



CHAPTER 7

Test-Taking Strategies

What Will the Test Be Like?

You already have a good sense of what Part I of the GED Language Arts, Writing Test looks like because you have worked through this book. The passages and questions on this portion of the GED Test will look very similar to the passages and questions you have worked on in the Cumulative Review at the end of each chapter of this book.

In Part I of the Language Arts, Writing Test, you will be given **75 minutes to answer 50 questions**. The questions will all be multiple choice with five answer choices. The questions will be based on short passages, each approximately 200–300 words in length. The passages will be business documents, instructional documents, and informational documents. The questions will check your knowledge of organization, sentence structure, standard usage, and mechanics (punctuation, capitalization, and spelling of homonyms).

Your score on Part I will be based on the number of correct answers you record over the 75-minute test period. This means that **there is no penalty for guessing**. The number of items you answered correctly will be converted into a standard score. This standard score will be combined with your score on Part II of the test (the Essay). This combined score will apply to the overall points you will need to pass the entire battery of GED tests.

If you understand the material covered in this book and you have done well in the Cumulative Review tests, you should do well on Part I of the Language Arts, Writing Test. However, there are some additional strategies that you might be able to use to boost your score. These strategies are included in this chapter. Keep in mind, however, that no amount of “test-wiseness” can substitute for a real understanding of the material in this book. Be sure you work carefully through all chapters before you attempt the practice test or the actual GED Test!

Know the Common Errors

Before you begin to answer the questions, first read the passage that the questions are based on. It helps to get an idea of what the passage is about, what verb tense it is written in, and what the basic style of the writing is. As you read through the passage, see if you can spot sentences in which there might be an error. You may not be able to tell exactly what the error is, but you may have an idea that something just doesn't sound right.

It may seem that there are millions of different errors that can appear in the passages on the Language Arts, Writing Test. In fact, this is not so. The chart below reviews the main skill areas tested. Read them and decide which areas you are most confident in.

Type of Error	Example
SENTENCE STRUCTURE	
Sentence fragment	Because it was a holiday.
Run-on sentence or comma splice	He left early, we met him at the train.
Wordy or repetitive sentence	I went to the grocery store to buy some milk, and I went to the grocery store to buy some eggs.
Incorrect coordination or subordination	Computers are easy to use, so people are afraid of them.
Misplaced or dangling modifier	Sitting in front of the television, her eyes became glassy.
Lack of parallel structure	The report is intended to inform, amuse, and being instructional.
USAGE	
Subject-verb disagreement	Jim and Raoul was at the meeting today.
Incorrect verb tense	Tomorrow, the fun was just beginning.
Pronoun-antecedent disagreement	Everyone should bring their driver's license.
MECHANICS	
Incorrect capitalization	The country of south africa is South of the equator.
Missing comma	Whenever we see each other we are surprised.
Unnecessary comma	Yesterday we walked, and biked.
Misspelled homonym, possessive, or contraction	They took they're film to the convenience store.

Of course, this list does not include every single skill and rule you need to know to succeed on Part I of the test, but these are the important categories.

Organization Errors

Some sentences on the Language Arts, Writing Test will not contain grammatical errors. But some of these grammatically correct sentences will need to be moved or deleted in order to create an effective piece of writing. In addition, some paragraphs will need to be divided or combined to make an effective piece of writing.

These organization errors fall into the following categories:

1. Divide a Paragraph

Sometimes a paragraph as written will be too long. It will contain more than one main idea. If this is the case, there will be a question that asks *What revision would make this paragraph more effective?* Five options for dividing the paragraph will follow.

2. Combine Two Paragraphs

At other times, two paragraphs actually relate to the same main idea. The writing would be more effective if the two paragraphs were combined. In this case, a question will ask *Which revision should be made to sentence *x* to improve the paragraph?* The correct response is one in which two paragraphs are combined.

3. Add a Topic Sentence

Sometimes a paragraph will be missing a topic sentence—a sentence that unifies all of the other sentences. In this case, the question *Which sentence would be most effective at the beginning of the paragraph?* will be asked. Following this question, there will be five possible topic sentences, one of which will be the correct response.

4. Move a Sentence

If a sentence is out of place in a paragraph, you will be asked *Which revision would make the paragraph more effective?* Your options will be places to move the sentence within the piece of writing.

5. Remove a Sentence

Occasionally, a sentence simply does not belong anywhere in a piece of writing. It does not support any of the main ideas. In this case, one of the answer choices will be to *remove sentence *x**.

Understanding these five types of organization questions will help you focus on some of the errors you will find in the documents in the Language Arts, Writing Test.

Understand the Question Types

There are three different types of questions on Part I of the Language Arts, Writing Test. Recognizing and understanding these item types will help you prepare.

Sentence Correction

Of the 50 questions on the test, fewer than half (45 percent) will be the sentence correction type. In this type of question, you'll see a sentence from the passage followed by the question *What correction should be made to sentence x?* The five possible answers will focus on different parts of the sentence. One choice might deal with a homonym error, another with punctuation, a third with usage, and a fourth with sentence structure. Sometimes the fifth choice will be *no correction is necessary*. This fifth choice is sometimes correct, meaning that the sentence was correct as written in the passage. Look at the example below:

Sentence 1: Mr. Anderson, why does all the files need to be printed now?

What correction should be made to sentence 1?

- (1) remove the comma after *Anderson*
- (2) change *does* to *do*
- (3) insert a comma after *files*
- (4) change *need* to *needed*
- (5) no correction is necessary

If you recognize the error in the sentence right away, just look for the answer that corrects that error. Otherwise, the key to answering this type of question is flexibility. Look carefully at the suggested change in each choice and see how it would fit into the sentence. Sometimes you will have to check the paragraph as a whole for verb tense or pronoun choice. Take some time to try out each possibility to see if it makes sense.

Let's evaluate each of the choices above. Answer choice (1) is not correct because a comma is needed after the direct address introduction. Answer (3) is not correct because a comma is not needed between a subject and a predicate. Answer (4) is incorrect because the past tense *needed* is not necessary. Since there is an error in the sentence, answer (5) is not correct. Answer (2) is correct. The correct verb to agree with the plural subject *files* is *do*.

Sentence Revision

Out of 50 writing skills questions, about one-third (35 percent) will be of the sentence revision variety. In this type of question, text from the passage will be presented with one section of it underlined. You'll be asked to choose the best way to rewrite the underlined portion. The first answer choice will always be the original wording; the other four choices give you alternative versions. You choose option (1) if the original sentence is correct as written.

Sentence 2: Several improvements have been made to our office, it's a more pleasant place to work.

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

- (1) our office, it's a
- (2) our office it's a
- (3) our office, but it's a
- (4) our office, in fact it's a
- (5) our office, so it's a

Since only one part of the sentence contains an error, this kind of question will probably focus on one or two rules rather than several. In the above example, you can see that the question deals with the correct way to join two clauses together. Is the original sentence correct, or is it a comma splice? Which of the alternatives is correct? See if you can eliminate the wrong answer choices.

Answer choice (5) is correct. Adding a conjunction that shows a cause-effect relationship between the two clauses corrects the comma splice. The other choices create either a run-on sentence, a comma splice, or a sentence with an inaccurate conjunction.

Construction Shift

The last type of question on the Language Arts, Writing Test is called a construction shift. There will be about 10 of these items on the test (20 percent). This type of question will ask you to choose the best way to rewrite a sentence or to combine two sentences. A construction shift question is different from the other two types in that it asks you to improve a sentence by choosing an alternative structure. The correct answer should be an obvious improvement over the original, while retaining the same meaning. Look at the examples on the next page.

Sentences 3 and 4: The meeting should be attended by all salespeople. Managers and support staff should also attend the meeting.

The most effective combination of sentences 3 and 4 would include which group of words?

- (1) The meeting should be attended by all salespeople, and managers
- (2) Salespeople, managers, and support staff should attend
- (3) To attend the meeting is required by salespeople, managers, and
- (4) Salespeople should attend the meeting, and managers and support staff
- (5) Attending the meeting should be all salespeople, and managers

As you can see, there are no errors in sentences 3 and 4. However, together they are a bit awkward and repetitive. Which revised sentence is the most effective combination? Answers (1), (3), (4), and (5) would combine the sentences, but the resulting sentences would be long and still repetitive. Answer (2) effectively joins the common elements of the two sentences to make one simple sentence with no repetition.

Another type of construction shift item asks you to think about rewriting a sentence starting with a different group of words. Again, there is no error in the original sentence, but the revised sentence should result in an improvement over the original.

Sentence 5: We left the house so that we would be on time for the conference, but we arrived late for the conference.

If you rewrote sentence 5 beginning with

Although we left the house,

The next words should be

- (1) on time for the conference, but we
- (2) we arrived late for the conference
- (3) so that we would be on time, but we arrived
- (4) on time, we arrived late for
- (5) on time for the conference, we arrived late for the conference

Read each answer carefully. Some of them leave out important parts of the original sentence. Others are still repetitive. Only answer (4) includes all the meaning of the original sentence without unnecessary repetition.

Look at the Whole Passage

Consider the context of the entire passage before choosing the correct answer. Questions that deal with consistent verb tense and pronoun reference often require you to see the sentence as part of a whole.

The question below is based on the following short passage.

(1) The senior managers at Century Fund would like to donate the enclosed check to your organization. (2) As you may know, several of our employees volunteer their time at Hannah’s House, participating in repair work, maintenance, and cooking for the residents. (3) We would like to pay tribute to them, and to you, for the fine work this worthwhile organization does on behalf of the homeless. (4) We are pleased to say that our collection among managerial staff was more successful than ever before, netting a total of \$4,800. (5) We are sure that you were able to put this money to excellent use at Hannah’s House.

Sentence 5: We are sure that you were able to put this money to excellent use at Hannah’s House.

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

- (1) We are sure that you were
- (2) We were sure that you were
- (3) We are sure that you had been
- (4) We will be sure that you were
- (5) We are sure that you will be

All of the choices would make grammatically correct sentences. However, only one choice makes sense with the rest of the paragraph. The paragraph as a whole is written in the present tense, so *are* is the correct verb to follow *we*. Since the money will be used in the future, *will be* is the correct verb form to use with the subject *you*. Choice (5) is correct.

Answer All Fifty Questions

Be sure to answer all the questions on the Language Arts, Writing Test. There is no penalty for guessing, so a wrong answer won’t count against your score any more than a blank answer. If you are unsure of an answer, try to eliminate some of the answer choices that you know are incorrect. Then guess among the remaining choices.

Now that you have completed a review of Part I of the Language Arts, Writing Test, go on to the next chapter to begin a review of Part II (the Essay).