

Dissecting the WASL

The Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) combines multiple-choice questions with those that require short and extended answers. The test is untimed, and students may take up as much space as they like for their responses. The reading and writing section of the test will be given this week; the math and science segments will be administered in April. For a sample test and other information about the WASL, go to the state Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction's new test-related Web site, www.wasl2006.org.

Reading

GENERAL GOAL The goal of the 10th-grade reading test is to determine if students can read, comprehend, interpret and think critically about fiction and nonfiction text.

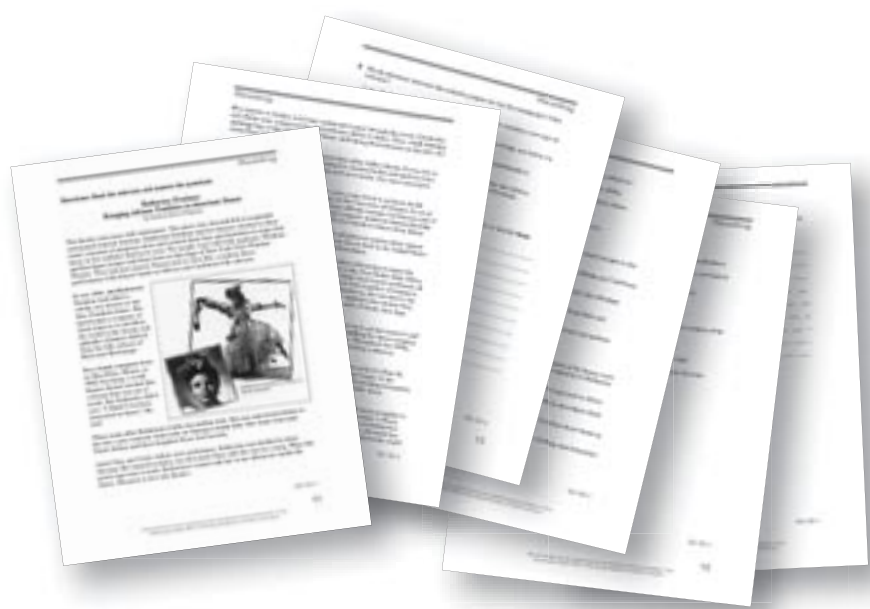
To demonstrate their competency on extended- and short-answer responses, students must be able to:

- Write a brief summary of a text.
- Take a position regarding a text; support it with evidence from the text, and explain how the evidence supports their position.
- Compare and contrast information across two texts.
- See how information connects within or between texts.
- Recognize and interpret literary devices, such as metaphors.

SCORING Reading passages are taken from actual published works, including magazine articles, poems and books. Students are not marked down for spelling errors or grammar usage in their answers; those are scored in writing, but not reading.

Reading questions are scored as 1 point for multiple-choice; 2 points for short-answer; 4 points for extended response.

The following example is for a short-answer question.



SAMPLE QUESTION >

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

“Katherine Dunham’s accomplishments were due as much to her hard work as to her creativity.”

Use two details from the selection to support your response.

The goal of this reading question is to see if the student knows how to take a position with regard to the text, and support it with at least two details, worth 1 point each, from the selection about an African-American female sociologist who brings Caribbean and African dance to the stage.

ANSWERS AND SCORES >

I agree that Katherine Dunham deserved everything she has accomplished because she worked hard for it. She didn't let people sit her down. She went after every opportunity that was available. If you work hard to get to a place where you wanna be you're going to get there by faith.

Score

0 out of 2

This response, though lengthy, is full of generalizations without text-based details.

0 – No details to support agreement.

I agree that Katherine Dunham's accomplishments are due as much to her hard work as to her creativity. She often did two things at once to make her dreams come true, studying anthropology & dance. Also going to Africa for years to study the ways they danced to bring it to America.

Score

2 out of 2

This is a good response that is complete and includes solid text-based support for the claim.

- 1 – “Studying anthropology” and
- 2 – “Going to Africa for years to study the ways they danced to bring it to America.”

I agree, Katherine Dunham work hard to reopen her school when it close. She went to colleges.

Score

2 out of 2

This response also receives the 2 possible points because, despite the lack of focus on spelling, grammar and writing, the student includes the two text-based details.

- 1 – “Work hard to reopen her school when it close.”
- 2 – “She went to college.”

Writing

GENERAL GOAL The goal of the 10th-grade writing test is to demonstrate careful and analytical thinking as well as correct spelling, punctuation, capitalization and sentence structure. Students must also be able to write to persuade and to inform. Students may use a dictionary and thesaurus.

SCORING Students receive one score for their content and style and another for spelling, grammar and punctuation.

Content and style scoring

4 points - Maintains focus on topic and includes relevant details; has logical organization and feels complete; transitions clearly connect ideas; uses engaging and appropriate words; sentences and phrases vary in length and structure; reader gets a sense of the person behind the writing.

3 - Focuses on topic with adequate supporting details; logically organized and is mostly complete; adequate transitions; adequate use of language; sentences and phrases somewhat varied; reader gets some sense of the writer.

2 - Inconsistent focus with some details, but may include loosely related material; attempt at organization, without sense of completeness; weak or inconsistent transitions; limited variety of sentences; attempts to give a sense of the writer.

1 - Little to no focus with few details that may confuse the meaning of the text; little evidence of organization or completeness; poor transitions; little to no sentence variety; little sense of the writer.

0 - Response of “I don't know,” “?” or a one-word answer.

Conventions scoring

2 points - Consistently follows the rules of standard English for usage, spelling of common words, capitalization, punctuation; uses complete sentences except where purposeful phrases are used for effect; paragraphs indicated consistently.

1 - Generally follows the above.

0 - Mostly does not follow conventions.

SAMPLE WRITING TASK >

If you could be any age, what age would you be?

“Write a multiple-paragraph essay for your teacher identifying the age you would be and explaining why you would choose this age.”

Students must focus on a main idea; have well-chosen supporting details; a logical structure; use transitions; a discernible voice; and an introduction and a conclusion.

Students may receive up to 4 points for content, organization and style and 2 points for spelling, grammar, capitalization and use of paragraphs.

RESPONSES AND SCORES >

If I was able to choose any age to be I would pick twenty-four. There are many reasons I choose twenty-four. First, no more school. Second, having your own home. And third, being close to starting your own family. But all together to me is that being able to be you own individual. Not worrying what people think. And trying to be adult and making a difference in your community and just your life.

Score

1 out of 4

This response demonstrates an insufficient ability to explain effectively. It offers three somewhat specific reasons (no more school, having your own home, being close to starting your own family) without additional elaboration. While some basic transitions are used, they are poorly utilized, and there is little sense of the response being complete.

Adults are always wishing to be a young kid again. At the same time, children can never wait to become adults. So what is so great about being a kid if all they want is to be older? This raises the question: what is the perfect age? My answer is 17. If I could be any age I would be 17, because 17 year-olds have responsibility and enjoy being a kid simultaneously.

17 is not quite adult but not naive child. Most 17 year-olds are in their third or fourth year of high school so they've completed most of their schooling. This means they have a pretty good knowledge of the world and what's going on around them. They also have an ability to make a difference. Most 17 year-olds also have a fair amount of independence and responsibility. This shows that others trust them. They are old enough to work and they can get their driver's license. They are relying less and less on their parents for help.

Keeping all that in mind, 17 is an age when being a kid is still possible. Parents are still there in a rough situation and the responsibility isn't so much that their lives depend on it. 17 can be what they choose to make it. A person at 17 is aware of the outside world but doesn't have to let it impact their life. They can just spend their time hanging out with friends and having fun.

Of course, everyone's situation is different and not everyone will an experience like I have just described. I believe that for most Americans, 17 is a mix between the world of adults and the world of children. Unless a 17 year-old messes up pretty badly, losing the trust of family and friends, everything is basically in balance. The direction their life will take has not been set in stone and is subject to change if they so choose. It's a great time to figure out what you want out of life.

Score

3 out of 4

This response demonstrates a sufficient ability to explain effectively. The writer chooses the age of 17, because 17-year-olds have responsibility and enjoy being a kid simultaneously.

Supporting details elaborate upon and explain how a 17-year-old has responsibility (... ability to make a difference ... work ... get their driver's license, relying less and less on their parents)

but also is still able to be a kid (... parents are still there in a rough situation ... aware of the outside world but doesn't have to let it impact their life ... just spend time hanging out with friends and having fun).

Word choice is adequate for the purpose and intended audience of the writer, and there is some variety of sentence structure and length. An engaging introduction and satisfying conclusion give this organized response a sense of wholeness while providing some sense of the person behind the words.