

This commentary is the first of two articles on the Analytical Writing Assessment (AWA), a new component in the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT). Here, we examine the AWA's historical significance and address questions regarding the relevance of the new writing test for management education. A comparison of what the AWA measures with GMAC's claims and business schools' expressed needs suggests that the AWA furnishes new information indicating MBA applicants' academic abilities, especially critical thinking and analytical writing abilities. However, as a writing test the AWA predicts students' performance in only one mode of writing required by MBA studies, and it is of little relevance to management writing in the workplace. Overall, we find the AWA to be a limited academic writing assessment that will meet only some of the expectations of management educators.

WHAT IS THE RELEVANCE OF THE GMAT ANALYTICAL WRITING ASSESSMENT FOR MANAGEMENT EDUCATION? A Critical Analysis, Part 1

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In the fall of 1994, the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) introduced a new section called the Analytical Writing Assessment (AWA). Characterized by the president of the Graduate Management Admission Council (GMAC), William Broesamle (1993), as "the most significant change in the GMAT since it was first administered," the AWA adds writing performance to a standardized multiple-choice test. Now, in addition to completing the objective, quantitative, and verbal sections, individuals taking the GMAT write two short essays.¹ The essays are assessed by several evaluators to produce a single overall AWA score for each test taker,

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ranging from a low of 1 to a high of 6. Subsequently, when an individual applies to MBA programs, his or her AWA score (e.g., 5.5) and essays are provided to each school. The AWA scores and essays are intended “to help business schools select the best applicants for admission” and to serve as “a diagnostic aid for determining whether prospective and accepted students need specific work to develop communication skills” (GMAC, n.d., p. 1).

Our purpose is to analyze the new GMAT Analytical Writing Assessment and its potential impact on management education in two articles. In this first article, we examine the AWA’s historical significance, placing the test in the context of recent developments in management education, and we address the following critical questions regarding the relevance of the GMAT writing test for business schools:

Is the AWA useful for MBA admissions?

Will the AWA identify individuals with inadequate writing abilities for graduate work in management?

Will it identify students who may not perform well as writers in their management careers?

The second article (Rogers & Rymer, in press) focuses on the AWA’s effectiveness as a diagnostic instrument, exploring its value and consequences for management communication programs. The analysis in both articles is informed by a comparison of the results the AWA will provide with expectations expressed by the 355 GMAT-using schools that responded to a GMAC survey prior to the test’s development (Bruce, 1993).

Our analysis shows that the AWA contributes to management education by acknowledging writing as a significant management competency and by furnishing useful new data indicating MBA applicants’ academic abilities for graduate study in management. However, as a *writing* assessment, it has shortcomings. Because it tests general academic writing, the AWA only partially reflects the requirements of management studies and has little relevance to management writing in the workplace. Overall, we find the AWA

to be an *academic* writing assessment that will meet only some of the expectations of management educators.

WHAT IS THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE GMAT ANALYTICAL WRITING ASSESSMENT?

Traditionally, business schools have not been strong advocates of language testing. Many administrators have privileged the GMAT Quantitative score over the Verbal score, which evaluates reading comprehension, critical reasoning, and ability to identify syntactic and usage errors (O'Reilly, 1994). In fact, a decade ago a joint report by GMAC and the Educational Testing Service (ETS) recommended adding a writing test to the GMAT (Hecht & Alloway, 1984), but it was not adopted, reputedly because the benefits did not seem to warrant the high costs and the many difficulties of implementation, including concerns of business faculty about subjectivity in evaluating writing.²

So what motivated the introduction of the GMAT writing assessment now? We believe that the ongoing effort to reformulate MBA education in response to the business community and other stakeholders, an effort that acknowledges communication as a critical managerial ability, created a climate favorable to implementing the new writing test. Prompted by the business communities' increased concern for hiring and retaining the best managers, for serving customers well, and for competing in global markets, this reformulation of the MBA directly responds to complaints about the inadequacy of graduates' communication abilities.³ Numerous stakeholders in management education have issued appeals to business schools to ensure "that graduates are able to deal effectively with other people, both in person and in writing" (GMAC, 1990, pp. 19, 41). Certainly, there has been a felt need, within both the academy and the business community, to do something to improve management students' writing abilities. GMAC explicitly links the AWA with this need (GMAC, n.d., p. 1) and points to support (67% "strongly" and 23% "moderately") from business school deans and MBA program administrators (Bruce, 1993, p. 24).⁴

The GMAT writing assessment is particularly timely given that the most visible changes in management education focus on oral communication. General management curricula now include a range of communication subjects—interpersonal and group communication, workgroups, meeting and conflict management, decision making, leadership, corporate vision, and motivation—all of which tend to be perceived and taught as oral communication.⁵ By contrast, business schools have typically marginalized writing. Rather than treating it as a central management competency (like accounting), most MBA programs tend to claim that writing is sufficiently covered in the curriculum through assigned case write-ups and reports in a variety of core courses like finance, marketing, and organizational behavior.

Although some MBA programs offer communication courses that feature writing, there is no trend to establish writing pedagogy for management. Indeed, although some well-known business schools have recently added required management communication courses that include writing (New York University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology), others have eliminated such courses (Harvard). Across the country, writing is taught in communication core courses, electives, writing assessment programs, seminars and workshops, and remedial courses, and by integrating communication components into functional courses and field projects—offerings that vary tremendously school-to-school and constitute no standard component in MBA programs. This variety demonstrates that business school faculties have yet to determine how writing fits into the graduate study of management. Moreover, the accreditation directive to “include written and oral communication as an important characteristic” of the MBA curriculum (American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business, 1993, pp. 17-19) pays lip service to the importance of writing but provides little guidance as to how or where writing should be included in MBA studies. In short, management educators at all levels lack any consensus on the form or place of writing instruction in graduate management study (Munter, 1989a, 1989b, 1990; Shelby, 1994).

Given the current interest in reformulating MBA studies, the addition of a writing performance assessment to the GMAT should

not be underestimated. As a prestigious international exam, the AWA has great potential to focus attention on writing as a management ability. Under the auspices of GMAC and backed by the credibility of ETS, the new GMAT writing assessment will likely establish the need for writing competency for management studies and help shape its valued features. Moreover, as a performance assessment, the new test should bring recognition to management writing as a high-level cognitive ability rather than a low-level editorial skill (Rogers & Rymer, in press). The GMAT writing assessment may even encourage educators to consider that writing should be systematically integrated into MBA programs.

But will the AWA fulfill the expectations of business schools? Does the AWA appropriately test writing abilities needed by MBA students and future managers? To address these questions, we discuss the usefulness of the AWA for selecting the fittest among MBA applicants; we consider what the AWA does and does not measure; and we compare GMAC's claims with business schools' expressed needs for a GMAT writing test (Bruce, 1993). Finally, we examine the new test in light of business school educators' goals to improve the workplace-writing abilities of their MBAs.

WILL THE AWA PREDICT COMPETENCY FOR MBA STUDIES?

First and foremost, GMAC intends the AWA to be a "tool to help business schools select the best applicants for admission to graduate management programs" (GMAC, n.d., p.1). This admissions function of the new writing test garnered the support of 91% of GMAC survey respondents, with those from mainstream schools tending to expect the AWA to be "somewhat useful" and those from the "top" schools tending to consider the test to be "very useful" for making admissions decisions (Bruce, 1993, pp. 10-12).⁶ These survey results suggest that educators in the elite, highly competitive schools believe that the writing test may help them differentiate among outstanding applicants, those with high overall GMAT scores and excellent academic records, and perhaps identify any

international applicants whose English competency is questionable.⁷ Overall, potential users express a belief that the AWA brings something new to the admissions process.

Our analysis, based on theory and research on writing and writing assessment, confirms that the AWA should indeed provide GMAT subscribers with a new indicator of MBA applicants' abilities for academic work. Assessment research, including studies on other professional school tests such as the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT), demonstrates that a writing test measures something different than objective questions on language use (Koenig & Mitchell, 1988), so the AWA should fulfill GMAC's promise to enhance the value of the GMAT as a predictor of academic performance in the first year of MBA study. However, the AWA will not be as fully relevant to the writing required in the MBA curriculum as GMAC claims or as management educators expect because the writing test measures ability in only one type of classroom writing.

WHAT IS THE ANALYTICAL WRITING ASSESSMENT?

The AWA requires test takers to write two essays in response to two separate types of prompts or questions, one an "Analysis of an Issue," and the other an "Analysis of an Argument" (see the sample prompts in Figure 1). The Issue prompt invites writers to develop their own ideas about an issue, whereas the Argument prompt requires them to critique an argument fully presented in the question itself. Although labeled and focused somewhat differently, both prompts elicit the same genre or type of writing—the analytical essay—and scores for the two pieces of writing are averaged into a single AWA score.⁸

True to its name, the AWA is designed to test analytical writing. The AWA scoring guide defines the overall focus of the evaluation for both essays as the effectiveness of the analysis, with the specified criteria meeting conventional expectations for analytical writing (that is, evaluating ideas, assuming a position, developing reasons and examples, and organizing the material logically) (GMAC, n.d., pp. 10-15).⁹ Although the modes of writing have no

Analysis of an Issue

People often complain that products are not made to last. They feel that making products that wear out fairly quickly wastes both natural and human resources. What they fail to see, however, is that such manufacturing practices keep costs down for the consumer and stimulate demand.

Which do you find more compelling, the complaint about products that do not last or the response to it? Explain your position, using relevant reasons and/or examples drawn from your own experience, observations, or reading.

Analysis of an Argument

The following appeared as part of an article in a weekly news magazine:

The computerized, on-board warning system that will be installed in commercial airliners will virtually solve the problem of midair plane collisions. One plane's warning system can receive signals from another's transponder—a radio set that signals a plane's course—in order to determine the likelihood of a collision and recommend evasive action.

Discuss how logically convincing you find this argument. In explaining your point of view, be sure to analyze the line of reasoning and use the evidence in the argument. Also discuss what, if anything, would make the argument more sound and persuasive or would help you to better evaluate its conclusion.

Figure 1: Sample Prompts for the GMAT Writing Assessment (GMAC, n.d., p. 3).

hard and fast definitions, theorists typically contrast analytical writing with simpler forms like narrative, description, and exposition by noting its focus on a critical perspective and the evaluation of ideas (Durst, 1987). In turn, they contrast analytical writing with argumentation and persuasion by citing its almost exclusive focus on the logical development of ideas (rather than an assertion of claims, for example) with little or no concern for an audience (Hirschberg, 1990; Rottenberg, 1991). In sum, GMAC's claim that the AWA tests analytical writing seems justified (Bruce, 1993).¹⁰

WHAT DOES THE ANALYTICAL WRITING ASSESSMENT MEASURE?

According to GMAC, "the AWA assesses the ability to think critically and to communicate complex ideas," an ability that is "important to *academic* performance" [*italics added*] (GMAC, n.d., p. 2). Although it has long been assumed that writing facilitates thinking and learning the complex content in any subject area (Langer & Applebee, 1987; Ruggiero, 1991; and witness the writing-

across-the-curriculum movement), recent studies have confirmed empirically that writing—especially certain types of writing—can elicit critical thinking. Using protocol analysis combined with other methods, researchers have shown that analytical writing involves a wide range of reasoning operations—analyzing, integrating, re-conceptualizing, interpreting, hypothesizing, and evaluating ideas, as well as metacognitive procedural abilities essential to problem solving (Ackerman 1991; 1993; Durst, 1987; Penrose, 1992). But not all types of writing require these critical thinking abilities. In contrast with such typical classroom modes as narrative, description, and simple exposition, analytical writing is more cognitively demanding, and it has been shown that when assigned analytical tasks, less proficient writers tend to respond with simpler modes (Durst, 1987). Therefore, an analytical writing test can be an effective means for differentiating those applicants with highly developed cognitive abilities who can create a critical perspective and both evaluate and communicate complex ideas, from those individuals who can only reproduce information (Schumacher & Nash, 1991).¹¹

WHAT DOES THE ANALYTICAL WRITING ASSESSMENT *NOT* MEASURE?

Although GMAT users seemed to endorse GMAC's choice of analytical writing for the test by confirming the genre's relevance to the MBA curriculum (Bruce, 1993), the AWA does not adequately represent the writing required of students in MBA programs. Certainly, analysis is valued in MBA courses, and some MBA writing assignments may seem similar to the analytical essays required by the GMAT, but research suggests that MBA writing, like all advanced classroom writing, is far more complex than the analytical essays required for the GMAT writing test (Forman & Rymer, 1993; Freedman, Adam, & Smart, 1994).

Of chief importance, the AWA tests analytical writing that designates no particular audience, whereas research shows that MBA faculty regard persuasive writing for a specific audience highly important for students in their first year of graduate study (Bridgeman & Carlson, 1984). By contrast, the task that the AWA

requires of the test taker represents a type of classroom writing that some scholars have come to call “essayist literacy,” a generic kind of writing associated with academe, including student papers, essays, and reports (see Farr, 1993). Valuing logical development, clarity, and correctness, essayist literacy tends to be self-contained and isolated from the social context, with the writer and the reader not represented as persons but implicitly assumed as “rational minds.” The AWA tasks—following in this essayist tradition of classroom writing, which is above all depersonalized and rational—designate no audience or situation but simply direct the writer to present generalizations supported by reasons.¹² The writing is essentially decontextualized as much as it possibly can be, and the fact that the essays will be read and evaluated by an academic audience with a compositionist bent is only vaguely implied by criteria in the published scoring guide (e.g., “well chosen reasons,” “diction and syntactic variety,” and “facility with the conventions of standard written English”; GMAC, n.d., p. 10).¹³ As examples of essayist literacy, the essays that AWA test takers write are not in any way specific to management;¹⁴ in fact, they are similar to the writing elicited in general large-scale writing assessments, composition instruction, and much undergraduate classroom writing in many fields. In short, the AWA writing tasks ignore MBA programs’ emphasis on ability to persuade specific audiences through writing.

In contrast to the GMAT analytical essay, much MBA classroom writing is closely related to the writing of management practice, especially argumentation in which a student must defend recommendations with evidence to persuade particular stakeholders (Freedman, Adam, & Smart, 1994). In MBA courses, for example, students are often asked to play managerial roles requiring them to write from various perspectives, such as a marketer, operations specialist, advertising manager, and so on. These exercises require MBA students to apply the language of a particular business field to a specific management situation outlined in a case or presented in a project or field-study experience (Christensen, 1987).

In addition to cases and exercises that require students to assume managerial roles, much MBA classroom writing is also influenced

by the specialized disciplinary writing in various functional business fields, such as finance, human resources, and real estate (see Driskill, Ferrill, & Steffey, 1992). Researchers studying writing in many different disciplines, including writing directly associated with business, have established that writing within each discipline is influenced by the purposes, practices, values, and contexts of a particular academic community (Devitt, 1991; McIsaac & Aschauer, 1990; and see Olsen, 1993). In other words, the writing within any academic discipline is not only cognitive, it is also inherently social (Jolliffe, 1988; Lipson, 1988). In fact, the more advanced a writer is in a discipline, the more domain-specific his or her writing abilities become, and the more significant the social dimension becomes (Carter, 1990). As an apprentice member, a student begins learning to think, to speak, and to write in a disciplinary community by practicing the relevant classroom discourse that foreshadows to some degree the professional discourse in which he or she will eventually engage (Russell, 1991).

Research on disciplinary discourse has yet to affect the way writing is regarded in business schools, although the integral role that discourse plays in developing disciplinary knowledge has been recognized for some time (Bazerman, 1983), and scholars have begun to explore the integral role of discourse in the basic social sciences on which business depends as well as in the business disciplines (Henderson, Dudley-Evans, & Backhouse, 1993; McCloskey, 1985; Nelson, Megill, & McCloskey, 1987). Indeed, disciplinary writing remains largely "invisible" to business academicians, with its characteristics neither explicitly defined nor directly taught (Russell, 1991). Faculty—assuming that their own writing is simply a conduit for conveying research results rather than an integral part of their formation of new knowledge—typically consider their students' writing to be a vehicle for demonstrating analytical skills and course content; therefore, writing well means transmitting information logically and clearly. It is not surprising, therefore, that 76% of the business school respondents to GMAC's survey viewed "analytical writing" as "very important" in their MBA programs (Bruce, 1993, p 8).¹⁵

But management educators should not assume that the AWA indicates how well students will perform on written assignments for MBA courses. Just because students can produce effective analytical writing does not mean that they can produce the domain-specific writing expected in management classrooms. Despite common beliefs that writing comprises basic skills that readily transfer across situations, there is no global concept of "good writing" and no single definition of an expert writer (Faigley, 1986). Different disciplines tend to assign specific types of classroom writing tasks and focus on different characteristics in evaluation (Bridgeman & Carlson, 1984). Just as the rules, expectations, and standards all differ to some degree by the type of discourse, research shows that different writing tasks or genres require different cognitive abilities and skills from a writer (Nystrand, 1989; Webster & Ammon, 1994).

Numerous studies on writing assessment also demonstrate that writers' abilities vary depending on the nature of the writing task or genre (Applebee, Langer, Mullis, Latham, & Gentile, 1994; Engelhard, Gordon, & Gabrielson, 1991; Purves, 1992; Quellmalz, Capell, & Chou, 1982). Not unexpectedly, then, writers' effective skills in performing one task may not readily translate to other types of writing (Langer, 1992; Witte & Cherry, 1994). For example, Forman's (1989) research on field-study projects demonstrates that MBA students who were proficient writers in other genres were unable to do an effective job writing strategic reports. Without instruction and practice in the new genre, students' abilities transferred imperfectly to the new mode and in some respects even inhibited their success. Thus, by asking GMAT test takers to write analytical essays, the AWA predicts performance in only one mode of academic writing; it does not necessarily predict performance in other types of tasks assigned in the MBA curriculum.

What can we conclude regarding the value of the AWA for testing the writing abilities of applicants for MBA programs? Business schools can expect the AWA to predict the critical thinking abilities of many applicants, an indicator of their readiness for MBA studies. The AWA will also predict many applicants' performance in analytical writing, one type of writing that is required in MBA pro-

grams. However, when interpreting the AWA scores and using the test results, business school administrators and faculty should not expect that the AWA measures the range of writing abilities necessary for MBA studies. Students with high AWA scores do not necessarily have the abilities to write their MBA assignments effectively; some writing competencies, especially argumentation and persuasion, demand writing abilities not encompassed by analytical writing.¹⁶

WILL THE AWA PREDICT WRITING COMPETENCY FOR THE WORKPLACE?

GMAC's 1993 survey reveals that business school respondents assumed the AWA would be relevant to managerial writing and many endorsed the AWA as a test of workplace writing ability. Summarizing respondents' support for the new test, GMAC announced that "effective writing skills are needed in order to succeed *in both graduate school and business*" [italics added] (Broesamle, 1993, p. 2). In fact, the survey results show that the most frequent reason respondents gave for favoring adoption of the AWA was MBAs' need for effective writing skills to succeed in business, not in graduate school (Bruce, 1993). The prevalence of survey responses citing complaints from employers and pressure from alumni and the business community further suggests that user expectations for the writing test centered on the workplace. As previous research has indicated, business faculty tend to consider effective writing more important to MBA graduates' career success than to their success in MBA coursework (Bridgeman & Carlson, 1984).

Although GMAC never claims to fulfill expectations that the AWA would be relevant to career writing, GMAC's promotional statements imply that the AWA pertains to writing performance in both the academy and the workplace. The introductory brochure, for example, states that the AWA addresses "new management demands" in which the ability "to write effectively has become more important" (GMAC, n.d., p. 1). Additionally, several GMAC

publications announce that the AWA will assess ability to develop a “communication strategy,” “present logical arguments,” and to be “persuasive,” (GMAC, n.d., p. 1), thereby creating an erroneous impression that the test covers rhetorical principles associated with management writing. Developing a communication strategy implies an audience and situation; being persuasive involves adapting content and language to achieve an objective with a particular audience (Shelby, 1991); and presenting logical arguments implies developing claims, data, and warrants for specific discourse communities (Toulmin, 1958). In fact, as we have discussed above, the AWA evaluates none of the elements traditionally associated with developing a communication strategy for an audience, but instead advises test takers to explain their own views and opinions, almost seeming to encourage a literary notion antithetical to the workplace—a notion that “you must write for yourself and not be gnawed by constant worry over whether the reader is tagging along behind” (Zinsser, 1990, p. 27).

Despite implications that the AWA might be relevant to management writing, the test itself is true to GMAC’s explicit and official descriptions: The AWA exclusively tests academic writing ability. Throughout the development of the AWA, GMAC was scrupulously careful to define what the test would measure and what its specific purposes would be. In GMAC’s many official publications over the past couple of years, the AWA is always presented as a test of academic abilities for academic purposes. It is consistently described as an “analytical writing” test pertinent to “academic programs” in graduate schools of management, and the AWA score is referred to as “an important indicator of academic performance” (GMAC, n.d., p. 9). Yet might AWA results provide a reasonably accurate gauge of some writing abilities that are important in the workplace? Would it be safe for deans and MBA program administrators to conclude that those who score well on their AWA essays will write well on the job?

Not necessarily. Fundamentally, the AWA does not evaluate writing for management because the test does not place the test taker in a rhetorical context requiring him or her to adapt ideas and language for an intended audience. In sum, the AWA does not

evaluate key attributes of management communication competency, such as the ability to persuade, to be sensitive to the needs and expectations of others, and to negotiate between dissonant perspectives. Nor does the AWA assess the kind of writing that MBA graduates will encounter in their business careers—writing which, above all, is transactional between writer and audience in a specific situation, accomplishing communication objectives in light of organizational considerations and constraints (Cross, 1994; Driskill, 1989; MacKinnon, 1993).

Observing best assessment practices, GMAC never directly claims that the AWA tests some universal “good” writing, a kind of umbrella discourse that pretends to cover both academic and workplace writing. However, GMAT users, like many of those surveyed by GMAC, might assume that the AWA tests writing abilities for both school and work, as GMAC promotional materials imply. Some users also might infer that the AWA will distinguish “good” writers from “bad” writers, believing that the AWA measures writing abilities that are universal and readily transferable to business.

If such assumptions are made, will it really matter? We believe it will. If the AWA is assumed to represent competence in managerial writing, scores may be used to signal students’ expertise to business constituencies or to exempt students from courses where managerial writing is taught. Such decisions would be unwise, for although the AWA measures critical thinking and a common mode of academic writing that make it useful for admissions decisions, the AWA scores and essays are not designed to predict applicants’ competencies as managerial writers. Schools cannot assume that applicants who score high on the AWA do not need management communication training, nor can they assume that those scoring low necessarily need remedial work. The vast majority of writers perform at different levels of effectiveness depending on the type of writing; for instance, some may score well on an academic task like the GMAT analytical essay, yet do poorly on a case write-up or a management writing task like a persuasive memorandum. Given the design of the AWA, business schools should not expect that the AWA will predict applicants’ competencies as *managerial*

writers. At most, the AWA tests a narrow academic genre that will not predict performance in the workplace.

CONCLUSION

Our analysis indicates that the GMAT Analytical Writing Assessment stakes out a new position for writing in management education by calling attention to writing as a critical management ability. After reviewing the new GMAT writing assessment, we believe that it will provide business schools with useful information that is not currently available: It will serve as an additional predictor of success in MBA study, especially in terms of applicants' critical thinking abilities, and it will provide schools with data on applicants' analytical writing abilities. However, the AWA only partially meets the expectations of management educators. As a test of analytical writing, the AWA is of limited relevance to writing in MBA programs or to managerial writing in the workplace. Rhetorical and social aspects of writing are excluded, aspects that are fundamental to management education and practice. So, despite all the publicity about a special writing test for the Graduate Management Admission Test, the Analytical Writing Assessment evaluates only one of the important modes of writing among an array required in business school classrooms, a mode that is of limited relevance to the world of management.

NOTES

1. To accommodate the AWA, the objective sections (Quantitative and Verbal) were each reduced by 15 minutes, and the GMAT time was extended by 30 minutes for a total of 4 hours and 30 minutes. For test design, administration, and scoring of the AWA, add a fee, originally set at \$17, to the cost of the GMAT (Broesamle, 1993).

2. Subjectivity of raters in evaluating writing still concerns 4% of GMAT-subscribing schools (Bruce, 1993, p. 21). Also, see Bruce, 1992.

3. Over the past decade, and particularly since the publication of such milestones as Boyatzis's *The Competent Manager* (1982) and Porter and McKibben's (1988) study of management education, there has been a highly visible movement to "reinvent the MBA," including the addition of training programs for interpersonal skills, team-building, and leadership through "Outward-Bound" type activities and practical assignments (Bigelow,

1991; A Survey of 1991; O'Reilly, 1994). These programs are based on a growing belief that strong verbal abilities are of greater importance than narrow technical skills for effective management, a belief exemplified by the fact that the most common ability sought by organizations hiring MBAs today is communication ability, both in written and oral form (O'Dowd & Liedtka, 1994).

4. The GMAC survey of attitudes toward a writing assessment was conducted in March 1993. The survey covered all GMAT-using institutions; the final sample included 355 schools (65%), with slightly disproportionate representation of GMAC members and schools with full-time programs. Respondents were primarily deans and MBA program administrators.

5. Teamwork, for example, is perceived as an oral activity (Schwindt, 1990). Teams may be encouraged to use writing as a tool for recording decisions (Scholtes, 1988) and for brainstorming (Moore, 1994), but seldom is written communication recognized as central to the team process itself (Rogers & Horton, 1992).

6. Schools whose matriculating students have mean GMAT scores higher than 500 tended to see some usefulness in the AWA for admissions purposes, but it was primarily elite schools that saw admissions as the primary use for the AWA (Bruce, 1993, pp. 11-12; and p. 34 for definitions of "top" schools).

7. Beyond the scores, the actual essays might also represent a valuable resource for admissions officers in making decisions about difficult cases such as borderline applicants and international students. In contrast to the typical application essay, which can be written with assistance, the AWA provides a controlled writing sample.

8. The two essays of the same genre or type of writing on different topics should improve the validity of the test (Brown, Hilgers, & Marsella, 1991). Packaged differently and accompanied by separate, though similar, scoring guides, the two prompts roughly represent the same genre, with the advice for test takers appearing in a single list for the two tasks: "[The evaluators] will consider how well you organize, develop, and express your ideas about the issue or argument; provide relevant supporting reasons and examples, and control the elements of standard written English" (Kelly, McHale, Munter, & Zak, 1994).

9. In addition, the AWA Scoring Guide asks evaluators to look at language use, particularly diction and syntactic variety, and control of textual conventions (grammar, mechanics).

10. GMAC publications repeatedly differentiate the genre assigned in the AWA from exposition (e.g., Bruce, 1993, p. 8), and although they never explicitly differentiate the AWA from argument, they only casually refer to the need for "logical arguments" (GMAC, n.d., p. 1) in the writer's presentation of supporting examples drawn from personal experience, observations, and reading (GMAC, n.d., p. 3).

11. The conclusion that the AWA tests applicants' critical thinking abilities should be tempered somewhat because of time constraints. For a writing test to assess critical thinking, test takers need adequate time for reflection, and for some, the 30 minutes allotted per essay in the AWA may be insufficient for the task; in fact, the 30-minute limit might inhibit some from revealing their full cognitive abilities. For test takers who cannot immediately respond to the prompt, thinking critically about the assigned issue and formulating a written analysis, for those test takers the AWA may suggest a lack of sufficient cognitive ability for graduate study in management, but this may be an erroneous conclusion (see Ackerman, 1991; Koenig & Mitchell, 1988; Ruth & Murphy, 1988). For those test takers who can immediately engage in critical analysis, the AWA provides an opportunity to demonstrate their academic talents.

12. Like other large-scale assessments aiming for high interrater reliability, the AWA advises evaluators to "disregard irrelevant features such as a writer's personality, attitudes,

and beliefs" in developing the score (GMAC, n.d., p. 7). The writer and the reader are both excluded as much as possible from the evaluation process.

13. The AWA is a standard writing task evaluated by writing instructors from various academic departments, mainly from English. Although ETS already includes some business writing instructors as evaluators, the most common factor among current AWA evaluators is experience in composition classrooms, and this is the most likely factor generating consensus in scoring (see Pula & Huot, 1993). Some studies suggest that the ratings of specially trained "professional" evaluators do generalize to others' perceptions of writing quality (Bochner, Albertini, Samar, & Metz, 1992), but the AWA raters' perspective is less managerial than compositionist and contributes to the general academic writing orientation of the test.

14. The topics assigned in both the Issue and the Argument prompts cover matters of "general interest," which might include some business-related questions, but do not presuppose any business knowledge. This nondisciplinary aspect of the test is to be expected, however, because the GMAT is not a test of business knowledge but a test to predict performance in the first year of graduate study of business.

15. It is noteworthy that GMAC survey respondents were given no options of writing tasks but were simply asked about the relevance of analytical writing. Considering the emphasis on analysis and analytical skills in MBA instruction, it is not difficult to see how respondents would confirm the importance of analytical writing in the curriculum.

16. Even designers of a more advanced form of assessment could not expect to cover all the disciplinary areas that contribute to MBA programs because students' understanding of disciplinary writing develops while studying management subjects. However, the AWA could more directly reflect writing related to MBA studies by incorporating rhetorical features highly valued for management (e.g., audience awareness, contextual responsiveness, and persuasive discourse).

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