

Writing Samples

Is writing a critical aspect of the position you are hiring for? You may want to consider having applicants complete a writing sample. Writing evaluations belong to a class of assessments referred to as "work sample tests," which require applicants to perform the types of tasks performed on the job. They can be very useful when writing ability is identified as one of the most critical competencies for the position. As with any other procedure used to make an employment decision, a **writing assessment should be:**

- ☑ Supported by a job analysis,
- ☑ Linked to one or more critical job competencies,
- ☑ Clearly indicated in the Job Opportunity Announcement so that job candidates are aware they may be required to participate in a writing exercise and at what point this will occur, and
- ☑ Based on standardized reviewing procedures (e.g., all candidates receive the same question(s) or prompts, same testing conditions, same amount of time, etc.).

CONSIDERATIONS

You will also need to consider:

- ☑ Will there be a minimum or maximum length?
 - For example, will their writing sample need to stay within a certain limit (e.g., no more than a page) or longer (e.g., over one page)?
- ☑ Type of sample provided – will applicants provide a written response to an essay prompt, perform a written task typical of the job, or simply provide a writing sample from a previous job or school?

Assessment Method	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages
<i>Portfolio Assessment</i>	Applicants provide writing samples from school or work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High face validity (applicants perceive test as valid) • Can easily be administered remotely 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty verifying authorship • Lack of opportunity (if applicant does not have a writing sample) • Positive Bias (only the best writing samples chosen)
<i>Written Task</i>	Applicants complete a task typical of the job that involves writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High face validity • Task is very representative of work performed in the job • All applicants assessed under standardized conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be expensive (in terms of both time and money) to develop and administer • Writing skill assessed based on a single work sample (potentially lower reliability and validity)
<i>Prompted Essay</i>	Applicants receive an essay prompt and have a set amount of time to write an essay about the topic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High face validity • All applicants assessed under standardized conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing skill assessed based on a single work sample

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FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

For written tasks and prompted essays, it is also important to consider:

- 📌 Testing environment
 - Type of room – Do you have a room available for the applicant to complete the assessment?
 - Use of computers – Will a laptop be needed? Will you want the candidates to be able to access the Internet? Can they use spell-check?
 - Geographically-remote applicants – How will any non-local candidates be assessed? Will you be able to verify authorship for remotely-assessed applicants?
- 📌 Will there be a time limit?
 - How long will the candidate have to complete their writing sample?

When asking for a writing sample (as with all testing practices) it is paramount to standardize the process, meaning that all candidates for a particular position are treated the same, given the same questions, and experience the same testing conditions.

Let's suppose you want to make sure that applicants being interviewed for a position can complete the written portion of their work, and you've asked them to complete a writing assessment. Writing prompts are typically either general or technical. Technical prompts require applicants to have technical knowledge and adjust their level of writing to the audience, while general prompts do not require technical knowledge. Below are some examples of written task and essay prompts you could administer:

Written Task Example

Question type: General

Example: Previously, employees were able to telework on Mondays and Fridays, but not on Tuesdays, Wednesdays or Thursdays. Employees will now be allowed to telework any day except for Wednesdays. Compose an internal memo informing coworkers of this change in the office's telework policy.

Question type: Technical

Example: Assume the hiring manager you are working with has no experience with conducting job analysis and does not know why you might need to conduct one. Write an email to the hiring manager explaining what a job analysis is, how to conduct a job analysis, and why conducting a job analysis is important.

Prompted Essay Example:

Question type: General

Example: Do you think telework has made it easier or harder to do your job and why?

Question type: Technical

Example: If somebody didn't know anything about job analysis, how would you explain it to them?

For additional guidance on writing assessments and other types of work sample tests, please reference the [Assessment Decision Guide](#).