WORKKEYS BUSINESS WRITING

The WorkKeys Business Writing test measures the skill individuals use when they write an original response to a work-related situation. Components of the Business Writing skill include sentence structure, mechanics, grammar, word usage, tone and word choice, organization and focus, and development of ideas.

The main requirement of workplace writing is clarity. Employers want their employees' written communications to be direct, grammatically correct, and easy to read. Careless errors may lead the reader to believe there are also errors in the facts, and the writer loses credibility and trustworthiness. WorkKeys Business Writing requires standard business English, defined as writing that is direct, courteous, grammatically correct, and not overly casual.

There are five skill levels assigned to test responses. Level 1 is the least complex and Level 5 is the most complex. At each new level, individuals need to demonstrate more competency than they do at the previous levels. For example, Level 3 builds upon the skills used at Levels 1 and 2. With the increased skill required at each level, the writing that individuals produce communicates more clearly and smoothly as they move to Level 5. At the same time, errors become less frequent and less serious.

NOTE

*** Important Information on Using the Business Writing Versus Writing ACT Work Keys Assessments***

The ACT Work Keys Paraprofessional Certification for Teaching Assistance allow for either the audio-based Writing assessment using an audio tape and paper-pencil score sheet response, OR the computer-based Business Writing assessment. Either assessment test may be used. However, the major difference in choosing to use the assessments is that the required skill level on the Business Writing (computer-based) is a Level 3, and the required skill level for the Writing (audio) is Level 4.

The Business Writing score is based on development of original thought and grammar and other writing mechanics. The Writing score is based on grammar and other writing mechanics and no development of an original thought is required.

When testing in the ACT Centers, you will be tested on Business Writing in a computer-based assessment environment. When testing as a group outside the ACT Centers, the person setting up the testing with the ACT Centers will determine if the Business Writing or Writing assessment will be administered. Paras in a group testing session will not have the option of either assessment test, but rather the one selected by the person at your school or district who arranges for the assessments.

If you are taking the Business Writing assessment, please refer to the following sheets that discuss the Business Writing assessment and what skill sets are measured at each level. Regardless of which assessment you take, the Writing study guide will help you with the grammar and other writing mechanics measured in both assessments.

THE WORKKEYS PROFICIENCY CERTIFICATE FOR TEACHER ASSISTANTS
REQUIRES AT LEAST A SCORE OF LEVEL 3 IN BUSINESS WRITING

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FIVE SKILL LEVELS

There are five skill levels of difficulty. Level 1 is the least complex and Level 5 is the most complex. At each new level, individuals need to demonstrate more competency than they do at the previous levels. For example, Level 3 builds upon the skills used at Levels 1 and 2. With the increased skill required at each level, the writing that individuals produce communicates more clearly and smoothly as they move to level 5. At the same time errors become less frequent and less serious.

In all cases, examinees read a written prompt and then write their response. Examinees with extremely limited reading skills may be unable to produce a response that is sufficiently on topic to receive a valid Business Writing score.

Business Writing Level 0 - Off-topic, offensive or strongly inappropriate language (may include profanity and/or threats), or written in a language other than English. May be blank or too brief to evaluate.

LEVEL 1 BUSINESS WRITING

Business Writing Level 1 - Individuals with Level 1 skills can write responses in English. A paper at this level has little or no development or support. Any development is extremely simple and/or repetitive. No organization is evident. Sentences lack variety, and construction errors seriously impede understanding. Word choice is poor and interferes with communication. The style and tone are inconsistent with standard business English. Errors in grammar and mechanics are frequent, severe, and seriously interfere with communication.

Sample Item Prompt:

At your office, employees are allowed to skip their morning and/or afternoon breaks to take longer lunch breaks. However, the personnel manager says that employees have been taking too much time on their lunch breaks as a result of this policy. She wants to require all employees to take their morning and afternoon breaks and the standard lunch break. Write a letter to the personnel manager explaining whether or not you are in favor of this proposal and why.

Level 1 Sample Response

I dont think its right for you to take are choice to not use our morning and afternoon breaks to have a longer lunch break! If we have a choice. I think you should writ up people that come back late if ther 3 times or more that have to work late or come in earlie. I hope you take in to thouht! We want you to do whats best. You know whats best. Yes.

Why this is a Level 1 response:

- Sentence construction errors, such as fragments, can hinder understanding (I hope you take in to thouht! If we have a choice.).
- Errors in grammar and mechanics are frequent and interfere with communication. Errors include misspellings such as writ, earlie, and thouht; the incorrect use of there instead of they're and are instead of our, and missing apostrophes in dont, its, and whats.

- Tone, style, and/or language are inconsistent with standard business English (I dont think its right for you to take are choice to not use our morning and afternoon breaks to have a longer lunch break!).
- The writing lacks organization. The response has no transitions or paragraph breaks and seems to skip around.
- Although there is an attempt to communicate ideas, there is only simple development. The
 response presents basic thoughts against the new policy, with little development.

Characteristics of Responses 1

- The writing is in English, but is difficult to understand because of a large number of errors
- The majority of the sentence structures are incorrect
- A large number of major grammatical, mechanical, and word usage errors interfere with communication
- Rude or overly casual language, tone, and style may be inconsistent with standard business English
- No organization is evident
- An attempt is made to communicate ideas, but there is little or no development or support

LEVEL 2 BUSINESS WRITING

Business Writing Level 2 - Individuals with Level 2 skills can write responses that are generally understandable. A paper at this level has thinly developed ideas that are not expanded and may be presented as a list. Although some organization is evident, the focus is unclear and/or inconsistent. Few or no transitions are used. Sentences are often simple or repetitive, with some noticeable errors in construction. Word choice is limited, often repetitive, and sometimes incorrect. The style and tone may be inconsistent with standard business English. Significant errors in grammar and/or mechanics interfere with communication.

Sample Item Prompt:

At your office, employees are allowed to skip their morning and/or afternoon breaks to take longer lunch breaks. However, the personnel manager says that employees have been taking too much time on their lunch breaks as a result of this policy. She wants to require all employees to take their morning and afternoon breaks and the standard lunch break. Write a letter to the personnel manager explaining whether or not you are in favor of this proposal and why.

Level 2 Sample Response:

I agree with your thoughts on having all the employees take **theur** morning and afternoon breaks, and having the standard lunch break. **If this idea happens**. I'd think that there will be more work done and more people at the office to answer phones during the time that would have normally been spent out at a long lunch.

Althouh I'd understand. If a person need to work through **theur** break, but I'd think that they **dont** need an extra 15 minuets to lunch. When there isn't much to do then they can take a break and make up for the one they lost.

I'd think the idea of having all employees take there morning and afternoon break would be a good change. Pleas go ahead with your plan. Thanks for your time.

Why this is a Level 2 response:

- The sentences are somewhat repetitive, and there are some construction errors, including sentence fragments (If this idea happens. and **Althouh** I'd understand.).
- Errors in grammar and mechanics interfere somewhat with communication. Errors include misspellings such as *theur*, *althouh*, *minuets*, *and Pleas*; the subject-verb disagreement *If a person need to work*; the incorrect use of *there* instead of *their* in the last paragraph; and a missing apostrophe in *dont*.
- The style, tone, and language are inconsistent with standard business English. The use of the phrase *I'd think* several times makes the tone overly casual.
- The writing has some organization, but the focus is unclear. Few transitions are used. Transitions used are limited to *If*, *but*, and *although*.
- The ideas are general and are not expanded. There is some development of the writer's thoughts in favor of the proposal, but it is limited in nature.

Characteristics of Responses 2

- The writing is generally understandable
- Some correct sentence structures are used, although sentences may be simple or repetitive
- Enough correct mechanics, word usage, and grammar are used to convey an idea, although many errors may somewhat interfere with comprehension
- Rude or overly casual language, tone, and style may be inconsistent with standard business English
- Some organization is evident but with an unclear focus and few or no transitions
- The ideas presented are generally understandable but are not expanded

LEVEL 3 BUSINESS WRITING

Business Writing Level 3 - Individuals with Level 3 skills can write clear responses. A paper at this level has adequate development of ideas but is limited in depth and thoroughness. Supporting examples tend to be general and details are relevant, but they may be repetitive. The writing is generally organized but may have minor lapses in focus. Transitions are simple. Sentences are usually correct, with some variety and complexity attempted. Word choice is generally clear and correct but may be repetitive and/or informal. The style and tone are consistent with standard business English but may be overly casual. Some errors in grammar and mechanics are apparent but do not interfere with communication. Basic spelling is correct.

Sample Item Prompt:

At your office, employees are allowed to skip their morning and/or afternoon breaks to take longer lunch breaks. However, the personnel manager says that employees have been taking too much time on their lunch breaks as a result of this policy. She wants to require all employees to take their morning and afternoon breaks and the standard lunch break. Write a letter to the personnel manager explaining whether or not you are in favor of this proposal and why.

Level 3 Sample Response

I would have to agree with you on the break. The employees should take breaks and 1 lunch break at the normal time. They shouldn't be allowed to combine their breaks. They need to go by the rules like

almost every other office buildings. There should be a law about this situation. It shouldn't be allowed. The employees need to learn how to flex their time during their lunch hour and breaks.

The management should start a good law about it. It shouldn't be allowed. The employees will just try to confuse the **managers** mind to let them have a longer lunch. They need to have 2 small breaks and 1 lunch hour. I think it is really, totally fair. They just need to learn how to manage their time so they can do all they need to.

Your proposal as the manager is what the building needs to make all office buildings fair and equal. All breaks should be taken and only a ½ hour lunch should be taken per work day. The manager is only trying to be fair to the workers. It is totally fair in my opinion. The workers need to follow the guidelines of **experenced** managers. Managers have more knowledge than employees. Managers are higher up and should have more say so than the employees. But if the employees disobey more than a couple times they should be taken off the job and fired. Not trying to be **hersh** but that is just my opinion in this situation. Give them a warning or two and maybe they will learn.

Please follow the new proposal its fair to the company. Its a good thing to do, because if they have longer lunches they may be doing something illegal or is just bad for other people. This is an excellent proposal from the manager to have more opinions. I say go with what the manager says.

Why this is a Level 3 response:

- Sentence structures are usually correct (despite a run-on sentence), and some variety and complexity are attempted, but many of the sentences are overly simple and vague. (Please follow the new proposal its fair to the company... It shouldn't be allowed... It is totally fair in my opinion.)
- There are some errors in grammar and mechanics, but they do not interfere with communication. Spelling is generally correct. Errors include misspellings of experenced and hersh, a missing word in or is just bad, and missing apostrophes in managers mind and its a good thing.
- Word choice is generally clear and correct but is repetitive: *There should be a law about this* (1st paragraph). *The management should start a good law about it* (2nd paragraph).
- The tone and style are casual but acceptable for standard business English (I think it is really, totally fair.)
- The writing is generally organized, and simple transitions are used (but and not).
- Ideas are adequately developed but are limited in depth and thoroughness. The idea that the policy is fair and that the manager's decision should be upheld is developed adequately, but there is little depth to the development. Supporting examples and details are relevant, but they are general and repetitive. The fairness issue is mentioned several times.

Characteristics of Responses 3

- The writing is clear with some errors
- Most of the sentences are complete, and some variety and complexity are attempted
- Few mechanical, grammatical, and word usage errors occur so that the response is adequately conveyed but may be repetitive; the spelling is generally correct
- Style and tone are generally consistent with standard business English; the writing may have somewhat casual language but does not contain slang or rude language
- Some organization is evident, but the writing may lose focus at some points; transitions are simple
- Ideas are adequately developed, but they may be limited in depth and thoroughness; supporting examples tend to be general and details are relevant, but they may be repetitive

LEVEL 4 BUSINESS WRITING

Business Writing Level 4 - A paper at this level has most of the ideas well developed with relevant supporting examples and details. The writing is organized and maintains consistent focus. Transitions are effective, if not especially varied. Sentences are generally varied in length and complexity. Word

choice shows some precision and variety. The style and tone are consistent with standard business English. Relatively minor and/or infrequent errors in grammar and/or mechanics do not interfere with communication.

Sample Item Prompt:

At your office, employees are allowed to skip their morning and/or afternoon breaks to take longer lunch breaks. However, the personnel manager says that employees have been taking too much time on their lunch breaks as a result of this policy. She wants to require all employees to take their morning and afternoon breaks and the standard lunch break. Write a letter to the personnel manager explaining whether or not you are in favor of this proposal and why.

Level 4 Sample Response

The employees in the office greatly appreciate the efforts you've made to keep everyone on task. However, I know I represent a group of employees who disagree with your suggestion to change the lunch and break system. Although we agree that employees shouldn't abuse their lunch **privillages**, we feel that micromanagement of our time will hurt the work we accomplish every day.

When an employee is given the choice of having two short breaks or a longer lunch hour it allows individuals to complete their work during a time of day when they are most efficient. Some people benefit from having a short break in the morning or afternoon and don't feel they would enjoy a longer lunch. Personally, I have a very heavy workload on a daily basis. Some of the tasks I do for **clientel** are not easy to stop in the middle. Due to this situation, I prefer to skip the interruption of a short break to have a longer lunch hour.

Another situation employees are frequently faced with is unexpected short-term projects. Some employees receive notice in the morning they have to see a client that day. Often employees have had to **forefit** their morning break.

The employees I represent would like you to reconsider your proposal. Hopefully our reasoning will shed new light on the situation. We are willing to watch time on breaks and lunch hours more carefully. The loss of flexibility would be a detriment to our company. Thank you for your time.

Why this is a Level 4 response:

- Sentences are generally varied in length and complexity (Although we agree that employees shouldn't abuse their lunch **privillages**, we feel that micromanagement of our time will hurt the work we accomplish every day.)
- Infrequent errors in grammar and/or mechanics do not interfere with communication. Spelling is generally correct. Errors include misspellings of *privillages*, *clientel*, and *forefit* and a missing comma in the first sentence of the 2nd paragraph.
- Word choice shows some precision and variety. Words such as micromanagement, individuals, interruption, forefit, flexibility, and detriment show precise and varied language, despite spelling errors.
- The tone is consistent with standard business English (The employees in the office greatly appreciate the efforts you've made to keep everyone on task.)
- The writing is organized and maintains consistent focus. Transitions are effective but not strongly varied (*however* and *although*).
- The ideas are mostly well developed, with relevant supporting examples and details. There are two well-developed ideas, but the second idea, short-term projects, is limited.

Characteristics of Responses 4

- The writing is clear with almost no errors
- All sentences are complete and they are generally varied in length and complexity The few mechanical, grammatical, and/or word usage errors that occur do not interfere with communication; word usage is precise and varied
- Style, tone, and language are consistent with standard business English; the writing contains no rude or overly casual language
- The writing is organized and maintains consistent focus, but may lack clarity; transitions are effective, if not especially varied
- Most of the ideas are well developed with relevant supporting examples and details

LEVEL 5 BUSINESS WRITING

Business Writing Level 5 - A paper at this highest level has well-developed ideas elaborated with relevant supporting examples and specific details. The writing shows insight. The organization is smooth and maintains clear and consistent focus from beginning to end. Transitions are varied and effective, creating a seamless flow of ideas. Sentences are varied in length and complexity. Word choice is precise and varied. The style and tone are appropriate for a business setting. Minor and/or infrequent errors in grammar and/or mechanics, if present, do not interfere with communication.

Sample Item Prompt:

At your office, employees are allowed to skip their morning and/or afternoon breaks to take longer lunch breaks. However, the personnel manager says that employees have been taking too much time on their lunch breaks as a result of this policy. She wants to require all employees to take their morning and afternoon breaks and the standard lunch break. Write a letter to the personnel manager explaining whether or not you are in favor of this proposal and why.

Level 5 Sample Response

Recently, I received the memo explaining your intent to eliminate policy that allows employees to omit morning or afternoon breaks so they can take longer lunch. In this fast-paced world of international business, I feel that a company must have every advantage in order to succeed. Because the benefits of the current policy allow our company to prosper, I must respectfully disagree with your intentions. First, the current policy fosters good employee morale; secondly, the same amount of work is completed either way; and finally, eliminating the policy would be severely detrimentel to employees' relationships with management.

First, one of the most important aspects of any successful business venture is high employee morale, something that the current policy fosters. The fact that an employee has the option of taking a long lunch with friends or a shorter lunch with time to mingle with coworkers in the morning promotes employee satisfaction. Employees can select whichever option is most suitable to their daily schedules. When a company has satisfied employees who look forward to going to work, the productivity of that company increases.

Second, whether employees take two fifteen-minute breaks or extend their lunch, the amount of work the employees are doing remains constant. Revoking the current policy will not increase productivity. True, some employees may try to abuse the system and stay out for lunch longer, but this would occur even if the scheduled break times were compulsory.

In addition, because our industry is so competitive, each company, in order to grow and progress. must maintain a good relationship between it's employees and management. Implementing this new

policy actually challenges this valuable bond by undermining the employees' trust in management. This is because in revoking the policy, it appears the management is attempting to limit workers' privileges and personal choices. The employees will feel as though they are not trusted. At this point, a good relationship between workers and managers will cease to exist.

Implementing the new policy would harm employee morale, would be ineffective in increasing productivity, and would undermine the workers' relationship with management. I respectfully ask you to retain the current policy. By allowing employees the freedom to decide when they take their breaks, you help to foster the continued success of this company.

Why this is a Level 5 response:

- Sentences are varied in length and complexity (By allowing employees the freedom to decide when they take their breaks, you help to foster the continued success of this company.)
- Infrequent, minor errors in grammar and/or mechanics do not interfere with communication. Errors include a missing article in *take longer lunch*, misspelling of *detrimentel*, and a misplaced apostrophe in *it's*.
- Word usage shows considerable precision and variety (omit, fast-paced world of international business, respectfully disagree with your intentions, satisfied, challenges this valuable bond, and help to foster the success).
- The style and tone are consistent with standard business English (Because the benefits of the current policy allow our company to prosper, I must respectfully disagree with your intentions.)
- The writing is well organized and maintains clear and consistent focus from beginning to end.
 Transitions such as *First*, *Second*, *True*, *In addition*, and *At this point* create a seamless flow of ideas.
- The ideas are well developed with relevant supporting examples and specific details. The writing shows insight, explaining that changing the policy would hurt employee morale, would be ineffective in increasing productivity, and would undermine the workers' relationship with management.

Characteristics of Responses 5

- The writing is clear, precise, and generally free of errors
- The writing communicates in a professional, courteous manner
- Correct, complete sentences are used and are varied in length and complexity
- Few or no errors in grammar and/or mechanics occur, and any present do not interfere with communication; word usage shows considerable precision and variety
- Style, tone, and language are consistent with standard business English; the writing contains no rude or overly casual language
- The organization is smooth and maintains clear and consistent focus from beginning to end; transitions are varied and effective, creating a seamless flow of ideas
- The ideas are well developed and elaborated on with relevant supporting examples and specific details; the writing shows insight, perception, and depth

EXAMPLES OF COMMON BUSINESS WRITING ERRORS

Sentence Structure	Sentence fragments	Because she works Wednesday night. Client waiting reception area.
	Run-on sentences	Go to the cafeteria we need some cream we need some coffee. He came to the meeting he brought the report.
	Comma splices	Gerhart prepared a summary for the clients, Sophie presented it.
Mechanical	Misspelled words	mite instead of might
	Incorrect or missing punctuation	dont What are you going to do.
Grammatical	Extra capitalization (or none)	she stopped for printer paper at the Office- supply store.
	Incorrect verb tenses	He starts a new project yesterday.
	Shifts in tense	He gets a signature and delivered the package. She talked to Jamie and chats with Miguel.
	Incorrect subject-verb agreement	Roger and his co-worker is going to lunch.
	Unclear pronoun references	I listened to Betty's and Martha's opinions and I agreed more with hers.
	Missing words	Luke the tractor.
Word Usage	Improper or poor word or symbol choices that interfere with communication	there instead of their; to instead of too; & instead of and
Style/Tone/Language	Rude or casual language not consistent with standard business English used in written correspondence	messing up the manager's mind
Organization	Little or no organization; unclear focus or logic	The main points of the writing may be random or grouped in a disorganized fashion; the details of the writing may be disjointed or not grouped together logically.
	Incorrect or simple transitions	Incorrect transition: She said she left early to get to the meeting on time so she arrived late instead ofbut she arrived late. Simple transitions: words such as then and also
Development	Simple, repetitive, and/or general development	The development or depth of ideas is limited to simple, repetitive, and/or general statements.

BUSINESS WRITING SCORE GUIDE

Score 5

A paper at this highest level has well-developed ideas elaborated with relevant supporting examples and specific details. The writing shows insight. The organization is smooth and maintains clear and consistent focus from beginning to end. Transitions are varied and effective, creating a seamless flow of ideas. Sentences are varied in length and complexity. Word choice is precise and varied. The style and tone are appropriate for a business setting. Minor and/or infrequent errors in grammar and/or mechanics, if present, do not interfere with communication.

Score 4

A paper at this level has most of the ideas well developed with relevant supporting examples and details. The writing is organized and maintains consistent focus. Transitions are effective, if not especially varied. Sentences are generally varied in length and complexity. Word choice shows some precision and variety. The style and tone are consistent with standard business English. Relatively minor and/or infrequent errors in grammar and/or mechanics do not interfere with communication.

Score 3

A paper at this level has adequate development of ideas but is limited in depth and thoroughness. Supporting examples tend to be general and details are relevant, but they may be repetitive. The writing is generally organized but may have minor lapses in focus. Transitions are simple. Sentences are usually correct, with some variety and complexity attempted. Word choice is generally clear and correct but may be repetitive and/or informal. The style and tone are consistent with standard business English but may be overly casual. Some errors in grammar and mechanics are apparent but do not interfere with communication. Basic spelling is correct.

Score 2

A paper at this level has thinly developed ideas that are not expanded and may be presented as a list. Although some organization is evident, the focus is unclear and/or inconsistent. Few or no transitions are used. Sentences are often simple or repetitive, with some noticeable errors in construction. Word choice is limited, often repetitive, and sometimes incorrect. The style and tone may be inconsistent with standard business English. Significant errors in grammar and/or mechanics interfere with communication.

Score 1

A paper at this level has little or no development or support. Any development is extremely simple and/or repetitive. No organization is evident. Sentences lack variety, and construction errors seriously impede understanding. Word choice is poor and interferes with communication. The style and tone are inconsistent with standard business English. Errors in grammar and mechanics are frequent, severe, and seriously interfere with communication.

Score 0

Off-topic, offensive or strongly inappropriate language (may include profanity and/or threats), or written in a language other than English. Response may be blank or too brief to evaluate.