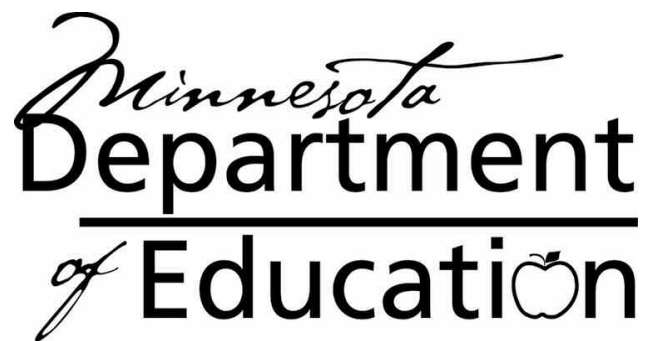


**MINNESOTA
BASIC SKILLS TEST
WRITTEN COMPOSITION
TEST SPECIFICATIONS**



**Assessment and Testing
1500 Highway 36 West
Roseville, MN 55113
<http://education.state.mn.us>**

MINNESOTA BASIC SKILLS TEST

TEST SPECIFICATIONS FOR WRITTEN COMPOSITION

ESTABLISHING LEGISLATION

The 1997 Legislature enacted into law M.S. 121.113, Statewide Testing and Reporting System, establishing the requirement for annual testing of all students at grades three, five, eight and high school with statewide tests at each of those grade levels. The Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA) in reading and mathematics fulfill the requirements for statewide testing at grade three. Reading, mathematics and writing MCAs fulfill the testing requirement in grade five. The Basic Skills Tests (BST) in reading and mathematics at grade eight fulfill the requirement for high school graduation. The BST Test of Written Composition first given in tenth grade fulfills the Basic Skills Test (BST) requirement for a high school diploma. In 2004, a grade seven MCA reading and mathematics tests, a grade ten MCA reading test and a grade eleven MCA mathematics test were implemented. In 2006, additional MCAs in grades four, six, and eight will be implemented to meet the requirements in the federal No Child Left Behind legislation.

In 2006, the test formerly known as the MCA/BST Test of Written Composition had “MCA” removed from its name because the test has no impact on Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for No Child Left Behind. It is now called the Basic Skills Test of Written Composition.

PURPOSE OF THE BASIC SKILL TESTS

The Basic Skills Tests in reading, mathematics and written composition are the “safety net” portion of Minnesota’s requirements for high school graduation. These tests measure some basic skills and knowledge representative of those that all students should have in a literate society. They are not graduation-level tests. Rather, they reflect minimum levels of math, reading and written composition. Because of that, students are encouraged to strive for broader and more complex levels of learning. The BSTs are only one tool for measuring basic skills and knowledge as students progress toward achieving higher, more rigorous standards. Students must pass the Basic Skills Tests in order to receive a diploma from a Minnesota public high school.

INCLUSION ISSUES

All students, with few exemptions permitted, are included in Minnesota's statewide testing program. Students who are Limited English Proficiency (LEP) identified may have a temporary exemption if they have been enrolled for fewer than three consecutive years of academic instruction in English. Accommodations are provided for students with Individual Educational Plans (IEP), 504 Plans and for students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). Accommodations do not compromise the validity, reliability or security of the test and are permitted in the areas of setting, scheduling, presentation or response formats. Permitted test accommodations include Braille and large print test materials, oral administration of the mathematics test, translations of the mathematics test and writing prompts into a student's native language, use of a word processor or a scribe. For complete information on accommodations permitted for the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments and Basic Skills Tests, see the documents on the Minnesota Department of Education Web site.

TEST RESULTS

Individual student test results are sent to the districts by the testing companies. The BST in Written Composition provides information on how well tenth graders write when compared to other students in the state with regards to the BST rubric. Students may receive a score of 0 – 6 on this test. A student score of 3 or above will pass the Basic Skills Test of Written Composition.

PROMPT AND MATERIAL SPECIFICATIONS

PROMPTS

A prompt directs students to write about a specific topic. Each prompts is formatted as a single sentences followed by a reminder to the writer to give specific reasons or ideas so that the reader will understand the response. Instructions remind students that they are writing for an adult reader.

The topics or prompts do not require any specialized knowledge and are evaluated for appropriateness and bias by advisory panels of education professionals from across the state prior to testing. Students may choose to respond to prompts in many ways. Student responses may draw from a variety of personal experiences. The written composition test is untimed.

TEST MATERIALS

Writing Prompt Folder – Each student receives a writing prompt folder. The folder contains the writing prompt, checklist of reminders and pre-writing pages. Students can work from their pre-writing pages to create a final draft copy for scoring. Schools discard prompt folders containing pre-writing after testing.

Answer Document – Each student also receives an answer document. The answer document contains three lined pages on which students write their compositions. Students are not allowed to write compositions of more than three pages in length for this test. Three pages are more than sufficient for students to demonstrate even the most advanced writing skills as defined by the score points of 5 and 6 on the BST rubric. Only writing in the scannable answer document is scored.

SCORING

CHARACTERISTICS EVALUATED

Clarity of central idea: the composition has a clearly stated message in direct response to the prompt.

Coherent focus: the supporting ideas expressed in the composition relate directly to the central idea and there are clear connections among ideas. This may be accomplished through transitional devices, parallel structure or other unifying devices.

Organization: ideas are expressed in an order that is logical and clear: the composition has a clear unifying structure. Students may choose one of a variety of organizational structures such as cause/effect, problem/solution, chronological sequence, topical order or spatial organization.

Detailed support or elaboration of ideas: the composition includes information, verbal illustrations, explanations and/or examples which clarify and expand the central idea for the reader. These details should also be logically connected to the central idea.

Language conventions: features of language that cause written communications to be acceptable in standard discourse. Their correct use is important to ensure the meaning of the written composition is not impaired. The writer should apply rules of

sentence formation, vocabulary, word order and language mechanics including punctuation, capitalization and spelling of standard written English.

SCORING RUBRIC

A rubric is a set of criteria or scoring rules based on the identified essential characteristics of composition. The Minnesota Basic Skills Test of Written Composition uses a focused, holistic rubric as defined by Minnesota teachers, to score papers.

Papers are scored using the Written Composition Basic Skills Test rubric. This is done to maintain consistency at the passing line from year to year. The Basic Skills Test rubric is included on pages 6 and 7.

Descriptions of the score points in the rubric and samples of student essays are used to train readers to score compositions. Each sample paper is accompanied by an explanation for the assigned score. Readers continually refer to this scoring guide when rating student compositions.

BASIC SKILLS TEST OF WRITTEN COMPOSITION RUBRIC

Not scorable = Responses that cannot be evaluated: Not Passing

The composition:

- is not related to the topic (off topic) (OT).
- is not readable because it is wholly illegible or incoherent (UR).
- is written largely or entirely in a language other than English (NE).
- contains an insufficient amount of writing to evaluate (IN).
- is non-existent (blank) (BL).

Score point 1 = Below Basic Composition: Not Passing

The composition:

- is related to the assigned topic.
- is very difficult to follow.
- may lack a coherent focus.
- is disorganized.
- may contain errors in sentence formation, word usage and mechanics that are frequent enough to detract from the overall quality of the composition.

Score point 2 = Below Basic Composition: Not Passing

The composition:

- is related to the assigned topic.
- may be somewhat focused.
- may lack a beginning, a middle or an end.
- may present obstacles for the reader in moving from idea to idea.
- may contain errors in sentence formation, word usage and mechanics that are frequent enough to detract from the overall quality of the composition.

Score point 3 = Basic Passing Composition: Passing

The composition:

- is related to the assigned topic.
- has a central idea that is clearly expressed.
- has some supporting details and sufficient development.
- has a beginning, a middle and an end.
- may present minor obstacles for the reader in moving from idea to idea.
- may have errors in sentence formation, word usage and mechanics, but they do not substantially detract from the overall quality of the composition.

Score point 4 = Competent Composition: Passing

The composition:

- is related to the assigned topic.
- has a central idea that is clearly expressed.
- is well developed with supporting details.
- has a beginning, a middle and an end.
- demonstrates a control of language that enhances the overall quality of the response.
- may have errors in sentence formation, usage and mechanics, but they do not detract from the overall quality of the composition.

Score point 5 = Skillful Composition: Passing

The composition:

- is related to assigned topic.
- remains consistently focused on a central idea.
- is evenly and richly developed with selected supporting detail and/or elaboration that clarifies and expands the central idea, but may have occasional lapses.
- has an effective beginning, middle and end, and an overall sense of wholeness; may use transitional devices, parallel structure, or other unifying devices to provide a mostly clear, unified progression of ideas.
- demonstrates control of language that enhances the overall quality of the response; includes some specific and engaging word choice, along with some purposefully varied sentences.
- demonstrates knowledge of the rules for sentence formation, word usage and mechanics. May contain occasional errors, but they do not detract from the overall quality of the composition.

Score point 6 = Exceptionally Skillful Composition: Passing

The composition:

- is related to assigned topic.
- remains consistently focused on a central idea.
- is evenly and richly developed with ample, selected supporting detail and/or elaboration that clarifies and expands the central idea.
- has a purposefully crafted beginning, middle, and end, and an overall sense of wholeness; uses transitional devices, parallel structure, or other unifying devices to provide a clear, unified progression of ideas.
- demonstrates a consistent control of language that enhances the overall quality of the response; includes precise and engaging word choice and purposefully varied, rhythmic sentences.
- demonstrates a command of the rule for sentence formation, word usage and mechanics. May contain minor errors, but they do not detract from the overall quality of the composition.

STUDENT RECORDS

It is the district's responsibility to determine and document whether a student meets the Basic Skills required for graduation and the manner in which they met the state BST requirement. While the state has set a minimum passing score, local districts may require a higher standard for graduation. The state minimum for passing Basic Skills Test of Written Composition is a score of 3 or higher.

BST-related codes have been used for a number of purposes over the years. MDE no longer collects these codes from districts. However, districts are required under Minnesota Statutes Section 120B.11 and Minnesota Rules 3501.0160 and 3501.0270 to publish an *Annual Report on Curriculum, Instruction and Student Performance* (formerly the *System Accountability Report*) in October. These rules require the reporting of BST passing rates for identified populations in the district. In addition, the local school district is required to officially record the BST status of a student with an IEP. Passing rates are also used for IDEA graduation reporting through special education. (The district decides whether to record BST scores on the student's transcript.) Districts may find these codes useful when querying their student information systems.

BST Code	Explanation	Code may be used with:			
		General Education Student	Student with IEP	Student with 504 Plan	Student with LEP designation
PS	Pass State —Student passed at the state level with or without accommodations. ¹	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
PI	Pass Individual —Student passed at a level established in an IEP or 504 Accommodation Plan. ²	No	Yes	Yes	No
NP	Not Passed —Student did not pass at the state level.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
EX	Exempt-LEP —Students with LEP designation who have been in an English-speaking school for fewer than 3 consecutive academic years of English instruction may have a temporary exemption.	No	No	No	Yes
XS	Not Pass State Translation —Student did not pass at the state level using a state-validated translated mathematics test or written composition prompt. ¹	No	No	No	Yes
PT	Pass Translation —Student passed at the state level using a district-translated mathematics test or written composition prompt.	No	No	No	Yes
XT	Not Pass Translation —Student did not pass at the State level using a district-translated mathematics test or written composition prompt.	No	No	No	Yes

¹ Student with LEP designation may have used a State-validated translation for the mathematics test or written composition prompts. State-validated translations of the BST mathematics test and written composition prompts are available in Hmong, Somali, Spanish and Vietnamese.

² Students whose ALT bubble is filled on their answer document for the BST may take the MDE Alternate Assessment, and they receive a Pass Individual for the Basic Skills Test.

BST codes no longer used: PL (Passed LEP), NT (Not Tested), XI (Not Passed at Individual Level).

BST code added: NP (Not Passed)

The record will be left blank if the student did not attempt the standard established for him or her.

REMEDIATION

Students who do not pass the Basic Skills Tests must be given appropriate remediation.

- A district will provide opportunities for remediation.
- A district will determine whether the student's score reasonably reflects the student's attainment of these basic skills.
- A district will determine appropriate remediation recommendations for attainment of these basic skills.
- A district will establish an Individual Learning Plan* for any student who has yet to pass the any Basic Skills Test by the end of 10th grade as required under Minnesota Rule 3501.0110
- For students with Special Education designation, appropriate modified standards may be established through the IEP or 504 process.
- LEP students may be eligible for a temporary exemption if they meet pre-determined criteria.

NOTE: *An Individual Learning Plan (ILP) is not a Special Education IEP (Individual Education Plan).

At least one testing opportunity must be offered each year in the subject area(s) students have not yet passed. The writing test is administered for students in grades 10-12 in January and July each year. Seniors who have not passed will be given an additional testing opportunity in April of their senior year.

WRITTEN COMPOSITION HANDBOOK

More specific details about the testing materials, prompts, and the scoring process are available in the Written Composition Handbook, which is published annually for Minnesota parents, teachers, and schools. Sample essays and annotations are also included in the Written Composition Handbook, which is available on the Minnesota Department of Education Web site or by request from the Department.

REPORTING

Test results are released to the school district from the testing vendor. Local school districts are responsible for communicating scores to students and parents.

Any information in these test specifications will be made available in an alternative format upon request. The Department of Education permits unlimited reproduction and distribution of this document.