



GRADUATE RECORD EXAMINATIONS®

Practice General Test # 1

Large Print (18 point) Edition

Analytical Writing Sample Essays
and Commentaries



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The Graduate Record Examinations Practice General Test #1

Analytical Writing Sample Essays with Reader Commentaries

The Analytical Writing portion of the GRE® General Test consists of one writing task. This document contains the writing topic for Practice Test #1, the scoring guide, and sample responses with commentaries.

Note: Sample responses are reproduced exactly as written, including misspellings, wrong choice of words, typographical and grammatical errors, etc., if any.

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Analytical Writing

Sample Topic Directions

Plan and compose a response to the following issue. A response to any other issue will receive a score of zero. Make sure that you respond according to the specific instructions and support your position on the issue with reasons and examples drawn from such areas as your reading, experience, observations, and/or academic studies.

In an actual test, your response will be evaluated on its overall quality according to how well you do each of the following:

- Respond to the specific instructions on the issue
- Consider the complexities of the issue
- Organize, develop, and express your ideas
- Support your position with relevant reasons and/or examples
- Control the elements of standard written English

Before you begin writing, you may want to think for a few minutes about the issue and the instructions and then plan your response. Be sure to develop your position fully and organize it coherently, but leave time to reread what you have written and make any revisions you think are necessary.

Sample Topic:

The best ideas arise from a passionate interest in commonplace things.

Write a response in which you discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement and explain your reasoning for the position you take. In developing and supporting your position, you should consider ways in which the statement might or might not hold true and explain how these considerations shape your position.

GRE® Scoring Guide

Score 6

In addressing the specific task directions, a 6 response presents a cogent, well-articulated analysis of the issue and conveys meaning skillfully.

A typical response in this category exhibits the following characteristics:

1. It articulates a clear and insightful position on the issue in accordance with the assigned task.
2. It develops the position fully, with compelling reasons and/or persuasive examples.
3. It sustains a well-focused, well-organized analysis, connecting ideas logically.
4. It conveys ideas fluently and precisely, using effective vocabulary and sentence variety.
5. It demonstrates superior facility with the conventions of standard written English (i.e., grammar, usage, and mechanics) but may have minor errors.

Score 5

In addressing the specific task directions, a 5 response presents a generally thoughtful, well-developed analysis of the issue and conveys meaning clearly.

A typical response in this category exhibits the following characteristics:

1. It presents a clear and well-considered position on the issue in accordance with the assigned task.
2. It develops the position with logically sound reasons and/or well-chosen examples.
3. It is focused and generally well organized, connecting ideas appropriately.
4. It conveys ideas clearly and well, using appropriate vocabulary and sentence variety.
5. It demonstrates facility with the conventions of standard written English but may have minor errors.

Score 4

In addressing the specific task directions, a 4 response presents a competent analysis of the issue and conveys meaning with acceptable clarity.

A typical response in this category exhibits the following characteristics:

1. It presents a clear position on the issue in accordance with the assigned task.
2. It develops the position with relevant reasons and/or examples.
3. It is adequately focused and organized.
4. It demonstrates sufficient control of language to express ideas with acceptable clarity.
5. It generally demonstrates control of the conventions of standard written English but may have some errors.

Score 3

A 3 response demonstrates some competence in addressing the specific task directions, in analyzing the issue, and in conveying meaning but is obviously flawed.

A typical response in this category exhibits **ONE OR MORE** of the following characteristics:

1. It is vague or limited in addressing the specific task directions and/or in presenting or developing a position on the issue.
2. It is weak in the use of relevant reasons or examples, or relies largely on unsupported claims.
3. It is limited in focus and/or organization.
4. It has problems in language and sentence structure that result in a lack of clarity.
5. It contains occasional major errors or frequent minor errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics that can interfere with meaning.

Score 2

A 2 response largely disregards the specific task directions and/or demonstrates serious weaknesses in analytical writing.

A typical response in this category exhibits **ONE OR MORE** of the following characteristics:

1. It is unclear or seriously limited in addressing the specific task directions and/or in presenting or developing a position on the issue.
2. It provides few, if any, relevant reasons or examples in support of its claims.
3. It is poorly focused and/or poorly organized.
4. It has serious problems in language and sentence structure that frequently interfere with meaning.
5. It contains serious errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics that frequently obscure meaning.

Score 1

A 1 response demonstrates fundamental deficiencies in analytical writing.

A typical response in this category exhibits **ONE OR MORE** of the following characteristics:

1. It provides little or no evidence of understanding the issue.
2. It provides little or no evidence of the ability to develop an organized response (e.g., is disorganized and/or extremely brief).
3. It has severe problems in language and sentence structure that persistently interfere with meaning.
4. It contains pervasive errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics that result in incoherence.

Score 0

A 0 response is off topic (i.e., provides no evidence of an attempt to respond to the assigned topic), written in a foreign language, merely copies the topic, consists of only keystroke characters, or is illegible or nonverbal.

Sample Responses with Reader Commentaries

The following are sample responses and commentary on those responses, which explain how each response was scored. There are responses and scoring comments for essays with scores of 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1.

Reminder: Sample responses are reproduced exactly as written, including misspellings, wrong choice of words, typographical and grammatical errors, etc., if any.

The following sample response received a score of 6:

Passion is clearly necessary for a truly great idea to take hold among a people—passion either on the part of the original thinker, the audience, or ideally both. The claim that the most lucrative subject matter for inspiring great ideas is “commonplace things” may seem initially to be counterintuitive. After all, aren’t great ideas usually marked by their extraordinary character? While this is true, their extraordinary character is as often as not directly derived from their insight into things that had theretofore gone unquestioned. While great ideas certainly can arise through seemingly pure innovation... say, for example, Big Bang cosmology, which developed nearly all of its own scientific and philosophical precepts through its own process of formation, it is nevertheless equally true that such groundbreaking thought was, and is, still largely a reevaluation of previous assumptions to a radical degree... after all, the question of the ultimate nature of the universe, and man’s place in it, has been central to human thought since the dawn of time. Commonplace things are, additionally, necessary as

material for the generation of “the best ideas” since certainly the success among an audience must be considered in evaluating the significance and quality of an idea.

The advent of Big Bang cosmology, which occurred in rudimentary form almost immediately upon Edwin Hubble’s first observations at the Hooker telescope in California during the early 20th century, was the most significant advance in mankind’s understanding of the universe in over 400 years. The seemingly simple fact that everything in the universe, on the very large scale, is moving away from everything else in fact betrays nearly all of our scientific knowledge of the origins and mechanics of the universe. This slight, one might even say commonplace, distortion of tint on a handful of photographic plates carried with it the greatest challenge to Man’s general, often religiously reinforced, conception of the nature of the world to an extent not seen since the days of Galileo. Not even Charles Darwin’s theory, though it created more of a stir than Big Bang cosmology, had such shattering implications for our conceptions of the nature of our reality. Yet it is not significant because it introduced

the question of the nature of what lies beyond Man's grasp. A tremendous number of megalithic ruins, including the Pyramids both of Mexico and Egypt, Stonehenge, and others, indicate that this question has been foremost on humankind's collective mind since time immemorial. Big Bang cosmology is so incredibly significant in this line of reasoning exactly because of the degree to which it changed the direction of this generally held, constantly pondered, and very ancient train of thought.

Additionally, there is a diachronic significance to the advent of Big Bang cosmology, which is that, disregarding limitations such as the quality of optical devices available and the state of theoretical math, it could have happened at any point in time. That is to say, all evidence points to roughly the same raw intellectual capacity for homo sapiens throughout our history, our progress has merely depended upon the degree of it that a person happens to inherit, a pace that has been increasing rapidly since the industrial revolution. Yet this discovery had to happen at a certain point in time or another—it cannot have been happening constantly or have never happened yet still be present—and this point in time does have its

own significance. That significance is precisely the fact that the aforementioned advent must have occurred at precisely the point in time at which it truly could have occurred—that is to say, it marks the point in our history when we had progressed sufficiently to begin examining, with remarkable substantiated acuity, the workings of the universe across distances that would take millions of human lifetimes to reach or to traverse. The point for the success of this advent must necessarily have been, additionally, the point at which the audience concerned was capable and prepared to accept such a radical line of reasoning.

Both factors, a radical, passionate interpretation of the commonplace and the preparedness to accept such an interpretation, are necessary for the formulation of a truly great idea. If the passion is absent from an inquiry by the thinker or by the bulk of an audience, the idea will die out if it comes to fruition at all. If the material is not sufficiently commonplace to be considered by an informed audience of sufficient size, the same two hazards exist. Given these two factors, the idea must still be found palatable and interesting by the audience if it is

to hope to gain a foothold and eventually establish itself in a significant fashion.

Comments on sample essay receiving score of 6:

This outstanding response presents a cogent, well-articulated analysis of the complexities of the issue by arguing that (1) great ideas develop from commonplace observations that are interpreted in a radical way; and (2) passion is required of both thinkers and the audience in order for great ideas to take hold.

The argument is based on an extended example (Big Bang cosmology) and has two parts. The first part defines “commonplace things” as universal questions (i.e., the quest to understand the cosmos is commonplace, though complex, because it is an ancient and universal question) and places Big Bang cosmology in context with the scientific breakthroughs of Galileo and the Pyramids of ancient Mexico and Egypt. The second part explains Big Bang as the result of a convergence of factors: both thinkers and the audience must be ready to

reevaluate “previous assumptions” and accept “radical, passionate interpretations.”

The argument’s careful line of reasoning is strengthened by appropriate transitions between paragraphs (“Additionally,” “Both factors, a radical, passionate interpretation of the commonplace and the preparedness to accept such an interpretation, are necessary for the formulation of a truly great idea,” etc.) and within paragraphs (“Not even Charles Darwin’s,” “Yet,” “that is to say,” etc.). Fluent and precise language—advent, rudimentary, diachronic, shattering implications, megalithic ruins—and effective sentence variety also characterize this response as outstanding. Finally, despite the presence of minor errors (overuse of comma and inconsistent use of ellipses in paragraph 1), this response demonstrates facility with the conventions of standard written English.

The following sample response received a score of 5:

The statement above comes from the perspective that the best thinkers, inventors, and innovators are the way that they are because they explore passionately the interesting things around them. Yes, I would say that this is definitely true. I understand best the things that interest me, but it is only the things with which I am familiar with and understand in my surroundings. It would be difficult to take passionate interest in the things which I did not have available in my environment.

For example, let's consider some "idea" people in history. The person who invented the basketball hoop, or the game of volleyball, or ice skates, all had interest in those things before they had their brilliant ideas. I do know that the inventor of the basketball hoop used to coach a basketball team of young boys, and they would throw the ball into a fruit basket that was nailed to the wall. Obviously, a basket has a bottom to it, and they would have to fish it out after every successful throw. So he had the brilliant idea of cutting out the bottom of the basket. It seems so

simple to us now, but nobody had ever played basketball like that in his day.

The phrase, "commonplace things" can be rather misleading, I believe. I think every person has slightly different "commonplace things" in their environment depending on their interests, their financial status, and availability of items. What is commonplace for one person may never be known by another. I take passionate interest in things having to do with sewing using patterns, fabrics and threads. However, my mother and grandmother are excellent seamstresses and I had the availability of learning from them. It was a "commonplace thing" for me. I have had some wonderful ideas come out of my passion for this kind of art.

Orville and Wilbur Wright had a passionate interest in things having to do with flight, a rather ordinary thing for the sorts of birds who can fly with their wings, but certainly not people. If I had lived during the Wright brothers' time, I would probably not have had the same passionate interest in figuring out how to make humans fly, because it is not something that I would have thought possible. But

their dreams and visionary possibilities were much bigger than mine would have been at that time. They not only had a passionate interest but they were willing to experiment, to risk financial ruin and ridicule, and even put their lives on the line. So while it is true that the best ideas arise from a passionate interest in commonplace things, there also has to be an element of daring to challenge "norms" and not being able to just accept things as they are. There has to be a desire to make things better and to improve on the present.

There also has to be the element of not being afraid of failure. Most ideas do inevitably fail. Einstein is viewed today as being one of the most brilliant thinkers and "idea" people in all of history. But nobody really talks about how many times his ideas failed. The number is quite amazing. Many people are afraid of failure, so even though they make take a passionate interest in something commonplace, and have some great ideas, they may never carry them through because of uncertainty that they would work. We must be willing to try!

So, yes, it is true that the best ideas arise from a passionate interest in commonplace things, because these are the things that we know, these are the things that we understand, and the things that we want to explore in even more depths. But there must be more elements involved than just taking interest in something. We must be willing to face risks of many kinds in order to separate the ideas that fail from the ones that will triumphantly succeed.

Comments on sample essay receiving score of 5:

This strong response presents a well-considered analysis of the complexities of the issue by arguing that great ideas come, not only from a passionate interest in the commonplace, but also from great imagination and a willingness to succeed.

The logic of the response unfolds very smoothly: paragraph 3 explores the term “commonplace” and offers support for the prompt’s position; paragraphs 4 and 5 discuss the related issues of imagination, willingness to experiment, and overcoming failure. The examples are well chosen and generally well developed.

Paragraph 2 offers a relevant, though predictable, sports example (invention of basketball hoop) to examine how commonplace things/familiarity can spark great ideas. A personal example is used in paragraph 3 to further explore the definition of “commonplace” and illustrate how the term is relative to financial status and availability (though only the concept of availability is developed in this example).

Paragraph 2 logically extends into paragraph 3, and the same connection is seen between paragraphs 4 and 5. In paragraph 4 the Wright brothers are used to argue that great ideas also come from imagination and a willingness to experiment. The final example, in which Einstein is offered to illustrate the necessity of overcoming failure, is not as fully developed as the others. The respondent does not explain what failures Einstein endured or how he overcame them, which makes the example less compelling. Overall, the analysis demonstrated in the examples is “perceptive and clear,” but not “insightful and cogent” as required for a score of 6.

While the response expresses ideas clearly, using appropriate vocabulary and sentence variety, it does not use language as fluently and precisely as would a typical 6. Occasional wordiness/ awkwardness could be avoided with more precise diction (e.g., “There also has to be the element of not being afraid of failure,” or “I have had some wonderful ideas come out of my passion for this kind of art”).

The following sample response received a score of 4:

In agreement with the statement, many great inventions have come from individuals interested in commonplace things. Out of simplicity arises great ideas, and I would consider commonplace things to be simplistic. However, it is hard to say that the "best" ideas arise from passion in commonplace things, because one could argue that the best ideas involve interest in remarkable things, which is what makes them the "best" ideas.

If the statement is viewed from the standpoint of all ideas from the beginning of civilization, then the statement holds true. Examples of commonplace things are food and shelter. If a person had an abundance of food and needed to transport it, they may have the idea to weave a basket or make some sort of tote in order to load more at once. With that idea, eventually the people would think of things to make the first idea more useful, such as adding wheels to your carrying device. With shelter, first people (Cro-Magnon) may have kept out of weather and unsafe territory by using caves as shelter. From

passionate interest in the common shelter a person may have come up with brilliant ideas about structures, architecture, and construction.

In concern with the opposing view that the best ideas arise from remarkable things, one could argue that best ideas are medical breakthroughs and all other aspects of Science. Working with substances and molecules and creating ions and isotopes is not a commonplace thing. However, it is what the people who make the scientific breakthroughs have passionate interest in expanding.

Looking at the big picture, I would say that if people did not have "passionate interest in commonplace things", then the idea that led us to the remarkable things would have never occurred. If that is true then the statement holds true because the best ideas do arise from a passionate interest in commonplace things. Though some older ideas may seem obsolete now, there was a time that without those ideas, we would still be in the dark ages.

Overall, I agree with the statement. The best ideas do arise from a passionate interest in commonplace things. Though I do not consider medical breakthroughs coming from interest in commonplace things, our species appears to be reaching the point in which cancer and AIDS could be considered a commonplace thing. If that is true, then when someone finds a cure for cancer or AIDS it will be one of the best ideas arising from a passionate interest in a commonplace thing. Once again reinforcing the truth of the statement.

Comments on sample essay receiving score of 4:

This response presents a competent analysis and conveys meaning adequately.

Paragraph 2 offers appropriate and adequately developed examples from "the beginning of civilization" to illustrate how commonplace needs inspire innovation: the need to transport food led to the invention of woven baskets and, eventually, the invention of the wheel; similarly, the need for shelter that drove "Cro-Magnon" to the caves eventually

inspired “brilliant ideas about structures, architecture, and construction.”

Paragraph 3, which explores the “opposing view” (the best ideas arise from remarkable things), is less developed. The respondent claims that the best ideas are “medical breakthroughs and all other aspects of Science,” without explaining what is meant by “Science” or why these types of ideas are the “best.” Does “Science” include engineering, computer sciences, and the social sciences? Why are advances in science and medicine better than advances in religion, the arts, or philosophy? The response also fails to acknowledge the commonplace interests (e.g., desire to improve quality of life) that drive medical/scientific research. While the response addresses two sides of the issue, it never delves into complexity the way a 5 or 6 would.

In paragraph 4, the response comes to a new conclusion: without initial interest in commonplace things, interest in remarkable things would be impossible. This is an interesting position that, if developed and supported with well-chosen examples, could lead to complex analysis. However,

the conclusion is merely stated, loosely supported with generalities, and then further confounded by shaky logic in paragraph 5.

Ideas are expressed with reasonable clarity and the response generally demonstrates control of language. It is lack of complexity and logical development that keep this response from earning a higher score.

The following sample response received a score of 3:

How do new knowledge came into being? Sometimes it stemed from exsiting knowledge. Sometimes it was born all out of sudden. Both ways seem work well. As I see through this question, I believe that what plays a key role in creating new ideas is a passionate interest.

Throughout history, a myriad of examples help prove the importance of interest. Edison, the greatest inventors in the world, possessed a sharp interest ever since his childhood. In his eyes, every common things were full of mysteries. It was his unique interest

which helped him look into the mechanism of things around therefore new ideas came into his mind and, changed into concrete machines facilitating our lives. Another famous example is that of Newton. A riped apple from a tree fell onto his head one afternoon. For ordinary people, this kind of trivial instance would slip off their mind at once. However, Newton lost himself in thought of the relation between objects. Finally he found gravitation and opened up a new era of physics.

On the other hand, without interest, the opportunity of great discoveries will pass by. Most people are experiencing ordinary lives everyday. Why don't they come up with great ideas? Because interest is a state of skepticism, a state in which we do not stop to disclose the truth beneath a surface of commonplaces. Interest means the ability to explore the internal correlations. Therefore, with a passionate interest, those commonplace things are no longer commonplace, and new ideas are created.

From what have been discussed above, we can see that interest serves as force to propell the exploration of unknowns, to perfect the structure of human knowledge, and to move towards the ultimate truth.

Comments on sample essay receiving score of 3:

This limited response demonstrates some competence in its analysis and in conveying meaning but is obviously flawed.

The response agrees with the prompt by arguing that a passionate interest allows people to see beyond the commonplace and create new ideas (paragraphs 1 and 3). However, the response is limited in presenting and developing this position.

In paragraph 2 the response offers two relevant but underdeveloped examples to illustrate the importance of interest in generating ideas. The Edison example is not persuasive because its development is limited to generalities ("common things were full of mysteries...which helped him look into the

machanism of things...therefore new iders came into his mind and, changed into conceret machines"). The response does not provide specific examples of the common "things" that interested Edison nor does it discuss any of Edison's particular ideas. Thus, it does little to advance the response's position. The Newton example is not penalized for historical inaccuracy. However, like the previous example, it is overly general and underdeveloped.

The response also contains an accumulation of language errors (in usage, word choice, and sentence structure) that often result in a lack of clarity. For instance, the rhetorical device used in paragraph 1 contains frequent errors that render it ineffective. The imprecise language use in the Newton example is particularly unsettling: "Newton lost hisself in thought of the relation between objects. Finally he found gravitation and opened up a new era of physics." While these errors do not generally interfere with meaning, they constitute a lack of language control that precludes a score of 4.

The following sample response received a score of 2:

The above statement reinforces my values and beliefs. I agree that the best ideas arises from a paasionate interest. I agree simply because a person must be able to personally relate to a thing in order to become passionate to the idea. The person behind the best ideas are passionate because the commonplace things have affected the person on a personally level or on a mutual level. The relationship between the commonplace thing and the best idea unites a passionate interest to the person who it has affected. A person must have a desire to build on their passion in order to follow through on his or her idea.

Comments on sample essay receiving score of 2:

This response presents a seriously flawed analysis of the issue.

The response agrees with the prompt by arguing that a person must be able to relate to something in order to develop passion for it. (The connection

between things one can “relate to” and “commonplace things” is implied.) The response also states that passion is necessary in order for a person to follow through on an idea. However, neither of these claims is supported with relevant reasons or examples.

Furthermore, flawed word choice and other language control problems make the reasoning hard to follow (particularly in sentences 4 and 5: “The person behind the best ideas are passionate because the commonplace things have affected the person on a personally level or on a mutual level. The relationship between the commonplace thing and the best idea unites a passionate interest to the person who it has affected.” In those sentences the respondent attempts to analyze the relationship between commonplace things, passion, and ideas). Nevertheless, this response is not a 1: the respondent does provide evidence of the ability to understand the issue and attempts to present a position on it.

The following sample response received a score of 1:

This topic can be found to be true in many different areas. The best ideas that people have come up with are usually founded be improving commonplace things. For example in order to improve the effieency of writing the typewriter was invented, then following that the computer was invented.

Comments on sample essay receiving score of 1:

This response presents a fundamentally deficient discussion of the issue.

The first sentence consists of generic language that can be applied to any prompt. Thus, it neither enhances nor detracts from the analysis. The remainder of the response consists of a statement in support of the prompt and a list of two examples (the typewriter and the computer). The examples offered are potentially relevant but completely undeveloped. Basic errors in usage and grammar are pervasive, but

it is primarily the inability to develop an organized response that makes this response a 1.

**End of The Graduate Record Examinations
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