

Praxis I - Writing

Before reading this section, make sure you have read the appropriate description of the writing section test (computerized or paper) to understand what is expected of you in the writing section of the Praxis I.

The most important resource you have available to you as a KSU student is the KSU Writing Center - <http://dept.kent.edu/english/WritingCent/main.htm>
318 Satterfield
(330) 672-1787
writing@kent.edu

Any registered student can visit once a day. Sessions are 45 minutes. See website for scheduling and other important details.

Hours:

Monday: 9-8:30

Tuesday: 9-8:30

Wednesday: 9-8:30

Thursday: 9-6:30

Friday: 9-3:15

The idea of grammar and writing often brings up many strong reactions in people (fear, mainly). You may be one of those people. You don't have to love writing and grammar in order to do well on this test BUT you must be willing to put some time and effort into what and how much you study. And (you can start a sentence with and- writers do it all the time) you will have to do some actual writing before the test. You would not run a marathon without doing some training before the race. You don't want to write an answer to a timed prompt without some warm up practice either. Plus, what you learn preparing for this test will help you throughout the rest of your college and teaching career.

Here are a few smart things to do. How smart you become will depend on how much energy you put into your studying.

Grammar Help

What you need to know:

For the computer test, you will have 38 minutes for 44 multiple-choice questions on the use of standard English. For the paper test, you will have 30 minutes for 38 multiple-choice questions on the use of standard English. In most cases, you are to find the error in the sentence provided. Sometimes, though, there is no error and you must mark that accordingly.

The kinds of topics you will need to be familiar with are the following:
Grammatical Relationships

- adjectives, adverbs, nouns, pronouns, verbs

Structural Relationships

- comparison, coordination, correlation, negation, parallelism, subordination

Idiom/Word Choice, Mechanics and No Error

- idiomatic expressions, word choice, capitalization, punctuation, identify sentences free from error.

As you read this list, if you could not identify or define a term or two, write those down. Then make sure to read about these topics before your test.

Test Prep:

Complete the practice items in booklets and tests. That is the only way to help you get into the test taking mindset and see the kinds of questions that you will encounter. This experience will help sharpen your focus of what to look for during the usage (how we use the English language) and sentence correction (how to most clearly and correctly say something) sections. Make a schedule for taking the practice tests and stick to it. Consider taking a practice session each day. Make sure to read the explanation for the answers, not just check to see if you got the answer right. Learn from the explanations.

Suggestion: Take any questions that you got wrong and did not understand the explanation with you to your writing center appointment and ask for help.

Look at grammar books (not the most exciting thing, I know) but they can become your friend. Check them out from the local library or spend an afternoon in the local bookstore. You don't have to read adult ones. You can read ones written for middle and high school students. Sometimes those explanations and examples are simple, but clear.

Visit our KSU Writing Center website. See their writing links and make sure to check out the Hypertext Workshops link (from Purdue Owl). Then click on Handouts. There are excellent handouts for Grammar, Punctuation, and Spelling.

Work with your study group to discuss grammar issues and the specific items that give you difficulty in your practice test.

Real life action:

Since you are already reading regularly now (if not, start immediately), take a moment to notice the writing and punctuation in your book.

1. Notice where and how the author uses commas.
2. Look for those issues that plague your writing. Check for active voice. Who is taking the action in what you are reading? Look for subject verb agreement.
3. Look for parallel construction. See if you can notice these things in the author's writing and then study their punctuation moves.

Where to get face-to-face help: The KSU writing center.

Essay Help:

What you need to know:

You have 30 minutes to write your essay. This is not a lot of time. You should always spend the first few minutes creating an outline of where you want to go in your piece. No, not a Roman numeral outline, but a general direction of what you want to say.

Real life connection:

- Build your writing stamina.
- Practice (yes, practice) writing the essays. Do an un-timed practiced essay first and then try a timed essay. You need to know what 30 minutes feels like and how far you are able to get during that time.
- **Cheater's Version 1**- read the practice essay question and outline your argument and main points. See if you can build a strong argument with supporting points in outline form. Actually write the sentence that clearly states your position on the topic. Think about how you could end your piece. Orally think through or rehearse what you will say. This will help you get into the habit of thinking through your piece BEFORE you ever begin writing your essay. If you take a few minutes of your precious 30 minutes to plan your piece, you will know where you are going while you are writing. You won't have to stop midway throughout your essay in panic, worrying that you don't know where you are going next or how you will end your piece. Remember, the ending is the last thing the scorer reads so you need to end on a strong note.
- **Cheater's Version 2**- Work with a friend and then pick a sample topic for the person and have them talk through their ideas and arguments. Listen for a clear position statement and for ample support for that position. Give each other feedback.
- Read the sample essays provided in the test booklets. Think about the standards used to score the essays (see ETS writing information packet) and then, using different highlighters, try and identify the writer's clear position and supporting details in the sample. Think about the following:
 - Study how the argument was crafted.
 - Study the examples provided. Study the elaboration of important ideas.
 - Study how the author transitioned from one paragraph to the next.
 - Study the first sentence of the piece and the last.
 - Study how the writer of the example restates her position at the end of the piece.
 - Think about how you could do that with any of the pieces you have already tried.
- One of the qualities you have to consider in your writing is sentence variety. All that means is that your sentences should not all sound alike, begin alike, or be of roughly the same length. Think about someone talking in a

monotone voice. That is what it will be like for the reader if you do not consider the sound, length, and patterns of your sentences. If this is not clear, pick up a book and notice the variety of sentence length or visit the writing center to talk with someone about this idea.

More thoughts about your essay:

- It appears from the examples provided that during the test you will read a strong position or statement and be asked to agree or disagree with the statement.
- Important idea #1. Pick a side. Make a decision. That will help you focus your piece.
- Important Idea #2. Make a list of specific reasons and examples why you believe this statement. Once you have the big ideas try to elaborate on each idea.
- Important Idea #3. Think about what a person who selected the opposite position might use as arguments to support her position. Then think of possible counterarguments and add those ideas to your list of reasons to support your position.
- Important idea #4. Think of counter arguments for each of your reasons and examples listed and use those ideas to make your reasons and examples stronger.
- Important Idea #5. Order your arguments. Select your most compelling reason to list first. This way, the reader reads your strongest argument first allowing you to “hook” your reader early on in your piece.
- Important Idea #5.5. Order your arguments. Begin with your least important idea and end with your most important idea. In this case, the reader is left with the last impression of your strongest argument.
- Important Idea #6. Decide which order works best for you.
- Important Idea #7. Make your beginning paragraph strong. Say what you believe with conviction and clarity. Make sure you say what you want to say. Say it simply and clearly and then begin working on your argument.
- Important Idea #8. Make sure you wrap up your argument but reminding the reader of your position. Don’t leave the reader hanging. Finish strong.

Real life action:

Read commentaries and editorials in the newspaper, online and in magazines. In these columns, writers take a position and then elaborate on that position. See if you can identify their main argument. See what evidence they provide for that argument.

Where to get help:

Look no further than your KSU Writing Center. It’s free. It’s close by. It’s free. There

is someone willing to work with you on your writing, helping you develop important understandings that will serve you forever.

Before your meeting:

Have one or two questions you want to ask. Be specific. Think about the kinds of comments you have received on your paper in the past. You might need to ask one or more of the following questions:

- Is my position on this topic clear and well-supported?
- Is my voice active?
- Do I have parallel construction?
- Do my subject-verbs agree?

You may need to have multiple visits in order to help you understand your writing patterns.

Window into the process:

The example below is a think aloud of a possible way to think through writing an essay. It might help you to hear how someone thinks through a piece.

Sample essay prompt:

"The only important criterion by which to judge a prospective teacher is his or her ability to get along with the widest possible variety of students."

Discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with this opinion. Support your views with specific reasons and examples from your own experience, observations or reading.

Take a Position: I disagree.

1st draft at stating your position:

I disagree with the idea that prospective teachers should be judged solely on his or her ability to get along with the widest possible variety of students. *(I tried to make my position clear and I used the language from the question in my answer).* I don't think teaching should amount to a popularity contest. *(I am telling why I think that reason is not a good one).* Prospective teachers should be judged on more important and substantial factors such as *(Here I need to list the factors I think are more important than getting along with students and I will need to elaborate on each one).*

Possible factors could include:

Ability to teach effectively- it matters that teachers reach their students, can make material understandable to students

Ability to excite and to energize learners (notice how I had to use "to excite" and "to energize" to keep parallel construction?)

Ability to help students learn to ask and answer their own questions.

(3 is not a magic number. You could have 2 ideas but 1 is not enough. Regardless of your number, you must elaborate on each of the ideas you present.)

Example elaboration on one factor

Ability to help students learn to answer their own questions-

A teacher's gift of teaching should not just be for one year. The teacher should help students learn how to learn. Students need to be able to ask and answer their own questions. In this way, students become self-sufficient in their learning and rely on themselves instead of some other authority or adult to tell them what to learn or how to think.

Elaborate other important factors

Closing:

Teachers should provide their students with more than a memory of a year in which they had a good time and got along with their teacher. Students need tools such as *(give examples from what I have already said earlier)*. Teachers should focus on leaving students with those kinds of parting gifts rather than merely a year of good fun.

Is this the perfect essay? No. But it is an example of how to think through organizing your essay and how to identify what you have to do as a writer to successfully state your position. Good Luck!