
- identifying the algebraic equivalent of a stated relationship
- identifying equations or expressions to solve word problems involving one and two variables

SUBAREA IV—WRITTEN COMMUNICATION—COMPOSITION

0017 Prepare an organized, developed composition, applying the standards of American English usage in response to instructions regarding content, purpose, and audience.

For example:

- demonstrating the ability to prepare a unified and focused piece of writing on a given topic using language and style appropriate to a specified audience, purpose, and occasion
- demonstrating the ability to develop and support a topic in a well-organized piece of writing
- demonstrating the ability to use effective sentence structure and apply the standards of American English usage
- demonstrating the ability to spell, capitalize, and punctuate according to the standards of American English



Sample Test Directions

A sample of the general directions for the New Mexico Assessment of Teacher Basic Skills is shown in the box below.

You should have in front of you:

- (1) a test booklet for the assessment for which you registered (check the assessment name on the front cover);
- (2) an Answer Sheet A;
- (3) a Written Response Booklet B; and
- (4) a No. 2 lead pencil.

IF YOU ARE MISSING ANY OF THESE MATERIALS, NOTIFY YOUR TEST ADMINISTRATOR. REMOVE ALL OTHER MATERIALS FROM YOUR DESK.

TEST DIRECTIONS

This test consists of two sections: 1) a section with selected-response questions and 2) a constructed-response section.

Each question in the first section of this booklet is a selected-response question with four answer choices. Read each question carefully and choose the ONE best answer. Record your answer on Answer Sheet A in the space that corresponds to the question number. Completely fill in the circle having the same letter as the answer you have chosen. *Use only a No. 2 lead pencil.*

Sample Question:

1. What is the capital of New Mexico?
 - A. Albuquerque
 - B. Las Cruces
 - C. Santa Fe
 - D. Silver City

The correct answer to this question is C. You would indicate that on Answer Sheet A as follows:

1. A B C D

Try to answer all questions. Even if you are unsure of an answer, it is better to guess than not to answer a question at all. You will NOT be penalized for guessing.

The second section of this booklet consists of one constructed-response assignment. You will be asked to provide a written response to the assignment. Directions for completing your written response to the constructed-response assignment appear immediately before the assignment.

You may use the margins of the test booklet for scratch paper, but all of your answers, including your response to the constructed-response assignment, must be recorded in the appropriate sections of your answer documents. Answers that are in the test booklet will not be scored.

The words "End of Test" indicate that you have completed the test. You may go back and review your work, and be sure you have answered all questions before raising your hand for dismissal. Your test materials must be returned to a test administrator when you finish the test.

FOR TEST SECURITY REASONS, YOU MAY NOT TAKE NOTES OR REMOVE ANY OF THE TEST MATERIALS FROM THE ROOM.

This testing session will last four hours. You may work at your own pace. If you have any questions, please ask them now before beginning the test.



DO NOT GO ON UNTIL YOU ARE TOLD TO DO SO.



Sample Selected-Response Questions

This section presents sample selected-response questions for you to review as part of your preparation for the New Mexico Assessment of Teacher Basic Skills. To demonstrate how the test competencies may be assessed, each sample question is preceded by the competency that it measures. On an actual test, the competencies will not be given.

The sample selected-response questions are designed to illustrate the nature of the test questions. They should not be used as a diagnostic tool to determine your individual strengths and weaknesses. The selected-response questions require you to demonstrate more than the ability to recall factual information. They ask you to think critically about the information, to analyze it, to consider it carefully, or to apply it to a hypothetical situation.

Work through each question carefully before referring to the answer key, which is located at the end of the section.

Read the selection below, adapted from *Human Development* by Grace J. Craig; then answer the five questions that follow.

Why Do Children Talk to Themselves?

- 1 Josh is alone in his room playing a game in which he tries to fit pieces into a puzzleboard. If we look in on him, we might overhear Josh say to himself, "This piece doesn't fit. Where's a round one? No, it doesn't. It's too big. This one is small. . . ." Children between the ages of 4 and 8 have been observed directing their talk to themselves about 20% of the time in school environments that permit it (Berk, 1985). Why do they do so?
- 2 Psychologists call talking aloud to oneself *private speech*. All people, young and old, talk to themselves. But, unlike adults, young children engage in private speech in public situations, such as at school or on a playground. Young children often sing words to themselves about what they are doing—songs they have generated spontaneously rather than the words to group songs. They also talk to themselves far more often than adults do. Some early observations of private speech among preschool children were made by Jean Piaget. He suggested that the private speech of young children indicated their immaturity. Social speech was more difficult because it required consideration of the listener's perspective. He called this talking to oneself *egocentric speech* (Piaget, 1926).
- 3 Piaget's observation stimulated other researchers to record the way children use social language and private speech. Early findings tended to raise questions about Piaget's explanation. Observers found that the amount of private speech varied a great deal depending on the situation, but even the youngest children used far more social speech to communicate and exchange ideas with others than they used private speech. Perhaps, private speech served a distinct and separate purpose.
- 4 In contrast to Piaget, Vygotsky (1934/1987) observed that private speech often mirrored adult social speech and served to help in the development of inner thought and self-direction. When observing children engaged in private activity, researchers have found three stages in the development of the children's private speech. In its earliest stage, private speech occurs after an action—"I made a big picture." At the second stage, talking to oneself accompanies an action—"It's getting darker and darker with lots of paint." Later, in the third stage, it precedes an action—"I want to make a scary picture with dark paint." Private speech in each of these stages seems to serve the purpose of controlling or guiding a child's behavior in performing a task. The progression corresponds, researchers believe, to the developing thought process in a child's mind. At the final stage, when speech comes before behavior, the child is planning a course of action. The changes in private speech from stage 1 to stage 3 illustrate the development of thought processes in guiding behavior and its accompanying linguistic development (Berk, 1992). . . .
- 5 Learning to think and self-guidance are not the only functions of private speech. For example, children seem to talk to themselves as a way of playing and relaxing, expressing feelings, and absorbing emotions and ideas. Young children take great pleasure in word play, which is an important strategy of learning language. Children tell themselves fantasies or speak to an imaginary playmate or talk to inanimate objects (Berk, 1985). Private speech is thus a way of expressing one's feelings, gaining understanding of one's environment, and developing language, as well as being a tool for developing self-control and inner thought.

Competency 0001

Understand the main idea and supporting details in written material.

1. What is the main idea of this selection?
 - A. Piaget's interpretation of private speech in children stimulated other psychologists to explore this phenomenon.
 - B. Private speech is an important means of thought development, self-guidance, and expression for children.
 - C. The private speech of children is most strongly influenced by adult social speech.
 - D. The third and most important stage of children's private speech involves the creation of plans of action.

Competency 0002

Identify a writer's purpose, point of view, and intended meaning.

2. The author's main purpose in this selection is to:
 - A. compare children's private speech and adult social speech.
 - B. explain why social speech is often slow to develop in children.
 - C. examine the stages and functions of children's private speech.
 - D. analyze the child development theories of Jean Piaget.

Competency 0004

Use critical reasoning skills to evaluate written material.

3. Which of the following is an accurate comparison of Piaget's and Vygotsky's views of children's private speech?
 - A. Unlike Piaget, Vygotsky believed that private speech plays a major role in a child's intellectual growth.
 - B. Both Piaget and Vygotsky thought that private speech discourages social communication among children.
 - C. Unlike Vygotsky, Piaget felt that private speech contributes to the emotional development of children.
 - D. Both Piaget and Vygotsky considered private speech evidence of a selfish disposition in children.

Competency 0004

Use critical reasoning skills to evaluate written material.

4. Which of the following assumptions most influenced the author's argument in this selection?
- A. There is no basic difference between private speech and social speech.
 - B. Children are generally more talkative than adults.
 - C. Children's private speech should be seen as part of a broader developmental process.
 - D. Speaking is a more demanding skill than listening.

Competency 0005

Understand the meaning of words and phrases in context.

5. Which of the following best defines the word generated as it is used in the second paragraph of the selection?
- A. supported
 - B. renewed
 - C. caused
 - D. created

Read the selection below, adapted from *Marketing: Concepts and Strategies* by William M. Pride and O. C. Ferrell; then answer the three questions that follow.

¹In the fashion business, most better-quality clothing manufacturers market their products through department stores or specialty shops. ²Currently, _____, the system is being challenged by a number of apparel makers, including Esprit, L.A. Gear, Murjani International, Guess?, and Cherokee. ³Dissatisfied with the performance of big retailers, these firms are opening their own outlets to gain greater control over the display and merchandising of their product lines. ⁴_____ the producer-owned shops compete directly with department stores, the manufacturers insist that they are not out to undermine the big chains; they simply do not want their labels stuffed on racks with

competing lines. ⁵In the long run, they say, the distinctive image created by distribution diversity will boost sales through both marketing channels.

⁶It is a high-risk approach, but the distribution strategy of Esprit and other apparel firms demonstrates that when it comes to getting products into the hands of end users, all marketing channels are not created equal. ⁷The channel that works for product A may not work for product B, and a distribution system appropriate five years ago may be outmoded in today's marketplace. ⁸_____

_____.

Competency 0006

Recognize writing for a given purpose and audience.

6. The writers' main purpose in this passage is to:
- A. compare the performance of major companies in the apparel industry.
 - B. explain why department stores are finding it increasingly difficult to compete with specialty shops.
 - C. examine the changing distribution strategies of apparel firms.
 - D. evaluate the costs and benefits of selling goods through department stores.

Competency 0007

Recognize unity, focus, and development in writing.

7. Which sentence, if added as Sentence 8, would best fit the writers' pattern of development in the second paragraph?
- A. In some cases, clothing manufacturers continue to market their products exclusively through department stores.
 - B. In other words, effective marketing demands continuous reevaluation of existing distribution channels, with adjustments made when necessary.
 - C. Cost is another factor that has a major influence on product sales.
 - D. Telemarketers and mail-order houses have become increasingly popular marketing alternatives for manufacturers of many types of products.

Competency 0008

Recognize effective organization in writing.

8. Which words or phrases, if inserted in order into the blanks in the first paragraph, would help the reader understand the sequence of the writers' ideas?
- A. however; Although
 - B. for example; Likewise
 - C. therefore; Because
 - D. moreover; After

Read the selection below, written in the style of a student essay; then answer the three questions that follow.

¹The United States has become a nation of polls. ²Every election cycle, citizens are bombarded with polling results telling them what they think about issues ranging from the state of the economy to the character of various politicians. ³Scientific polling began shortly after World War I. ⁴As election day draws near, citizens are incessantly told what proportion of Americans intends to vote for this or that candidate. ⁵Whether any of this data will help them make informed decisions is never considered. ⁶Nor does anyone in the media ever pause to ask: What types of information do voters want and need?

⁷This is an important question in a democratic society. ⁸Indeed, it is one that people responsible for media coverage of political matters should be asking themselves every moment of their working lives. ⁹Should they ever begin doing so, they will quickly learn that most voters care deeply about the issues. ¹⁰That so few candidates ever feels compelled to say anything of substance doubtless explains why so few people bother to vote in most elections. ¹¹By forcing politicians to be more forthcoming, journalists might not make any friends in high places. ¹²They will, however, be performing a real service for the general electorate.

Competency 0007

Recognize unity, focus, and development in writing.

9. Which sentence is *least* relevant to the main idea of the first paragraph?
- A. Sentence 2
 - B. Sentence 3
 - C. Sentence 5
 - D. Sentence 6

Competency 0009

Recognize the standards of American English usage.

10. Which of the following changes is needed in the passage?
- A. Sentence 2: Change "Every" to "Each."
 - B. Sentence 4: Change "what" to "whatever."
 - C. Sentence 7: Change "This" to "That."
 - D. Sentence 8: Change "theirselves" to "themselves."

Competency 0010

Recognize effective and ineffective sentences.

11. Which sentence should be revised as indicated?
- A. Sentence 4: Change "draws" to "draw."
 - B. Sentence 9: Change "care" to "cares."
 - C. Sentence 10: Change "feels" to "feel."
 - D. Sentence 10: Change "bother" to "bothers."

Competency 0011

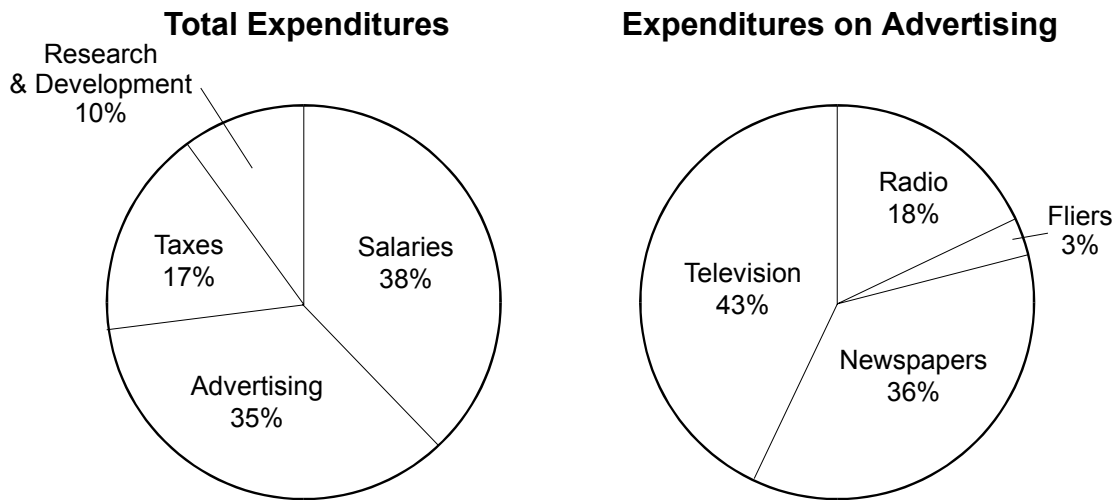
Solve word problems involving integers, fractions, decimals, and units of measurement.

12. Crystal estimates that she spends $\frac{1}{3}$ of each paycheck on rent and $\frac{1}{4}$ of each paycheck on food. If her paycheck is \$300.00, how much does she have left over after paying for rent and food?
- A. \$125.00
 - B. \$175.00
 - C. \$214.29
 - D. \$275.00

Competency 0012

Solve problems involving data interpretation and analysis.

13. Use the pie charts below to answer the question that follows.



The first pie chart represents a company's total expenditures, and the second pie chart shows a breakdown of the company's advertising expenditures. What percent of the company's total expenditures is spent on radio advertising?

- A. 6.3%
- B. 11.7%
- C. 18.0%
- D. 35.0%

Competency 0013

Graph, express, and solve algebraic equations.

14. If $6b + 20 = a$, and $4b + 30 = a$, then $b =$
- A. -5
 - B. -1
 - C. 1
 - D. 5

Competency 0014

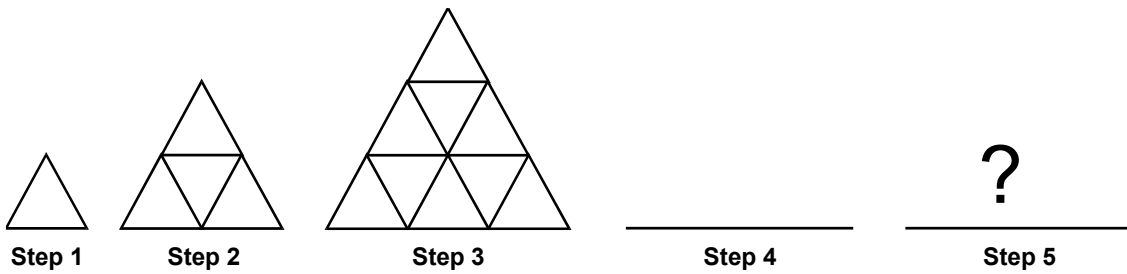
Solve problems involving geometric figures.

15. A circular area rug has a circumference of 26π inches. What is the radius of the rug?
- A. $\sqrt{26}$ inches
 - B. 13 inches
 - C. 26 inches
 - D. 39 inches

Competency 0015

Apply mathematical reasoning skills to analyze patterns and solve problems.

16. Use the diagrams below to answer the question that follows.



If the sequence above continues in the same pattern, how many small triangles would be needed to make the figure that would occur in **Step 5**?

- A. 16
- B. 25
- C. 36
- D. 49

Competency 0016

Solve applied problems using a combination of mathematical skills.

17. The perimeter of a rectangular garden is 1200 feet. The length of the garden is 300 feet more than twice the width. If l represents the length of the garden and w represents the width of the garden, which pair of equations should be used to determine the values of l and w ?
- A. $l + w = 1200$
 $l + 300 = 2w$
- B. $l + w = 1200$
 $l = 2w - 300$
- C. $2l + 2w = 1200$
 $l + 300 = 2w$
- D. $2l + 2w = 1200$
 $l = 2w + 300$



Answer Key for the Sample Selected-Response Questions

1. B
2. C
3. A
4. C
5. D
6. C
7. B
8. A
9. B
10. D
11. C
12. A
13. A
14. D
15. B
16. B
17. D



Information About the Constructed-Response Assignment

The constructed-response assignment for the Basic Skills test consists of one writing assignment. Each candidate's written response to the Basic Skills writing assignment will be scored using a method known as focused holistic scoring. In this method scorers judge the overall effectiveness of each response in meeting specified criteria. Each response is scored by at least two scorers and is assigned a score based on a holistic scale. The score points on the holistic scoring scale reflect the extent to which the candidate demonstrates the knowledge and skills included in the set of performance characteristics that have been defined as important for the assignment. Although this method *focuses* on the specific performance characteristics, it is *holistic* in that each assigned score describes the overall effectiveness of these characteristics working in concert in response to the assignment.

Writing Assignment Performance Characteristics

APPROPRIATENESS	the extent to which the writer addresses the topic and uses language and style appropriate to the given audience, purpose, and occasion
UNITY AND FOCUS	the clarity with which the writer states and maintains the main idea or point of view
SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT	the amount, depth, and specificity of the supporting details
REASON AND ORGANIZATION	the clarity of the writing and the logical sequence of the writer's ideas
SENTENCE STRUCTURE	the effectiveness of the writer's sentence structure and the extent to which the writing is free of errors in sentence structure
USAGE	the extent to which the writing is free of errors in usage and shows care and precision in word choice
MECHANICAL CONVENTIONS	the demonstrated ability to spell common words and to use the conventions of capitalization and punctuation

Writing Assignment Scoring Scale

The four points of the scoring scale correspond to varying degrees of performance. The following statements describe typical responses at each score point.

Score	Score Point Description
4	<p>The "4" response is a well-formed writing sample that effectively communicates a whole message to a specified audience.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The writer maintains unity of a developed topic throughout the writing sample and establishes a focus by clearly stating a purpose. • The writer exhibits control in the organization of ideas and clearly specifies supporting details. • Sentence structure is effective and free of errors. • Choice of words is precise, and usage is careful. • The writer shows mastery of mechanical conventions, such as spelling and punctuation.
3	<p>The "3" response is an adequately formed writing sample that attempts to communicate a message to a specified audience.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The focus and the purpose of the writing sample may be clear; however, the writer's attempts to develop supporting details may not be fully realized. • The writer's organization of ideas may be ambiguous, incomplete, or partially ineffective. • Sentence structure within paragraphs is adequate, but minor errors in sentence structure, usage, and word choice are evident. • There may also be errors in the use of mechanical conventions, such as spelling and punctuation.
2	<p>The "2" response is a partially developed writing sample in which the characteristics of effective written communication are only partially formed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The statement of purpose is not clear, and although a main idea or topic may be announced, focus on the main idea is not sustained. • Ideas may be developed by the use of specific supporting details, and the writer may make an effort to organize and sequence ideas, but development and organization are largely incomplete or unclear. • Paragraphs contain poorly structured sentences with noticeable and distracting errors. • The writer exhibits imprecision in usage and word choice and a lack of control of mechanical conventions, such as spelling and punctuation.
1	<p>The "1" response is an inadequately formed writing sample that fails to communicate a complete message.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The writer attempts to address the topic, but language and style may be inappropriate for the given audience, purpose, and/or occasion. • There is often no clear statement of a main idea, and the writer's efforts to present supporting details are confused. • Any organization that is present fails to provide an effective sequence of ideas. • Sentence structure is ineffective, and few sentences are free of errors. • Usage and word choice are imprecise. • The writer makes many errors in the use of mechanical conventions, such as spelling and punctuation.
U	<p>The "U" (Unscorable) will be assigned to responses that are off topic, illegible, primarily in a language other than English, or not of sufficient length to score.</p>
B	<p>The "B" (Blank) will be assigned to written response booklets that are completely blank.</p>

Sample Directions for the Constructed-Response Assignment

A sample of the directions for the constructed-response assignment for the New Mexico Assessment of Teacher Basic Skills is shown in the box below.

DIRECTIONS FOR THE CONSTRUCTED-RESPONSE ASSIGNMENT

This section of the test consists of one constructed-response assignment. You are to prepare a written response of 300–600 words on the assigned topic. **The assignment can be found on the following page.** You should use your time to plan, write, review, and edit your response to the assignment.

Read the assignment carefully before you begin to write. Think about how you will organize your response. You may use any blank space provided on the following pages to make notes, write an outline, or otherwise prepare your response. **However, your final response must be written in the appropriate areas of Written Response Booklet B.**

Your response to the assignment will be evaluated on the basis of the following criteria:

- **Appropriateness**—the extent to which you address the topic and use language and style appropriate to the given audience, purpose, and occasion
- **Unity and Focus**—the clarity with which you state and maintain your main idea or point of view
- **Support and Development**—the amount, depth, and specificity of your supporting details
- **Reason and Organization**—the clarity of your writing and the logical sequence of your ideas
- **Sentence Structure**—the effectiveness of your sentence structure and the extent to which your writing is free of errors in sentence structure
- **Usage**—the extent to which your writing is free of errors in usage and shows care and precision in word choice
- **Mechanical Conventions**—your ability to spell common words and to use the conventions of capitalization and punctuation

Be sure to write about the assigned topic and use multiple paragraphs. Please write legibly. You may not use any reference materials during the test. Your written response must be your original work, written in your own words, and not copied or paraphrased from some other work. Remember to review what you have written and make any changes you think will improve your written response. The final version of your response should conform to the conventions of edited American English.

Record your written response to the assignment in Written Response Booklet B. The length of your response is limited to the lined space available in Written Response Booklet B.

Sample Writing Assignment

Competency 0017

Prepare an organized, developed composition, applying the standards of American English usage in response to instructions regarding content, purpose, and audience.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT

At one time or another, most of us have had to make a difficult choice. Write an essay, to be read by an English teacher, in which you describe a choice you had to make, identify the choice you made, and explain why you made that choice.

A Very Good Response to the Sample Writing Assignment

I was a gymnast until I was sixteen. I was the girl to beat in practice and at competitions, the one who landed every vault, who nailed every combination. Until I was sixteen, I drew from this one source for my extracurricular activities, my friends, and (dangerously) for my identity. Then something very naturally happened, and I had to make a decision powerful enough to change my life.

It is true that I had been blessed with good genes for my sport: at fifty, my father is still very athletic, and my mother is a former ballet dancer who also excelled in gymnastics. It is also true that I cannot recall a time when I wasn't practicing my sport. When I was a pre-schooler, my mother spent time teaching me tumbling moves and ballet steps. I worked extremely hard to perfect every movement of my muscles; in fact, I was ahead of my classmates before I ever signed up for a class, a gymnast before I had ever been to a gym.

By the time I reached high school, the world of gymnastics was the only world I knew. My best friends were gymnasts or cheerleaders who took classes; however, I really did not have much time for cultivating friendships because my schedule was so hectic. My parents hustled me to the gym before school, after school, and on the weekends. We traveled out of state to competitions, spending much money and most of our conversation on my gymnastics "career." As hard as all the work was, though, I was happy with myself because I felt I was living an ambitious, coherent life, one full of meaning and promise. I had every intention of making a national reputation for myself and of becoming a coach of future stars.

Then a funny thing happened--I started to mature. I had been a lithe but muscular slip of a girl, and I was changing into a chunkier and more curvaceous version of myself. I had taken it for granted that I would grow up to have my mother's petite body, but somehow some brawnier woman's body from some unknown and uninvited ancestor started "morphing" me. Suddenly my balance was unsure and my weight difficult to control. I lacked the sort of energy I had had during previous years, and I lost my self-confidence on the floor. Instead of looking forward to competitions, I began dreading them. Worst of all, I began having panic attacks that made me think that I was dying.

(continued on next page)

A Very Good Response to the Sample Writing Assignment (*continued*)

In a way, I was dying. My old identity was having to face the end of itself. I was no longer the girl to beat. I was the girl who used to be good. I recall hating myself for months on end. Eventually I saw that I had to make a decision: was I going to continue feeling defeated and full of self-loathing, or was I going to decide to take my life in a new direction? Did I even have the will and imagination to develop another self?

I found, during this time, the power of decision-making. Very often, a person can decide to be one thing or another. I realized that I could decide that all my best days were behind me, and that I was only a has-been gymnast, or I could decide to be a person-in-progress, nimble and resilient, strong and hopeful. My life and sanity rested in the balance.

Today I am enrolled in college, hoping to become a teacher. I have enjoyed a number of excursions into academic disciplines that I never dreamed would interest me, and I have shared a number of adventures with a diverse and wonderful group of friends. I seldom go to a gym anymore except for aerobics. I decided to be a person-in-progress who knows that there are vast and strange worlds out there, and I plan to be many things as I tumble through them.



Acknowledgments

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