

The Writing Multiple-Choice Test

Improving your essay is the quickest and easiest way to improve your GED writing score, since one point higher score on the essay means a much higher overall score. However, the GED essay is only one part of the writing test, and you should be prepared for the multiple-choice portion of the test.

What is the GED multiple-choice writing test like? You'll have 50 multiple choice questions to answer in 75 minutes. That means, on average you'll have about 1½ minutes per question. But, what you'll find is 6 or so long readings, with about 8 or 9 questions about each. Like the reading test, because you've got a pretty big reading to deal with, it's better to think of your time in chunks *per reading* than per question. For 6 readings, you'll have about 10 minutes per reading, with 15 minutes or so left over. For the writing test, even more than in the reading test, you might not need to read through the whole reading. Most of the questions focus on one or two sentences. Read the question first, and use the longer reading for reference about what it's talking about, or for organization questions.

The readings on this test should not be difficult to read. They'll be workplace and community documents (that is, letters, memos, or similar documents, like the reading test workplace documents), "how-to" texts that have instructions about how to do something, or informational texts, which are like articles that talk about a topic. The texts are 12 to 22 sentences long, about 200 to 300 words. The readings are good writing, except that they have some errors in them, on purpose. The multiple choice questions, for the most part, ask you to identify and fix those errors.

The questions on the test fall into four categories.

- * About 7 to 8 questions (15%) will be **organization** questions. These questions ask you to add, remove, or move sentences. They're testing whether you know where a sentence or paragraph belongs. You should understand topic, or main idea, sentences; organizing paragraphs into a beginning, middle, and end; and organizing writing into a beginning, middle, and end. And, of course, the writing needs to make sense!
- * About 15 questions (30%) will be **sentence structure** questions. These questions have to do with how the sentences are written. You'll need to identify fragments, run-ons, how to join sentences properly, and other elements that make a sentence correct.
- * About 15 questions (30%) will be **usage** questions. These questions are about using words correctly. You'll need to identify whether the right verb is used with the right subject. You should be familiar with how to use the right verb tense and how to use pronouns, too.
- * About 12 to 13 questions (25%) will be **mechanics** questions. These questions are about capitalization, punctuation, and spelling. The spelling questions will only be about possessives, contractions, and easily confused words like "your" and "you're."

That's the content of the questions. The questions themselves are in several different formats.

- * About 22 to 23 questions (55%) will be **correction** questions. A correction question shows you a sentence (or a part of the reading) and asks you to choose which correction should be

made to it. Sometimes, no correction is needed, and that will be one of the choices.

- * About 17 to 18 questions (35%) will be **revision** questions. These questions show a sentence or sentences with an underlined part. To answer the question, choose the best way to change the underlined portion. You'll always have the choice to leave it the way it is.
- * About 10 questions (20%) will be **construction shift** questions. These questions will ask you about rewording a sentence in a different way, or moving or deleting sentences, or changing paragraphs.

Answering Writing Multiple-Choice ?s

The multiple choice section of the writing test expects you to have some knowledge of grammar, punctuation, and spelling. It also expects some common-sense knowledge of organization and what “sounds right” in language. You have a lot of language knowledge, and you can supplement that by learning about some common mistakes. You might find that you know the right answer to some questions immediately. For other questions, you’ll have to think it through.

To answer a multiple-choice writing question when you’re not sure of the answer, ask:

- ? What sounds right? Read the sentence quietly to yourself, and read the sentence with the changes in the answer choices. Pause at each comma, so you can “hear” the punctuation. You’ll often be able to “hear” the right answer, or at least eliminate some wrong answers. This works well for comma question, verb tenses, and some other common types of questions.
- ? Can I eliminate any wrong answers? Eliminating wrong answer choices is especially helpful in the multiple-choice writing section, and you’ll be able to narrow down your choices to increase your chance of success. If there’s anything that just doesn’t make sense or doesn’t sound right, eliminate it!
- ? Are there any common problems I can identify in the question and answers? Take a look at the next section for common problems you’ll find on the test.

Common Writing Problems

Here are the most common writing problems you'll run into. These are ones you should definitely know!

COMMONLY CONFUSED WORDS

Learn these commonly confused words you're most likely to run into on the test:

Your/You're	"You're" means "you are." If you can't put "you are" in the sentence, the correct word is "your."
There/Their/They're	"They're" means "they are." Test that in the sentence first! "There" means a place ("over there"), and "their" is possessive, meaning "belonging to them."
Its/It's	"It's" means "it is." If you can't put "it is" in the sentence, the correct word is "its."

COMMAS

! A comma should come between each item in a series, like this:

John bought soda, milk, peas, and bread at the store.

- ! Commas are used before the word “for,” “and,” “nor,” “but,” “or,” “yet,” or “so” to join **two complete sentences**, but only if these words are joining **two complete sentences**.

I went to the store, and Bob stayed home.

← “and” joins 2 complete sentences

I went to the store and the mall.

← “and” does not join 2 complete sentences

- ! Look out for extra commas where they don’t belong! If you read the sentence with a pause where the commas are, you can probably find these, because they’ll “sound wrong.”

I worked nine hours today, and then I went, to the store and picked up the kids.

← Wrong!

I worked nine hours today, and then I went to the store and picked up the kids.

← Right!

RUN-ONS AND FRAGMENTS

- ! A fragment often begins with a word like “because,” “while,” “although,” “when,” or a similar word, but it doesn’t tell you what happened because, while, although, or when. For example:

Because I was late. My boss yelled at me. *Wrong!*

Correct this by changing the period to a comma:

Because I was late, my boss yelled at me. *Right!*

- ! Run-ons are often comma splices, two sentences joined with only a comma:

I was late, my boss yelled at me. *Wrong!*

Possible corrections:

I was late, so my boss yelled at me. *Right!*

I was late. My boss yelled at me. *Right!*

I was late; my boss yelled at me. Right!

Because I was late, my boss yelled at me. Right!

VERB TENSE

! Make sure the verb matches the subject:

My friends is always helping me. Wrong!

My friends being always helping me. Wrong!

My friends are always helping me. Right!

! Make sure the verb tense makes sense. Look at what the sentence is saying to see if it's using the right words.

The salesman will arrive last week. Wrong!

Multiple-Choice Practice Questions

Title → **How to Make a Birthday Card**

(A)

(1) If you want to give a special gift instead of just buying a card from your local drugstore, try making a Birthday card yourself. (2) You'll need a piece of letter-sized cardstock or heavy paper, scissors, glue, and colored pens. (3) Plus, find things to decorate the card with: glitter, ribbons, yarn, buttons fabric, colored paper, magazine clippings, photos or memorabilia, wrapping paper, stencils, or anything colorful and fun!

(B)

(4) First, fold it in half along the longer side, so that you have a card. (5) Identify the front, back, and inside of your card. (6) Remember that the card should open on the right-hand side. (7) Now, all you need to do is decorate your card.

(C)

(8) Spend some time thinking of ideas to decorate your card. (9) Is there special memories you share with the person whose birthday you're celebrating? (10) What qualities does that person have? (11) What does he or she like? (12) In addition, think about what you want to say in your card. (13) The more personal you're card is, the better it will be.

(D)

(14) You might look for a special quote or poem to include. (15) You can print it out in a nice font, or write it on the card yourself. (16) You'll definitely want to include a "Happy Birthday!" and sign your name.

(E)

(17) Once you have all your ideas. (18) Start decorating! (19) Cut out all your materials and place them on the card before you start gluing. (20) You can move the materials around until you have been happy with how it looks. (21) When everything is laid out, glue your materials in place, and then draw or color additional decorations and add your handwritten text. (22) Let the glue dry, you'll have a unique and priceless birthday card.

← Sentences are numbered

1. Sentence 1: **If you want to give a special gift instead of just buying a card from your local drugstore, try making a Birthday card yourself.**

Which is the best way to write the underlined portion of this sentence? If the original is the best way, choose option (1).

- 1) try making a Birthday card
- 2) trying to make a Birthday card
- 3) try making a birthday card
- 4) try making a Birthday Card
- 5) tried to make a Birthday card

2. Sentence 3: **Plus, find things to decorate the card with: glitter, ribbons, yarn, buttons fabric, colored paper, magazine clippings, photos or memorabilia, wrapping paper, stencils, or anything colorful and fun!**

Which correction should be made to sentence 3?

- 1) Add a comma after buttons
- 2) Remove the comma after clippings
- 3) Change to decorate to decorating
- 4) Remove the word and
- 5) No correction is necessary.

3. Sentence 4: **First, fold it in half along the longer side, so that you have a card.**

Which correction should be made to sentence 4?

- 1) Add a comma after you
- 2) Remove you
- 3) Change have to has
- 4) Change it to the cardstock
- 5) No correction is necessary.

4. Sentences 5–6: **Identify the front, back, and inside of your card. Remember that the card should open on the right-hand side.**

If you rewrote sentences 5 and 6 beginning with When identifying the front, back, and inside of your card, the next words should be

- 1) open the card to the right
- 2) remember that the card should open
- 3) the right-hand side should be the card
- 4) should open on the right-hand side
- 5) on the right-hand side, should

5. Sentence 9: **Is there special memories you share with the person whose birthday you're celebrating?**

Which correction should be made to sentence 9?

- 1) Change there to they're
- 2) Change there to their
- 3) Change whose to who's
- 4) Change Is to Are
- 5) No correction is necessary.

6. Sentence 12: **In addition, think about what you want to say in your card.**

Which revision should be made to the placement of sentence 12?

- 1) Remove sentence 12
- 2) Move sentence 12 before sentence 8
- 3) Move sentence 12 to follow sentence 8
- 4) Move sentence 12 to the beginning of paragraph D
- 5) Move sentence 12 to follow sentence 16

7. Sentence 13: **The more personal you're card is, the better it will be.**

Which correction should be made to sentence 13?

- 1) Change will be to was
- 2) Change you're to your
- 3) Change is to are
- 4) Change it to they
- 5) No correction is necessary.

8. Sentences 17–18: **Once you have all your ideas. Start decorating!**

Which is the best way to write the underlined portion of these sentences? If the original is the best way, choose option (1).

- 1) all your ideas. Start
- 2) all you're ideas. Start
- 3) all your ideas, start
- 4) all your ideas, and start
- 5) all your idea. Start

9. Sentence 20: **You can move the materials around until you have been happy with how it looks.**

Which is the best way to write the underlined portion of this sentence? If the original is the best way, choose option (1).

- 1) until you have been happy
- 2) until you will be happy
- 3) until you were happy
- 4) until you is happy
- 5) until you are happy

10. Sentence 22: Let the glue dry, you'll have a unique and priceless birthday card.

Which is the best way to write the underlined portion of this sentence? If the original is the best way, choose option (1).

- 1) glue dry, you'll have
- 2) glue dry, you'll has
- 3) glue dry, and you'll have
- 4) glue dry, you'll have had
- 5) glue dry, you'll had

Practice Question Answers

Practice Question 1

This is a revision question. Because a portion of the sentence is underlined, you know where to look for the error. That makes it a little easier. If you can spot the error right away, that's great. Just look for it in the answers. Otherwise, take a look at the answer choices to try to think through which one's right. The first answer is always the same as the sentence, so skip it at first. The second one changes "try" to "trying." If you read the sentence through to yourself, changing "try" to "trying," you'll see that it doesn't sound right:

If you want to give a special gift instead of just buying a card from your local drugstore, **trying** making a Birthday card yourself.

Answer 5 is similar. It changes "try" to "tried." That will also likely sound wrong to you:

If you want to give a special gift instead of just buying a card from your local drugstore, **tried** making a Birthday card yourself.

Trust your ear! If it sounds wrong, it probably is wrong. The other two answers have to do with capitalization. Capitalization is something you can't hear. Should "birthday," "card," or both be

capitalized? They're not proper nouns, because it's not the name of a specific birthday card, so it shouldn't be capitalized. Another way to check your answer is to look through the rest of the writing. Scan it for the words "birthday card." Remember, most of the writing doesn't have errors. In sentence 22, you'll see that "birthday card" is all lowercase. That's a clue to how it should be written. The correct answer is 3.

Practice Question 2

This is a correction question. The sentence may or may not have an error, and you need to see if you can identify it. Read the sentence through to yourself, pausing at the commas. Do you hear a problem? You might find that "buttons fabric" sounds odd. There should be a comma between them. That's answer 1.

If you don't hear the problem, try reading through the sentence with all the different answer choices. The wrong answers will probably sound wrong to your ear, and the right answer will sound okay. If you remember the rule for using commas in a series, to put a comma between each item in a group, you'll also be able to find the correct answer.

Practice Question 3

Question 3 is another correction question. Try reading through the sentence with each of the corrections. The first three should all sound odd. A comma after "you" isn't needed. There's no series, and nothing's being joined. Removing "you" takes out the subject of that clause—"that have a card" doesn't make any

sense! Changing “have” to “has” should also sound wrong, since the subject “you” and the verb “has” don’t go together. That leaves changing “it” to “the cardstock.” It sounds okay, but is there a reason to make the change? And does it make sense in the whole reading?

Read the paragraph through. Sentence 4 is the first sentence. What does the word “it” mean? What’s it talking about? It doesn’t really say. That’s a problem. A pronoun like “it” has to refer to something. The writing needs a noun for the pronoun to refer to. You can probably guess that it means the cardstock, but it doesn’t tell you. That’s why the change is needed. Answer 4 is correct.

Practice Question 4

Question 4 asks you to reword a sentence. Sometimes you’ll come across a question that asks you how you might start a reworded sentence, or what the next words would be. Start by going through the answer choices and seeing what the whole sentence might sound like, if you started with those words. If you can’t think of any way to complete the sentence, or it just sounds wrong, that’s probably not the right answer. The best choice is answer 2. The whole sentence would make sense and mean exactly the same thing as the original sentences:

When identifying the front, back, and inside of your card, remember that the card should open on the right-hand side.

Practice Question 5

Question 5 is a correction question. Three of the answers are spelling issues, so you can't use your ear to see if they sound right. Instead, use what you know about spelling. If you know that "they're" means "they are," you can read through the sentence with "they are" in place:

Is **they are** special memories you share with the person whose birthday you're celebrating?

That definitely doesn't sound right! What about "their"? That's possessive. It means "belonging to them." Does the word "there" in the sentence indicate something belonging to "them"? Maybe "special memories"? Try it:

Is **special memories belonging to them** you share with the person whose birthday you're celebrating?

That doesn't make a lot of sense. You can eliminate answers 1 and 2. Answer 3 changes "whose" to "who's." This one's less common, but it's similar to "your" and "you're." "Who's" is a contraction, meaning "who is." Again, you can try substituting it into the sentence:

Is there special memories you share with the person **who is** birthday you're celebrating?

That doesn't sound right either. You can eliminate that answer. The last answer is changing "Is" to "Are." Try it in the sentence.

Are there special memories you share with the person whose birthday you're celebrating?

That should sound better. You might have already caught that "Is there special memories...?" sounds wrong. The problem is that "memories" is plural, so you need a plural form of the verb ("are") and not a singular form ("is"). The answer is 4.

Practice Question 6

Question 6 is an organization question. It asks you where the best location of a sentence is. That means, you'll need to look at how the whole article is organized. What does the sentence say? Where does it make the most sense?

Each paragraph has a topic. The topic of paragraph C, where sentence 12 appears, is planning the decorations for your card. Sentence 12 doesn't talk about decorations at all. It's talking about something new, what you want to say in your card. Should it be removed? Or is there someplace better to put it?

Paragraph D talks about what to write in your card. If you put sentence 12 at the beginning of paragraph D, it makes sense. It gives the main idea of that paragraph. The correct answer is 4, to move the sentence to the beginning of paragraph D.

The best idea with this kind of question is just to see where the sentence makes the most sense to you.

Practice Question 7

Question 7 is a correction question. You can check out three of the answers by seeing if they sound right in the sentence:

- 1: The more personal you're card is, the better it **was**.
- 3: The more personal you're card **are**, the better it will be.
- 4: The more personal you're card is, the better **they** will be.

Do any of these sound better than the original? Do they make sense? Answer 1 doesn't make sense. "Was" is the past tense, and it's talking about the future. Answer 3 should sound wrong, because the singular subject "card" needs a singular verb like "is," not a plural verb like "are." Answer 4 also is wrong. "They" means more than one thing, and "card" is singular. A card is an "it." That leaves answer 2, or else no changes. If you remember the commonly confused words "you're" and "your," you have an easy test to tell which one's right. "You're" means "you are." Just place "you are" in the sentence to see if it sounds right:

The more personal **you are** card is, the better it will be.

That doesn't make sense! That means that "you're" ought to be "your." The answer is 2.

Practice Question 8

Question 8 is a revision question. When a question is about the separation between two sentences, look for fragments. “Once you have all your ideas” is a fragment. It’s not a complete sentence, just like the fragments beginning with “because” or “while.” Once you have all your ideas, what happens? It doesn’t tell you. That’s what makes the sentence incomplete. To make this a complete sentence, it needs to be joined to the next sentence. Answer 2 doesn’t join the sentences. Instead, it changes “your” to “you’re.” Try “you are” in the sentence, and you’ll see that “you’re” is the wrong word! Answer 3 joins the sentences with a comma. That’s correct because the first “sentence” is really a fragment. All that’s needed to join them together is a comma. Answer 4 would be a good way to join two sentences, if they were complete sentences, but it’s wrong because the first “sentence” is a fragment. Answer 5 is also incorrect; “all your idea” doesn’t make much sense! The best choice is answer 3.

Practice Question 9

Question 9 is a revision question, and it asks about verbs. Which verb is correct? The verb needs to match the subject, and it needs to make sense. It needs to have the right tense for the meaning of the sentence. That means, it needs to be talking about the same time the rest of the sentence is talking about—the past, the present, or the future. A good approach to this type of question is to read the sentence with all the different verb choices in place. Eliminate the ones that sounds wrong, and then see if the ones that sound okay make sense.

1: You can move the materials around until you **have been** happy with how it looks.

Answer 1 probably doesn't sound right to you. "Have been" is talking about the past, and the sentence isn't really talking about the past.

2: You can move the materials around until you **will be** happy with how it looks.

Answer 2 probably doesn't sound right, either. You just wouldn't say "until you will be."

3: You can move the materials around until you **were** happy with how it looks.

Answer 3 sounds a little better, but it's talking about the past. The sentence just isn't describing something that happened in the past! It's describing something that might happen.

4: You can move the materials around until you **is** happy with how it looks.

Answer 4 should sound wrong. "You is" might be used sometimes as slang, but "is" doesn't go with the subject "you."

- 5: You can move the materials around until you **are** happy with how it looks.

Answer 5 is correct. The conditional word “until” works fine with a simple present-tense verb like “are,” and the verb “are” goes with the subject “you.” You should be able to tell that this sounds right, even if you’re not sure why.

Practice Question 10

In question 10, three of the answer choices change the verb “have.” Test them out to see how they sound:

- 2: Let the glue dry, you’ll **has** a unique and priceless birthday card.
- 4: Let the glue dry, you’ll **have had** a unique and priceless birthday card.
- 5: Let the glue dry, you’ll **had** a unique and priceless birthday card.

None of these probably sound right. You can eliminate all three. It’s either correct how it is, or you need to add the word “and.” Adding the word “and” is a clue that the sentence might be a comma splice—two sentences incorrectly joined with a comma. So, is each half of the “sentence” a sentence on its own? “Let the glue dry” works by itself as a sentence. “You’ll have a unique and priceless birthday card” also is a sentence. This is a comma splice, and the word “and” after the comma fixes it. The answer is 3.