

How to Get a Higher Score on a Utah Write Essay
(Observations of Honors English classes who examined some scored samples)

Rule 1: Revise! Don't just edit! Fixing a misspelling will not help. You need to make significant structural and content changes (*-re-* = back/again; *-vis-* = look)

Content and Ideas: This score can be raised by writing more.

- Have an appropriate and complete introduction.
- Include enough background info so the reader knows what is going on even if s/he didn't read the book.
- Introduce characters.
- Describe things, use figures of speech, and include some flowery prose. This isn't a bulleted document in which you only state main points.
- Don't be too short/curt. Elaborate!
- Write more: Overkill (More examples, more evidence, more warrants....)
- More specifics, longer (and more engaging) details and examples –
- Always tie examples and evidence to the thesis/claim.
- Longer examples and warrants
- Write it like you would say it – “talk it out.” Make it clear.
- Exact quotations (in small doses) help.
- Use two examples to support each quote, not just one.
- Longer, more detailed and explanatory paragraphs
- Refer to text sources often: summaries and quotes
- More sentences that develop and explain claim/topic sentence
- Lead into examples; tell enough of the story to set up the argument clearly.

Organization: This score can be raised with clear topic sentences, transitions, and conclusion statements

- Indenting and spacing doesn't matter as much as clear topic sentences, conclusion statements, and transitions.
- Transitions: Reader should know clearly what comes next.
- Creative transitions, not mechanical ones (“There is another point to support....”)
- Smooth transitions
- Organizational “flow”: Leads the reader confidently through the paper.
- Clear direction
- Topic sentences must be clear, but they don't always have to be at the beginning of the paragraph.

Voice: There should be a “personality” to the writing; we should “hear” a speaker.

- Writer CARES about topic and wants to make a good argument.
- Writer is confident about his/her knowledge of the topic.
- Writer is believable and trustworthy.
- Writer knows what s/he is talking about.
- Writing sounds natural.

Word Choice: This score can be raised by elevating the complexity and creativity of your vocabulary.

- Use formal language.
- “Higher level, academic vocabulary” (but don’t overuse thesaurus -- still needs to sound natural.)
- Precise vocabulary: say exactly what you mean.
- Use strong verbs instead of lots of repetitive, bland adjectives.
- Powerful, “fresh” words, not clichés or overused phrases
- Too much repetition lowers your score: Do not say the same things in the same way.
- Using exactly the same wording in more than one place will lower score.
- Do not restate the thesis in exactly the same words.
- When you restate a claim, use completely different words; say things in a new way even if they express the same idea.
- No Bubbas!
- Avoid “I” and “you”
- Avoid sounding like a machine, falling into patterns for topic sentences, using the same sentence structure over and over.

Sentence Fluency: “Flow”

- Mix up the lengths of sentences: some long and complex; others short and direct.
- Combine sentences.
- Lots of choppy sentences will lower your score.
- Say things the “right way,” so meaning is clear.
- Paper reads smoothly and fluently.
- The essay should be easy to read aloud.

Conventions:

- Write complete thoughts – pay attention to what makes a sentence.
- Use quotation marks correctly.
- Punctuate properly.
- Spelling
- Capitalization
- Do not quote improper grammar: Utah Write still counts it as a mistake.

Evidence >>> Warrant >>>Conclusion: Helpful pattern!

“The Bigger Picture”: Not only should the reader understand the argument on the level of the text itself, but s/he should also be able to see how the themes apply to reality. This is what a WARRANT is for. Clearly warrant all evidence/quotes/summaries.

Higher scores explain/analyze EVERYTHING! Even someone who has not read the text will be able to understand your argument. Do not expect the reader to just trust you.