



The GED Language Arts, Writing Test

Writing Style and Word Choice



Frances L. Roberson, M.A.
ABE/ASE/GED/ESL Teacher
Vocational Counselor
Grant Writing Specialist

California Distance Learning Project
www.cdponline.org

GED

Video Partner



Passing the GED Writing Test

For I am a bear of very little brain and long words bother me.

Winnie the Pooh

Video 6 Focus: Good writing is more than what you say, it is also the way you say it.

You Will Learn From Video 6:

- That writing is as much about style as it is content.
- That it is important to think about the effect on the audience.
- That every beginning writer copies or models his/her writing after other writers' styles.
- That when writing for people you don't know personally, use understandable language, not elaborate words or stilted sentences.



Words You Need to Know:

While viewing the video, put the letter of the meaning by the correct vocabulary word. Answers are on page 15.

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| _____ 1. jargon | a. overused or overworked words or expressions |
| _____ 2. cliché | b. informal and "trendy" language |
| _____ 3. vivid | c. accurate and polite; for business or people you do not know |
| _____ 4. superfluous | d. lively, spirited, helps to see the idea |
| _____ 5. formal writing | e. unnecessary, excess, extra |
| _____ 6. slang | f. specialized words a group or profession might use |



Points to Remember:

- Writing must be aimed toward your intended audience.
- Everything you choose to write makes a difference: sentence structure, grammar, verb tense, and specific vocabulary.
- All writing conveys tone, attitude, and image as well as information.

WRITING STYLE

Good writing is more than what you say, it is also how you say it. In other words: *style*.

Style is partly a process of using the right words, sentence structure, and verb tense, but it also includes an individual's manner of writing.



A person does not begin by having a distinctive manner of writing. A writer usually “copies” or mimics other admired writers in their styles before developing one of his/her own. Eventually, the writer will develop a style that may be a combination of other writers' styles, but the writer has made it her own by choice of words and structure.

Style begins with thinking about your intended audience. What do they know about the subject? Or care? Are they like you or different? Will they be interested in this? Do they have a sense of humor, or should you go with a serious approach?

Style includes considering the effect your writing will have on the audience. Is your purpose to entertain, inform, or persuade? So *style* takes into account your purpose for writing.

Style must also take into account the format for which you are writing. Is it a letter to your mother, a magazine article, business proposal, advertising for a billboard, GED Essay, or school newspaper article? The format will necessarily restrict your writing in length. While a letter to your mother may be unlimited in length, the billboard may require no more than 7-8 words. A magazine or newspaper article may range from several hundred to several thousand words, while your GED Essay is an assigned length of about 250 words.

Formality of writing is also determined by the format: Formal writing means communicating accurate information in a polite manner. It is generally used for business, GED Essays, and for communicating with people whom you do not know well. It uses structured sentences and customary—not elaborate—vocabulary while leaving out slang. Informal writing is similar to the way we speak when talking to friends and family. It includes contractions, slang words, and, perhaps, incomplete sentences. This writing is usually reserved for those we know well.



Style, therefore, must change from simply writing to writing based on the audience, purpose, and format.

WORD CHOICE

The words we use and the way we structure them convey tone, attitude, and image as well as serve our purpose whether that is to inform, entertain, or persuade. We should choose our words carefully to be the most clear and concise as possible. Keeping this in mind, here are some kinds of words to **avoid**.

Informal writing

Words we would use with friends, family, and in spoken conversations may not have a place in writing for unknown readers whether they are GED Essay scorers or our employers or customers. These include common spoken words, contractions like “aren’t,” and sentence fragments. It is very easy to fall back on such words, but there are always better words we can choose from.

Look at the words or phrases below and mark whether you think they are formal or informal writing. Answers are on page 15.

FORMAL WORD OR PHRASE INFORMAL

Sincerely
Hey, Friend!
regarding
OK
yeah
couldn’t

Now go back to those you marked INFORMAL, and write a substitute word or phrase that could be used in formal writing such as on the GED essay. Suggested answers are on page 15.



Which of these sentences would you use formally or informally? Mark “F” or “In” on the line to indicate which. Answers are on page 15.

- ❖ We are not able to fill the order in the quantity you requested. _____
- ❖ Hey, I can’t leave work till after 6. How about you? _____
- ❖ Hawaii is a good vacation choice because of its mild climate and many activities. _____
- ❖ Yeah, it’s OK to miss a meeting if you’re working late. _____
- ❖ The reception will not be held on Thursday as originally scheduled. _____

Slang

While informal words, rambling thoughts, a too-familiar tone, and less than ideal grammar should never be used in business or formal writing, so, too, **SLANG** is a major no-no (catch that bit of slang?).

Here is a portion of a GED Essay about a vacation. See if you can spot the slang:

Last summer, I left my 9-5 for a 24/7. I was looking for some action so I got my wheels and drove over to the pond. But it was sad! Nothing but geeks and airheads there. Then I really screwed up! I was ripped when I went to a flick there and got into it with the salary man who wouldn't shut his piehole. He was giving off bad vibes and gave me a bunch of noise, so I told him we could take it outside...

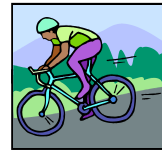
If you caught all these slang words and know which words with which to replace them, then you are on your way to writing slang-free essays. See how you did:

<u>SLANG</u>	<u>MEANING/REPLACEMENT</u>
9-5	job
a 24/7	week's vacation
action	excitement
wheels	car
pond	ocean
sad	poor situation
geeks	intellectuals disapproved of
airheads	stupid people
screwed up	made a mistake
ripped	drunk or intoxicated
flick	movie
got into it	argued with
salary man	businessman or manager
wouldn't shut his piehole	kept talking
vibes	feelings
noise	things you don't agree with
take it outside	fight

As you can see, slang-filled essays are often crude and may be offensive to the reader. Another point is that slang changes frequently. What is "in" for one group, one generation, one year, may change to the next. Here are some slang words used by other groups of people and in previous times that are not understood by most people today:

➤ Mountain biker's slang:

bacon	scabs on knees, elbows
biff	a crash
fred	person who spends a lot of money on bike and equipment but still can't ride



➤ Playground slang:

gaff	someone's house or home
ned	person who dresses in tacky sportswear
whellah	similar to "presto" or "eureka," used at conclusion of list of chores completed

➤ Vietnam Veteran's slang:

blue line	river on a map
church key	bottle opener
fat Albert	C-5A aircraft

➤ 1920s slang:



flapper	young woman who shows freedom from or who ignores conventional conduct
giggle water	alcohol
apple alley	drunk sailor

➤ 1940s body parts slang:

brace o'broads	shoulders
prayer dukes	knees
bone box	mouth

➤ 1960s slang:

dibble, Clyde	dull loser
clubby	uncoordinated
yesterday	out of style
Far out!	experimental, out of mainstream (actually used as far back as 1899 to mean extreme or imaginative)

➤ 1980s and 1990s slang:

phat or fat	good; usage goes back to 17 th century as a slang term for "rich"
goofy	riding a snowboard with right foot forward
head or face plant	falling on one's head

➤ Civil War slang:

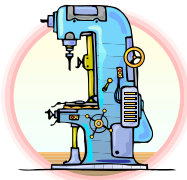
fighting under the black flag	soldiers killing lice
gallinippers	insects, mosquitoes
bull pit	under-arrest confinement area

➤ Medical slang:

bash cash	money received for filling out accident (insurance) claims forms
celestial discharge	died
FABIANS	felt awful but I'm all right now syndrome



Clichés



Clichés are words and phrases that are overworked and overused and, therefore, have little impact. “Cliché” comes from a French word meaning “the sound of a dye stamping out duplicates,” or in other words, over and over and over. Which is exactly what happens with clichés, they are used over and over and over.

Here are some very common clichés you are familiar with:

live and learn	don't worry, be happy
laughter is the best medicine	it could be worse
today is the first day of the rest of your life	same old, same old
it's always darkest before the dawn	no guts, no glory
been there, done that	beauty is only skin deep
the more things change, the more they stay the same	nobody is perfect
I can't change the past	I'm only human
the devil made me do it	it seemed like a good idea at the time

As the comedian once said, “I've got a million of 'em!”

Some possible ways to change common clichés:

- Today's the first day of the rest of your life. *change to:* You have a long life ahead of you, so start today to make it better.
- Nobody's perfect. *change to:* Very few of us have the ability to be perfect.
- No guts, no glory. *change to:* Unless we push hard to achieve, there will be no fame and fortune ahead.

Jargon

Jargon is another form of word to avoid using in your writing. Synonyms for jargon are gibberish, babble, nonsense, and mumbo jumbo. That about sums it up. However, jargon is also the use of specialized words within an occupation such as medicine, education, business, or technology. Often this jargon takes the form of acronyms, words made up of the first letter of several words. An example is AOL, **America On Line**, an internet service. To the rest of us outside those occupations, it is still gibberish, babble, nonsense, and mumbo jumbo!

To see how confusing and silly jargon sounds, look at these sentences.

- Eight bits equal one byte.
- Printing quality depends on the number of dpi.
- He presented a new action plan at the meeting.
- The goal of the faculty and staff will be to take advantage of synergies with the community.
- The athlete hoped to acquire a sustainable record.
- The EENT physician does not administer EKGs.
- This class is mastery-focused and meaning-centered.
- Reviews are peer-based and performance-driven.



Don't fall into the easy way of doing things. Eliminate slang, clichés, and jargon from your writing. Use your own words and create your own writing style.

CLARITY

The purpose of writing is to communicate with others. The focus of that writing should be to make that communication concise and clear. Especially when writing for people whom you don't really know like customers, employers, other co-workers, or GED examiners, use customary language and simply-constructed sentences.

One way to ensure conciseness is to eliminate superfluous words. These extra words are not needed to explain points or add to the entertainment. They merely add words to the page as if one were being paid by the pound! These words are often longer and more “elaborate” than is necessary for the written piece, or they merely serve to repeat what has already been said. In other words, go for quality rather than quantity.

Look at the following and see how excess words have been eliminated but with no loss of understanding.

- I've learned a lot about exercise from watching my three-year old, ~~preschool~~, ~~toddler~~.
- Your requisition ~~request~~ was received ~~yesterday~~, ~~Tuesday~~, May 15.
- The council's ~~solicitation~~ appeal landed promptly on my desk at 4:00 p.m.

Remember, the simplest word is often the best. By not calling attention to individual words by doubling up on them, so to speak, it allows the piece to move along and to remain consistent in tone and quality



In the following sentences, choose the words that are superfluous and draw a line through them. Answers are on page 15.

- Johnny was absent from school yesterday because he had a cold sickness.
- Dr. Smith, who will be leading the workshop seminar, has a graduate university degree.
- Notice to employees and workers: until further notice, the lunch hour period will be from 11:30 a.m. through 12:30 p.m.

While concise generally means using the fewest possible words without sacrificing meaning, there are times in advertising, persuasive essays, and in entertaining/story-telling pieces that it is important to add more words to present a vivid word picture for the reader.



As noted in previous lessons, you can achieve this by using vivid adjectives, nouns, and active verbs. See how the following sentences are transformed by the changes and hold the reader's interest:

- Dr. Smith, our speaker, has a lot of education. (clear and concise information)
- Dr. Smith, a man with doctorates in psychology and anthropology, has been known to bound onto the stage and blast out his speech, punctuating it with flailing arm movements. (a vivid picture for reader)
- The 1999 Corvette is for sale for \$20,000. (clear and concise information)
- The flaming red 1999 Corvette that seems to be speeding while sitting on the lot, is raring to hit the freeway, compete with the mountain goats going up steep hills, and slam to a halt in your driveway. The price is an amazingly low \$20,000! (vivid word picture)

Here are some vivid adjectives and active verbs to liven up your writing. For more, be sure to check in your *Roget's Thesaurus* or go to: <http://thesaurus.reference.com/>.

ADJECTIVES

absolute
disabled
gangly
juicy
magnificent
quarrelsome
tacky
washed-out

befuddled
energetic
horrifying
knotty
noble
ramshackle
uneventful
yearly

congested
fruitless
insensitive
laborious
observant
shaggy
various
zealous

VERBS

amplify
cancel
establish
involve
maximize
qualify
respond
terminate
view

announce
design
envision
lengthen
negotiate
recognize
seize
transmit
widen

balance
distribute
investigate
magnify
provide
repair
simplify
unearth
yield



In the following sentences, replace the underlined word or phrase with a more vivid adjective or verb from the lists. (You may need to change the tense.)

Answers are on page 16.

1. Her gown was unfashionable and cheap.
2. The argument ended on a positive note.
3. He grabbed the microphone from the narrator's hand.
4. The broken-down house had peeling paint and broken windows.
5. The old man was mixed up.
6. His pale face was pressed against the window as he looked out.
7. My boss is going to send that information to the European office.
8. My search for a new lid for the teapot was useless.
9. She was unfeeling when it came to someone else's pain.
10. I'm going to have to call off my wedding because I got rid of the bum!



- ❖ Be sure to write in a style that suits your audience.
- ❖ Choose sentence and paragraph structure and precise, vivid words to convey the tone and image that you desire.
- ❖ Eliminate slang, jargon, clichés, and informalities to increase clarity.

Writing is more than what you say, it is the way you say it.

GED EXERCISE 1

A business letter is a formal, polite, direct means of communicating with people in a different company or with customers. A memo, short for memorandum, is for internal—within a company—communication. It is also formal since it is dealing with co-workers or employers whom you may not know or know only slightly, and its purpose is to ask or answer questions, make a request, or suggest alternative actions. It follows a specific format.

Here is a memo. Note its format and choose the best way to answer the questions following.
Answers are on page 16.

Ludite Toys

To: Baby Doll Production Division
From: Marketing
Date: September 1, 2003
Subject: Holiday Sales

(1) We here at Ludite Toys take pride in delivering adequate quantities of product to stores. (2) The demand has been great for “Baby Blue” since the article came out in *Parenting Magazine* in June, and we are especially eager to see that customers will be able to get what they need for Christmas in December this year.

(3) Yikes, the shipping of dolls has been lagging this past month when they should have already been in the stores. (4) Has the production line been adjusted? (5) When can we reasonably expect an increase in shipping? (6) Our customers are screaming at us! (7) Let us know ASAP.

1. Sentence 1: **We here at Ludite Toys take pride in delivering adequate quantities of product to stores.**

- 1) no change necessary
- 2) move sentences after (7)
- 3) remove here at Ludite Toys as it is unnecessary
- 4) capitalize the word product
- 5) put a comma after toys

2. Sentence 2: **The demand has been great for “Baby Blue” since the article came out in *Parenting Magazine* in June, and we are especially eager to see that customers will be able to get what they need for Christmas in December this year.**
 - 1) no change necessary
 - 2) move sentence before (1)
 - 3) do not capitalize June
 - 4) put exclamation point at end of sentence
 - 5) remove December as it is superfluous

3. Sentence 3: **Yikes, the shipping of dolls has been lagging this month when they should have already been in the stores.**
 - 1) capitalize dolls
 - 2) replace the slang, Yikes, with a more formal word such as Unfortunately
 - 3) place comma after month
 - 4) put question mark at end of sentence
 - 5) no change necessary

4. Sentence 6: **Our customers are screaming at us!**
 - 1) put after sentence (2)
 - 2) remove screaming at us and use a more formal phrase such as extremely angry
 - 3) put a question mark at end of sentence
 - 4) capitalize customers
 - 5) no change necessary

5. Sentence 7: **Let us know ASAP.**
 - 1) remove the jargon ASAP and replace with as soon as possible
 - 2) use exclamation point at end of sentence
 - 3) put after sentence (1)
 - 4) no change necessary
 - 5) put a comma after know

GED EXERCISE 2

GED Essay prompt: “Some people believe that movie theaters will disappear because television is far more popular than movies now. Compare movie-theater and television viewing and explain why you think movie theaters will disappear or will endure.”

(1) I’ve always loved movies! Ever since I was a kid, I’d go to the movies as often as I could I still go at least once in every seven. Even so, I think movie theaters will go poof.

(2) It’s costing big bucks to go to a movie. Like \$9 just to see one flick. I hate to put out that kind of dough to see a cheesy movie. I can stay home and watch mucho movies and chill, and, even if I pay for cable, I’m still not paying nine bucks a movie.

(3) One thing movie theaters have going for them is the big screen. And it is better to watch an epic movie on a big screen. But nowadays, it’s a whole different ballgame. Television screens keep getting bigger and bigger so that watching a movie like “Gladiator” is as much fun on a giant boob-tube that can go up to 60” as it is in a theater.

(4) Another reason I think movie theaters will disappear is that I don’t like standing in long lines to get tickets, then have to sit in a room filled stranger dudes. I like to watch a movie by myself or with a small group of buds. Not to mention cheaper popcorn and soft drinks! I can even have a freddy.

(5) It’s a bummer, but I think television is going to win out over movie theaters in the war for viewers. Has with me. Look on the bright side. We’ll get to see brand new movies right away on tv!

This GED Essay, while following all the rules for introduction, thesis statement, topic sentences, proof, and conclusion, is filled with slang, clichés, poorly constructed sentences, and informal writing. Go paragraph by paragraph and describe all the things wrong with this essay and put them under the correct heading. Answers are on page 16-17.

Slang

Clichés

Poor Sentence Structure/
Informal Writing

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)

GED EXERCISE 3

Mr. Harold Jones, President
Ludite Toy Company

Dear Mr. Jones,

(1) I wanted to let you no that I bought your Fly-High Kite, and I'm not happy. (2) You make a lousy kite. (3) It's really cheesy. (4) First time out it crashed it smashed my finger, too. (5) Somebody in your company really screwed up. (6) I want my money back, and I want another kite.

(7) Sincerely;
(8) Tommy Smith

Choose the one best answer to each question. Answers are on page 17.

1. Inside address and salutation:
 - 1) remove capital P on President
 - 2) remove capital C on Company
 - 3) correct as it stands
 - 4) replace comma with colon after Jones
 - 5) remove period after Mr.

2. Sentence 1: **I wanted to let you no that I bought your Fly-High Kite, and I'm not happy.**
 - 1) remove comma after Kite
 - 2) replace no with know
 - 3) replace I'm with you're
 - 4) remove capitals from Fly-High Kite
 - 5) sentence is correct as it stands

3. Sentence 2 and 3: **(2) You make a lousy kite. (3) It's really cheesy.**
 - 1) replace It's with Its
 - 2) capitalize kite
 - 3) sentences are correct as they stand
 - 4) sentences contain slang: replace lousy and cheesy with more appropriate words
 - 5) replace You with Your

4. Sentence 4: **First time out, it crashed it smashed my finger, too.**
 - 1) change too to two
 - 2) change it to you
 - 3) contains jargon
 - 4) change time out to timeout
 - 5) run-on sentence

5. Sentence 5: **Somebody in your company really screwed up.**
 - 1) contains slang
 - 2) capitalize company
 - 3) sentence is correct as it stands
 - 4) put a comma after Somebody
 - 5) fragment

6. Numbers 6, 7, 8:
 - 1) all are correct as they stand
 - 2) #6 is a run-on sentence
 - 3) remove capital from Sincerely
 - 4) remove comma after back
 - 5) replace semi-colon with comma after Sincerely

ANSWERS AND EXPLANATIONS

Page 1: Words You Need to Know

1. f
2. a
3. d
4. e
5. c
6. b

Page 3: Informal Writing

formal
informal
formal
informal
informal
informal

Page 3: Informal Replacement Words

Hey, Friend!	Hello
OK	all right
yeah	yes
couldn't	could not

Page 3: Try This

F
In
F
In
F

Page 8: Try This

- Johnny was absent ~~from school~~ yesterday because he had a cold ~~sickness~~.
- Dr. Smith, who will be leading the workshop ~~seminar~~, has a graduate ~~university~~ degree.
- Notice to employees ~~and workers~~: until further notice, the lunch hour ~~period~~ will be from 11:30 a.m. through 12:30 p.m.

Page 9: Try This

1. tacky
2. terminated
3. seized
4. ramshackle
5. befuddled
6. washed-out
7. transmit
8. fruitless
9. insensitive
10. cancel

Page 10-11: GED EXERCISE 1

1. (3) Since this is an internal memo, everyone knows the name of the company is Ludite Toys so these words are superfluous.
2. (5) It's not necessary to point out that Christmas is in December, therefore, December should be removed.
3. (2) The slang word yikes is too informal for this memo.
4. (2) The informal phrase our customers are screaming at us should be replaced with a more formal phrase.
5. (1) ASAP is an acronym, jargon, which should be replaced with the actual words.

Page 12-13: GED EXERCISE 2

Slang

Clichés

Poor Sentence Structure/
Informal Writing

(1)

kid = child
every seven = once a week
go poof = disappear

Ever since I was a kid, I'd go to the movies
as often as I could I still go at least once
in every seven. (run-on sentence)

(2)

big bucks = lot of money
flick = movie
dough = money
cheesy = second-rate, bad
mucho = many
chill = relax
bucks = dollars

Like \$9 just to see one flick. (fragment)

- (3) nowadays = these days
boob-tube = television
- whole different
ballgame
- And it is better to watch an epic movie
on a big screen. (combine with
previous sentence with a comma)
One thing movie theaters have going
for them is the big screen, and it is
better to watch an epic movie on a big screen
- (4) dudes = people, strangers
group of buds = friends
a freddy = a beer, Heineken
- Not to mention cheaper popcorn
and soft drinks. (fragment)
- (5) bummer = bad thing
tv = television
- look on the bright side
- Has with me. (fragment)

Page 13-14: GED EXERCISE 3

1. 4) Business or formal letters always have a colon after the salutation.
2. 2) Know is the correct spelling.
3. 4) These sentences contain slang: lousy and cheesy.
4. 5) This is a run-on. Break sentence into two sentences by putting period after crashed.
5. 1) This sentence contains slang: screwed up.
6. 5) The closing (Sincerely) always take a comma.