02/18/00

Tools to Facilitate Transitions into Unfamiliar Writing Contexts

Priscilla S. Rogers
University of Michigan

Jone Rymer
Wayne State University

Priscilla S. Rogers
University of Michigan Business School
701 Tappan Street
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1234
O 734-764-9779
F 734-936-6631
psr@umich.edu

Jone Rymer
3701 Middleton Drive
Ann Arbor, MI 48105
H 734-996-1521
F 734-662-6199
jone.rymer@wayne.edu

Is writing in a new context largely dependent on "being there" over time? Can transitions into unfamiliar contexts be facilitated by diagnosing writers' performance in a type of writing they already know? With little information about transferable writing skills and no valid and reliable tools to facilitate such transitions, these questions remain unanswered. This field study identified four traits in academic essays (task, coherence, reasoning units, and error interference) that are significant for quite a different writing context, namely MBA programs in business schools. Analyzing more than 400 essays from the GMAT Analytical Writing Assessment, the research team identified transferable traits and developed tools describing them from a communicative perspective highlighting reader needs. The tools were tested through essay readings (including blind scoring), followed by consultations with 50 matriculating MBA students. Results from the readings, student surveys, and consultations showed that the tools enabled students with diverse needs to identify writing deficiencies relevant to their new writing environment. The findings suggest that these four traits and the communicative focus of the tools may be applicable to writer transitions into other unfamiliar contexts, including the workplace.

Tools to FacilitateTransitions into Unfamiliar Writing Contexts

For some years, social constructionist theory, research, and practice have

demonstrated that there is no valid way of defining what makes a good writer without

asking about the writing's context, discourse community, genre, and social circumstances

(Faigley, 1992; Fairclough, 1993; Brown & Herndl, 1986; Rogers, 1989; Smeltzer & Fann

Thomas, 1994). This robust line of research has demonstrated that--to a greater or lesser

degree--writing goals, practices, processes, expectations, and standards all differ across

disciplines (Bazerman, 1988; Swales, 1998), types of writing (Northey, 1990; Swales,

1990), and professional/organizational contexts (Driskill, 1989; Thornton, 1992). No

wonder that individuals often have difficulty communicating with people in other groups

and problems making the transition into new roles and writing contexts (Freedman, Adam,

& Smart, 1994; Hill, 1992; Mathes, 1986). Indeed, research suggests that writers'

competence varies as they move from one context to another (Nystrand, 1989; Webster &

Ammon, 1994; Witte & Cherry, 1994). Individuals may fully learn discourse practices

only after actively participating in a community; even expert writers sometimes require

extended periods to gain facility in new writing contexts (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995;

Winsor, 1996). In short, one of the current orthodoxies of our discipline finds effective

written communications as contingent on context and challenges assumptions about

commonalities across writing communities (Suchan, 1998).

If writing like an expert depends in large part on "being there" for some period of

time and learning the habits of a particular community, how can we help individuals move

into new writing contexts? Beyond basic textual skills like writing grammatically correct

sentences (Anson & Forsberg, 1990; Kent, 1993), there is little evidence regarding what

kind of writing deficiencies evident in writers' familiar discourse might be relevant

elsewhere--such as writing required of students entering a professional program or

managers confronting multiple new constituencies in fast-changing businesses.

All these issues about transferable skills across contexts confronted us in a very

practical way with the addition of essays to the Graduate Management Admissions Test

(GMAT), the entrance examination for graduate business schools worldwide. Although

the holistic scores on the GMAT essays (called the Analytical Writing Assessment or

AWA) cannot be used to diagnose students' particular writing needs, our preliminary

study showed that the essays themselves promised to be a rich source of information

about incoming MBA students' writing abilities (Rogers & Rymer, 1996a & b). The

problem was that the AWA essays represent a very different type of written discourse

than students face in their MBA writing assignments, so determining what the AWA

essays might tell us was neither straightforward nor simple.

The AWA essays were promoted by the Graduate Management Admissions

Council (GMAC) and the Educational Testing Service (ETS) as a kind of writing relevant

to MBA and business writing (GMAC, n.d.). In fact, the essays actually represent a

generic kind of analytical writing associated with academe, especially papers assigned in

introductory humanities courses (Rogers and Rymer, 1995a & b). Some scholars call this

classroom writing "essayist literacy," describing it as rational and decontextualized text in

which both writers and readers are largely invisible (Farr, 1993; Farr & Nardini, 1996). In

contrast, MBA writing is highly contextualized in the culture of the business school and

typically requires writers persuading particular audiences from managerial and

disciplinary perspectives, for example, as a financial analyst, human resources manager, or

operations specialist (Bridgeman & Carlson, 1984; Forman & Rymer, 1999a & b;

Freedman, Adam, & Smart, 1994; Rogers & Rymer, 1995a & b; Russell, 1991).

So despite some similarities as classroom analytical writing tasks that can

demonstrate critical thinking ability (Ackerman, 1991; 1993; Durst, 1987; Penrose, 1992),

the AWA essays and MBA writing represent quite different discourses. How, then,

might the AWA essays be used to help new students transition into the discourse practices

of MBA writing? More to the point, could the AWA academic essays offer an opportunity

to help students identify deficiencies that might interfere with their development into

effective MBA writers? This became the central question of this study.

To bridge these two contexts, we conducted a field study with writing experts and

MBA students in two business schools. First, we identified traits reflected in the AWA

essays that writing experts considered relevant to successful performance in MBA writing.

Second, we described these traits and developed them into analytical tools that could be used

to facilitate writers' transitions into the unfamiliar discourse practices in graduate business

school. Results from scoring essays and student consultations show that the analytical tools

are relevant to widely diverse students' development as MBA writers, useful in helping them

identify and address their own potential deficiencies. In practical terms, therefore, the study

provides a way for MBA programs to tap the enormous potential of the relatively unused

AWA (Knight, 1999; Noll & Stowers, 1998), a writing test taken by over 200,000 students

annually. In theoretical terms, the study's significance lies in the approach it explores for

linking discourses, providing a way for writing experts and non-experts alike to use

performance in one context and community to facilitate their development in the practices of

a new world of writing.

Literature Review and Theoretical Background

Searching for a means by which to bridge these two writing contexts, we

determined to develop "analytical tools" as a practical vehicle for assisting learners. Most

relevant for this study, several tools have been developed and tested for both management

writing and oral presentations by Rogers and her colleagues (e.g., Quinn, Hildebrandt,

Rogers, & Thompson, 1991; Rogers & Hildebrandt, 1993; Rogers, 1994; 2000). Having

been used with some success to assist both business students and professionals adjust to

new communicative demands, these tools suggested procedures and prospects for tool

development for this study.

To construct tools for linking AWA and MBA writing, we devised an analytic

scoring method because it can evaluate specific factors or traits of writing (Purves,

Gorman, & Takala, 1988). Rather than merely evaluating overall text quality like the

holistic AWA score, an analytic method can offer several significant reasons for an

evaluation of text quality and diagnose specific problems (Huot, 1993; Pula & Huot,

1993; Yeh, 1998). Thus, tools based on an analytic scoring method could potentially help

writers to identify deficiencies in their AWA essays that might inhibit their MBA writing

tasks.

Procedures for developing an analytic scoring method to evaluate specific factors

of written text are well established (Wolcott with Legg, 1998) Developing an analytic

scoring instrument involves two major steps: identifying the particular factors, sometimes

called "traits," relevant to the goals and appropriate for the type of writing to be

evaluated; and developing the scoring explanation and scale descriptors. Based on a long

tradition in both research and practice, analytic scoring was championed by ETS

researcher Paul Diederich in his "Five Factors" for essay writing (that is, Ideas, Form,

Flavor, Mechanics, and Wording; Diederich, French, & Carlton, 1961; Diederich, 1974).

Indeed, a variety of analytic scoring schemes has been devised for many significant

research projects, especially those determining what factors particularly impact overall

quality in a holistic score (e.g., Connor, 1990; Connor & Lauer, 1985; Hoetker, 1982; Yeh,

1998). The foundation of some influential classroom instruction (Elbow, 1993), analytic

scoring (though typically considered to be too expensive) has also been adapted for some

large-scale assessments. The Vermont state assessment, for example, scores writing on

purpose, organization, details, tone, and grammar (DeRemer, 1998).

Despite the fact that analytic scoring offers ample precedent for developing a

system to evaluate individual writing traits, it presents significant problems for a study

attempting to bridge two discourses. First and foremost, analytic scoring developed for

one discourse type does not necessarily apply to another (Faigley, Cherry, Jolliffe, &

Skinner, 1985). Considerable research shows that analytic scoring schemes must be -

adjusted to each new type of writing (Lloyd-Jones, 1977; Walvoord & Anderson, 1998).

Indeed, the inability to span discourse types with one scheme caused the failure of

perhaps the most ambitious analytic scoring assessment ever attempted, the International

Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement. Researchers eventually

stopped the international study because, except for handwriting, evaluators could not

consistently score writing across discourse types (Purves, 1992).

Clearly, analytic scoring has tended to focus on texts; thus, there is no model for

applying a single analytic scheme to two discourse types that may define and value

particular features of writing quite differently. In addition, analytic and holistic scoring

alike have tended to ignore the communicative purpose of text, specifically factors of

writing as they facilitate interaction between writers and readers. Not only do the scoring

rubrics say little or nothing about audience, but the standard scoring technology designed

to achieve interrater reliability in scoring does not permit true "reading" as we know it--

that is from a communicative perspective by which readers' interpretive needs for

understanding actually form the basis for evaluation. Indeed, both analytic and holistic

scoring methods imply a decontextualized view of writing with evaluators acting as

"raters" who narrowly assess texts according to a testing rubric rather than as "readers"

who seek to understand writer intent (Haswell, 1998; Huot, 1996; Yancey, 1999). Yet,

we, like others (Kuriloff, 1996), wondered if focusing on the reader-writer relationship

might enable us to identify writing traits of concern across discourses.

Attempting to associate and thus bridge discourses by viewing texts through the

lens of "communicative interaction" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 68), we developed and applied

analytical tools in a social constructionist fashion. Spivey cogently described this point of

departure in which meaning does not reside in the text but is constructed collaboratively

by writers and readers:

> Writers construct meaning when they compose texts, and readers construct
>
> meaning when they understand and interpret texts . . . .[Readers] build a
>
> representation of meaning in response to discourse goals, using previously

acquired knowledge to operate on, and to embellish, the minimal cues provided by

the text . . . . A reader strives, as a writer does, to create a representation that is

not only internally coherent, in that it makes sense and hangs together, but is also

externally coherent, in that it is appropriate for the communicative context.

(Spivey, 1990, pp. 256-7)

Such a genuine or authentic reader tries to understand what the writer is trying to

say--that is, what the writing is seeking to communicate. An authentic reader reaches out

to the writer and plays an active role, participating by filling in details from the textual

cues and from acquaintance with the context. Such authentic reading does not, of course,

constitute a single method for reading all types of texts; as readers we use different

methods for different genres and in our various roles we may read texts of the same genre

quite differently depending on our purposes--simply using some texts as disposable

drafts while engaging in others fully, including assignments written by our students whose

needs we are attempting to understand. In this way, authentic reading contrasts sharply

with reading for the purpose of rating a text according to a scoring scheme. Authentic

reading represents the kind of reading we mean in referring to "writer-reader interaction"

in this study.

In short, rather than focusing the analytic tools on the AWA essays purely as

texts, we sought to identify reader-writer concerns in reading the essays that would also

be relevant to readers of MBA writing. As readers of AWA essays--anticipating

interaction with MBA writers in consultations about their writing deficiencies--we

constructed the scoring scheme to reflect significant reader-writer concerns in both types

of writing, emphasizing those factors that would elucidate needs in MBA writing.

Similarly, in applying the analytical tools, we eschewed the role of "raters" dictated by a

scoring rubric and adopted the broader perspective of "reader-evaluators," that is, readers

considering factors necessary for understanding the writer's intent. This kind of authentic

reading relates all aspects of writing to the central rhetorical relationship; everything, from

larger matters of context to surface matters of text, is contingent upon the interaction

between writer and reader.

Adopting a "reader-evaluator" perspective in preference to the more limited

evaluator role in constructing and using an analytic scoring system has strong support

among writing assessment scholars. Many are challenging both the validity and the

reliability of scoring procedures (Haswell, 1998; Hayes, Hatch, & Silk, 2000). Many are

calling for new forms of assessment that go beyond the notion of the written text as a

"right answer" which inevitably must constrain writers' choices as well as reading

processes of raters (Moss, 1994; Williamson, 1993). The reader-evaluator perspective is

also in harmony with current assessment trends among the wider psychometric

community (Broad, 1997; Huot, 1996; Moss, 1994). Theorists Guba and Lincoln (1989),

for example, call for replacing the psychometric model of assessment with a decision-

making process that involves sharing views with all stakeholders through discussion and

negotiation, seeking to reach a relative consensus. Valuing agreement but not requiring it

(with some similarities to the portfolio assessment movement) represents a "shift from a

desire for the uniform replication of scoring practice to an assumed negotiation and

acceptance of different readings" (Yancey, p. 493, 1999) because real readers are responding to real writers, not to texts in isolation.

Thus, during the initial development and the final testing of analytical tools in this study, we adopted the most authentic role possible, that of reader-evaluators trying to understand the student-writers and their needs. However, we also employed a more traditional rater role during the middle phase of the study. Here we rated the essays according to some standard assessment procedures, using blind scoring according to a rubric to achieve interrater agreement (White, 1994; Wolcott with Legg, 1998). We wanted to demonstrate some reliability for this research for those adhering to traditional psychometric principles, including many communication scholars and some stakeholders in business schools. Overall, our greater goal was to function as reader-evaluators, developing the tools that could engage novice MBA writers in a dialogue about the demands of their new writing environment. The effect of this multi-faceted methodology appeared to be effective in developing tools that help writers make the transition to the new discourse practices of MBA programs.

Method

Conducted by a research team drawn from two business schools, this exploratory field study involved three overlapping stages: first, reading essays to identify the specific factors or traits of writing--that is, recurring writing problems in AWA essays that are consequential for MBA writing; second, developing analytical tools--that is explanations of the traits together with a scoring rubric; and third, testing the analytical tools by blind scoring of the essays followed by authentic reading and consultations with MBA

students. After describing the research team, study sites, and sample data, we discuss our

research process involving trait identification and analytical tool development, and testing.

Research Team

Eight writing experts participated in this study, a primary group consisting of four

communication faculty and a secondary group of four writing tutors. All had long-term

appointments at one or both of the graduate business schools in this study, all were

familiar with the requirements and standards of MBA writing in a wide variety of regular

business classes and field studies, and all were experienced consultants on MBA writing.

Conducting the bulk of the research, the primary research group consisted of two faculty

colleagues working together with the two of us, the co-principal investigators. All four

primary researchers had conducted local writing assessments, served as ETS raters for the

GMAT AWA, and taught various MBA communication courses at one or both of the

research sites. The secondary group of writing tutors participated independently by

reading essays for a trait identification exercise.

As the principal investigators in this research, both of us participated in each facet

of the study. We also acted as outside observers, configuring the project, studying what

happened, interpreting it, and reporting it here. We acknowledge our immersion in all

these activities and, as many others in the interpretive tradition have admitted, we believe

in the power of subjective, informed perspectives and see our multiple roles as a source of

synergy, not as a conflict of interest (Cross, 1994; Doheny-Farina, 1993; Geertz, 1983;

Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Ray, 1993).

Research Sites

The research sites comprised two sharply contrasting MBA programs and business school environments that provided significant diversity in the study population. Located in large Midwestern public universities, one is a top-ranked or "elite" business school, enrolling a select few among many applicants worldwide, whereas the other is an urban "mainstream" school, enrolling full-time career employees in area businesses. The academic profile of students at the elite institution predictably showed very high GMAT scores with a third of the class ranked in the top 15 percent on the AWA. In contrast, records of the students at the mainstream program showed both GMAT and AWA scores just slightly above the average of all test-takers.[1]

Sample Selection

The first two stages in the study, identifying key traits and developing the analytical tools, involved reading hundreds of AWA essay samples from the two schools. The third stage, testing the analytical tools, focused on evaluating the essays with the tools and conducting writing conferences with students at both schools. Here we describe selecting the essay sample and the student sample.

To identify the traits and develop the analytical tools, we collected an overall sample of essays at all scoring levels, that is half-point intervals on the 6-point scale (except for the lowest AWA score of 1.0, which was unavailable at either school). The resulting sample comprised 230 sets of AWA essays (that is, 460 essays because each GMAT test-taker writes two essays), 100 sets from the elite school and 130 from the mainstream school (which afforded more mid- and low-scoring essays). Through initial

random holistic readings and discussions of these essays, the primary researchers

determined that the goals of the study could best be met by concentrating on essays with

mid- and low-level scores. We found these essays revealed frequent deficiencies

representing critical problems for students' MBA writing. (See Appendix A for sets of

AWA essays with the GMAT holistic scores.)

From the overall sample we subsequently selected four smaller, comparable

samples, each consisting of approximately 12 essays with scores clustered at the middle

and lower range (AWA 4.0 and below at the elite school and AWA 3.5 and below at the

mainstream school). Each of these smaller essay samples was used at some point in the

research process, to identify traits or to develop the analytical tools.

To test the analytical tools, we constructed a complementary sample of

matriculating students from the two business schools to participate in consultations based

on their AWA essays. The total sample was 50 students. After engaging eight students in

pilot consultations, we invited 20 students from the elite business school and 22 from the

mainstream school to participate in writing consultations.

Using a complementary (rather than proportional) student sample allowed for

reasonable distribution of AWA scores ranging from 2.5 - 4.0 with a mean score of 3.3.

The student sample from the elite school reflected the AWA scores in the entering MBA

class, but we weighted the mainstream sample with scores of AWA 3.0 and below,

especially at the 3.0 and 2.5 levels (Table 1). This weighting ensured a sufficiently diverse

group of low-scoring students whose writing would display deficiencies exemplified in all

GMAT test-takers worldwide, a quarter of whom scored AWA 3.0 and below. Because

only 12 percent of the students at the mainstream school had scored AWA 3.0 and below

(and the elite school only 4 percent), a proportional sample of participants would have

inadequately represented the lower-scoring students, the target group for our study.

[Table 1]

The complementary student sample also reflected substantial diversity by

GMAT score (elite mean of 620; mainstream mean of 462), undergraduate major, gender

(31 percent women), race/ethnicity (17 percent African American, the largest group), and

by proportion of international students (33 percent). Although the number of

internationals was much higher than in the matriculating classes at either school (elite at

20 percent; mainstream at 9 percent), one would expect English as Second Language (ESL)

speakers to be disproportionately represented among the lower-scoring ranks on an

English writing test.

Trait Identification

To identify the traits for building the analytical tools, the four primary researchers

read, discussed, and evaluated AWA essays, defining writing deficiencies likely to impact

student-writers' initiation into the new writing environment. Assuming the role of

authentic readers attempting to understand writers' meaning, we read each set of sample

essays aiming to answer the question: "What are the major communication problems in

these essays that I would discuss with this student-writer in order to help him/her with

MBA writing assignments?" After discussing and classifying our findings, we selected the

most critical recurring problems in both types of writing to form the bases of analytical

tools. Our goal was to develop an extensive list of communication problems and then

build a consensus on those that might critically affect performance in MBA writing. In effect, we were searching for problems in the genre of the academic analytical essay to identify potential problems in highly contrasting types of writing such as case analyses. Based on researchers' readings and discussions of many sets of essays, we developed tentative conclusions about the most significant communicative traits.

To serve as a check on our conclusions, we devised a separate analysis involving four MBA writing tutors. Following the same technique used by the primary researchers, each of these experts read ten sets of essays in the context of their tutorial obligations-- that is, when reviewing the essays, they listed the major problems that they as tutors would discuss with a student to help him/her write successful MBA assignments. Operating independently, these tutors attempted to review the essays as much as possible as they would review students' writing assignments for MBA consultations (that is, determining what the student needs to do to meet the professor's assignment). After reporting their individual findings in writing (Appendix B), the tutors met as a focus group with us so that we could explore their views further.

Negotiating among the tutors and primary researchers' conclusions, we reached a consensus on the deficiencies in the AWA essays most likely to affect MBA writing performance significantly. On the basis of strong agreement among the primary researchers and independent confirmation from the tutors, we identified three provisional areas of concern: addressing the assigned task, reasoning logically, and errors. With more modest agreement, we identified two other issues, organization and clarity. After preparing descriptions of these components, the primary researchers applied them in

analyzing new sample essays and eventually recast the organization and clarity

descriptions into a single factor, "coherence." Thus, we identified four essential traits

relevant to the communicative contexts of AWA essays and of MBA writing: addressing

the writing task, coherence, logical reasoning, and controlling error.

Interestingly, considerable assessment research verifies the validity of three of the

four traits as significant components of analytical writing quality--the error and reasoning

traits, and to a lesser degree, coherence. (Assessment research on the concept of task is

conflicted because of the frequent discrepancies between the assignment and how the

writer construes it; Cherry & Witte, 1998; Ruth & Murphy, 1988). Control of error rivals

logical reasoning as the most important predictor of overall argumentative essay writing

quality (Yeh, 1998), and it is particularly salient in predicting lower-scoring papers

(Haswell, 1998). Logical reasoning (the structure of argument from the Toulmin model) is

the most important predictor of overall writing quality as evidenced in holistic scores of

argumentative essays, while coherence is an important but lesser predictor, frequently

intertwined with reasoning (Bracewell, 1998; Connor, 1990; Connor & Lauer, 1985;

Crammond, 1998; Durst, Laine, Schultz, & Vilter, 1990; Yeh, 1998).

Tool Development

Based on the traits of task, coherence, reasoning, and error, we constructed each

analytical tool as a separate, stand-alone sheet including an explanation of the trait as it

relates to the reader-writer interaction and a standard 6-point evaluative scale with

descriptors.

Tapping the research team's expert knowledge of students' problems in preparing

MBA writing assignments, the analytical tools reflect the writer-reader interaction

involved in the review of the AWA essays and anticipate the demands of MBA writing.

The coherence tool, for example, describes what the writer might do (fail to provide

sufficient context and cohesive devices) and what the reader might do as a consequence

(perhaps reread, attempting to fill in the gaps). At first glance, the tools may appear to be

a type of checklist or "text-focused" evaluation system so familiar in textbooks (Schriver,

1989), but upon closer examination it becomes apparent that they explicitly concern

readers' evaluations of textual features in the process of attempting to understand the

writer's message.

Guided by the research literature and a recursive process of piloting the tools in

individual writing conferences, we designed the tools to be used by both writing experts

(for example, instructors and consultants) and by non-expert students conducting self-

assessments. Thus, we attempted to describe skills that contribute to effective

performance on each trait using language that non-experts might readily understand and

apply, even without the benefit of instruction. In constructing the reasoning tool, for

example, we found that the MBA students in our study required some definition of

"claim" and that the term "support" worked better than "data" in Toulmin's model of

informal logic (1958). Moreover, the tool simplifies Toulmin's model in accordance with

recent research suggesting that the concept of warrant is difficult even for sophisticated

writers to grasp and that claim and data are the essential components (Bracewell, 1998;

Crammond, 1998; Yeh, 1998).

Testing the Tools

The four analytical tools were tested by scoring essays and by conducting

individual student consultations. Each consultation was conducted by a member of the

primary research team using a consultation protocol designed for the study. Additional data

regarding the workability of the tools was obtained by anonymously surveying the students

after their consultations and by recording extensive research notes immediately after each

consultation.

To test the tools, the primary research team scored all students' essays "blind"--

independent of fellow researchers' scores and without any knowledge of the students'

identities. Thus, we followed several of the conventions in traditional writing assessments

aiming for interrater reliability (White, 1994; Wolcott with Legg, 1998). However, we

deliberately eschewed standard rater training and monitoring to achieve conformity. We

considered that these procedures would undermine our efforts to tap the knowledge of our

readers and to fully understand the needs of the student-writers (Haswell, 1998), the

primary goal of this study. Moreover, since the AWA is a set of two essays, the test

provided two writing samples that we used in a complementary way to interpret a writer's

needs. Instead of aiming for interrater reliability on the text by scoring one of the essays, we

read the two essays together, attempting to understand the writer's strengths and weaknesses

on each of the tools.

To prepare for the writing consultations, each research team member rescored the

essays of his/her designated students. Here we each assumed the role of an authentic

reader preparing to meet our student writers and help them diagnose their communicative

strengths and weaknesses with the aid of the analytical tools. For this reading, each

researcher investigated the identities of his/her individual students and reviewed pertinent

background information (AWA holistic scores, GMAT test scores, native language,

educational background). Finally, each researcher considered their fellow researchers'

comments and scores on the individual student's essays. In light of this fuller picture, each

rescored the essays of their assigned students. In addition, the researcher identified one or

two essential tools along with scores, and constructed a "writing profile" listing the

student's major writing strengths along with explicit suggestions to improve (Appendix

C).

Individual Consultations

Consultations with student-writers, averaging 40 minutes, were conducted face-to-
·face with over two-thirds of the students (69 percent) and by telephone with the remainder

who were all full-time employees at the mainstream school. (For the telephone conferences,

students received copies of their AWA essays and the analytical tools by mail so that they

could review them during the writing conference). These writing consultations were

structured by a protocol that incorporated the tools in a systematic way (Appendix D). Built

on research of writing tutorials, user-testing for document revision, and discourse-based

interviewing (Anson, 1989; Beach, 1989; Harris, 1995; Harris & Silva, 1993; Hynds &

Rubin, 1990; Odell, Goswami, & Herrington, 1983; Straub, 1996; Schriver, 1992; Walker &

Elias, 1987), our consultation protocol asked students to recollect their writing of the AWA

essays, connecting their recollections to the traits in the analytical tools to help them

consider communication issues that might impact their writing in the new MBA

environment. Writers can reliably recall the details of past writing experiences, especially if

the writing were significant to them and if they review and discuss actual passages of the

text (Chin, 1994; DiPardo, 1994; Green & Higgins, 1994; Smagorinsky, 1994). Indeed,

most students in this field study--expressing concern or anger about their low AWA scores-
-readily remembered their experiences in writing the essays some months or even a year

earlier. Prodded to explore their choices in composing the essays, the students remembered

much about the writing experience and articulated thoughts they may never have considered

before.

Student Survey

After the writing consultations, students completed an anonymous survey. This

post-consultation survey solicited information on students' attitudes toward the

discussion of their essays and whether they felt that the consultation with the analytical

tools furthered the understanding of writing concerns that needed to be addressed as they

entered the MBA writing environment (Appendix E). The survey response rate was 88

percent; only two students at the elite school and three at the mainstream school failed to

respond.

Researcher Notes

Post-consultation researcher notes and the "writing profiles" (Appendix C)

constitute the major qualitative data in this study. Ranging from 200-500 words of

narrative and analysis, the notes describe the student as a writer and his/her participation,

recount student comments and reactions to the tools, characterize the overall discussion

of the essays, and analyze the session in light of the goals outlined in the consultation

protocol. The writing profiles provide the researcher's observations on the student's

strengths and opportunities to improve.

The Analytical Tools

This section presents the primary outcome of this study, the four analytical tools:

task, coherence, reasoning units, and error interference. The tools form a logical

progression for discussing the writers' and the readers' actions (that is, their respective

processes in attempting to communicate). The task tool contextualizes the communication

event for writers and readers, examining what the writing is for. The coherence and

reasoning tools concern writers' development of content and readers' success in

comprehending it. The error tool explores the extent to which textual errors may distract

the reader or hurt the writer's credibility.

The tools are presented here in their final form as tested for this study. Each tool

synthesizes a significant body of research so the references are gathered in a note with

each figure. In addition, a revised generic version of the task tool--developed to use for

MBA courses, executive education, and company training programs--is provided in

Appendix F. (The task tool for the study was tailored to the AWA argument essay so it

is not suited to other applications.)

Task Tool

The task tool (Figure 1) treats the text as the writer's action in response to a social

need involving reader expectations and situational obligations.[2] The task tool highlights the

writer's responsibility for figuring out what the writing is for and what the readers expect--

whether the assignment is spelled out (as in the AWA), described somewhat vaguely (as in

some MBA assignments), or left up to the writer to determine. Fulfilling the task involves

determining the genre required, what to say and how to say it, and how to address reader

expectations. The task for the AWA argument essay, for instance, is narrowly academic,

asking a writer to analyze the logical structure of the argument, critiquing major flaws. In

contrast, the overriding task for much MBA writing is to pinpoint a critical business

problem, analyze it, and recommend a feasible solution for the circumstances.

[Figure 1]

The task tool can intensify writers' awareness that writing is interactive, involving readers who come to a piece of writing with certain expectations and requirements. Indeed, the tool explicitly acknowledges that there may be some discrepancy between the assigned task and the writer's interpretation of it. An AWA assessor evaluates the extent to which an essay critiques the particular argument statement in the test; an MBA professor determines if a student develops logical solutions to a business case by using the particular theories recently learned in class. Thus, "writing to the task," as we call it, involves both negotiating and fulfilling needs and expectations of readers.

The task tool further suggests that the nature of tasks and reader expectations can differ radically across contexts; writers cannot assume that choices appropriate for one situation will be applicable to another. Misunderstanding the nature of the task of critique can influence AWA writing in significant ways, as we have seen in reading hundreds of essays. For example, some GMAT test-takers, interpreting the writing task as a request to demonstrate their knowledge of Standard English, focus on crafting a syntactically and grammatically correct response without any solid analysis. Others revert to their own workplace writing experiences or impose their own expectations for a workplace audience on the AWA. Instead of writing an academic essay that critiques the argument, they recast the argument as a business problem and propose a practical solution for management. Applying the task tool to the AWA argument essay thus provides the perfect opportunity to discuss different writing contexts with very different audiences and contrasting expectations for writing.

Coherence Tool

The coherence tool (Figure 2) examines whether the writing makes sense to the intended reader.[3] A coherent text allows the reader to proceed with little or no re-reading, successfully interpreting what the writer is trying to say, point to point. Without explicitly mentioning psycholinguistic principles such as the "given-new contract," the coherence tool makes it clear that understanding the text depends upon shared writer-reader knowledge. According to the tool, the fundamental determinant of a text's coherence resides in the simple question: Does it hang together and make sense to its readers?

Despite this seeming simplicity, the coherence tool is very ambitious in scope and basic assumptions. Combining the discourse-structuring concept of coherence and the linguistic devices of cohesion, the tool covers skills in developing a thesis, organizing content, constructing paragraphs, and applying relevant grammatical rules on pronoun references.

The basic assumptions challenged by the coherence tool are also ambitious, especially the deeply-held belief that clarity is a property of text itself rather than of communicative interaction. For example, the tool asserts that the effectiveness of cohesive ties depends on the writer-reader relationship and communication rather than rules. Even though several well-known linguistic measures value frequent use of cohesive devices, large numbers of devices may not correlate with high coherence. In fact, experts' highly admired writing may display relatively few cohesive devices, while novices' awkward texts may be loaded with them. In short, the tool specifies that coherence truly depends on the writer's effective communication with the intended reader.

[Figure 2]

Derived from this communicative perspective, the coherence tool depends less upon writers' abilities to use textual devices than upon their skill in creating text for the context, appropriating sufficient textual features to make the text accessible for intended readers. As the coherence tool specifies, cohesive devices that connect one item to the next (such as transitions, references, repetition, and substitutions) and various types of metadiscourse (features that offer commentary on the text itself) may contribute to coherence, but the ultimate test is how readily the reader can comprehend the continuity of the writer's ideas, sentence-to-sentence, and the relevance and relationship of the text to the context ("Oh, yes," the reader may recall, "this comment refers to that meeting we had on Tuesday."). From this perspective, achieving coherence depends as much on what readers infer from the text as on what the text explicitly says. Accurately predicting reader inferences is critical to achieving coherence.

Taking this reader-based view, the coherence tool presents writing as highly dependent on the writing context, including the discourse practices and rules of the community and the type of writing involved. Indeed, what might be coherent to one set of readers in one context, could be unintelligible to those in other contexts. Moreover, individual readers have variable standards and criteria for judging a text's coherence; they apply different sets of standards and criteria in different circumstances, partly on the basis of their individual preferences and partly because of requirements in the various communities to which they belong.

The coherence tool specifies that the writer's responsibility is to create a text specifically for those who need to comprehend it. This requires learning the conventions and rules for communicating, including what kinds of expectations readers have, what they know, as well as how they typically use and read texts of various kinds. For example, in writing case analyses, novice MBA students must learn how to use the case to develop their analysis without retelling the story. All in all, the coherence tool represents an acknowledgement that there is no reliable method for fully explaining why readers may find one text coherent and another not; indeed readers' responses to a text represent the only reliable method for evaluating coherence.

Reasoning Units Tool

Evaluating effectiveness from a communicative perspective, the reasoning units tool (Figure 3) posits that a unit of discourse is not logical in and of itself but only as it has validity for an intended reader in a particular context.[4] The reasoning tool simplifies a model of informal logic which defines a unit of discourse as consisting of two irreducible components: claim (a conclusion the writer puts forward) and support (data and explanation for the reader). The tool focuses on these two components without explicitly discussing "warrants" that show connections between them because, as noted earlier, warrants are ambiguous for even experts to identify. Still, the concept of warrant is implied by the tool's name, "reasoning unit," and description. Clearly, to be a "unit," a claim and its support must be logically joined together.

[Figure 3]

According to the reasoning tool, the credibility and sufficiency of claims and support, and the adequacy of the links used to form them into units, all depend on reader interpretation and the communicative context. Readers distinguish claims from supporting evidence even in lengthy text and make decisions regarding the validity of claims based on the kind, relevance, and amount of supporting evidence provided. Moreover, claims and support vary in nature, density, and use--all depending on the writer's knowledge and relationship with the reader and the expectations inherent in the particular writing situation. For example, test evaluators reading an AWA essay for the argument question expect to find claims in the form of writers' personal opinions, observations, and knowledge of history and current events. In contrast, professors reading MBA students' field study projects expects claims-as-recommendations supported with disciplinary principles, models, extensive statistical analyses, and various calculations. In these and other writing contexts, readers have very specific assumptions and expectations that writers must consider to compose units of discourse that are sufficient and credible.

In contrast with the coherence tool, the reasoning tool tends to be user friendly, even for novices. The model of informal logic with claim and support is straightforward and well known. For writing experts, claim and data have long been used to evaluate writing quality, both in conjunction with holistic evaluation (e.g. criteria for the AWA issue question include "development of a position with insightful reasons and/or persuasive examples") and as the basis for analytical tools focusing on traits of discourse ranging from English essays of international students to managerial memoranda.

Error Interference Tool

The error interference tool (Figure 4) takes the communicative perspective that

errors are not simply "there" in the text, objective phenomena that can be counted

reliably.[5] Instead, errors are defined by the extent to which they interfere with

communication between the writer and reader. The error tool assumes that when reading

for meaning, most readers neither read for nor perceive errors unless the errors are severe

and/or frequent, or unless (like writing instructors and editors) they expect to find errors.

The error tool encourages users to read for meaning, noting errors only as they impede the

interpretive process. In other words, the error tool discourages hunting for errors. Instead

it asks users to assess whether textual features inhibit the writer's efforts to communicate

with the reader.

[Figure 4]

By confronting the whole notion of error as a dynamic component in the writer-

reader interaction, the error tool aims to strike a balance between the "cult of correctness"

and the notion that textual distractions do not matter. Although there is no consensus

among language style panels or researchers on how to define or measure error, errors can

be usefully classified for writers by how potentially disruptive they may be on readers'

attempts to relate to the writer and to understand his/her meaning. The error tool

discriminates among errors' disruptive power by suggesting that some textual

transgressions might receive no notice from target readers; others may distract readers,

affecting the writer's credibility; others may result in misreadings; still others may disrupt

the reading process altogether, causing the reader to wonder what the writer meant to say.

Classifying errors by their intrusion on the reading process underscores the idea that writers must adapt their editing procedures to different contexts and readers. Business and content-area academic readers, for example, may respond to fewer errors than writing instructors.

In addition to providing a communicative perspective for evaluating errors, the error tool also suggests the value of classifying errors by diagnosing the writer's developmental needs. For example, error patterns may demonstrate a writer's current stage in learning to control textual conventions and thus furnish an individual learning agenda. In contrast, random textual errors or "mistakes" resulting from drafting under pressure or inadequate editing may be within the writer's power to correct. Indeed, many textual conventions traditionally classified as "errors" may be perceived as errors by only an elite few, particularly many usage and mechanical violations of "Standard English." Devaluing such errors can attenuate some writers' anxieties about producing error-free text, helping them focus on severe and critical errors while concentrating on the communicative issues. In effect, the error tool attempts "to put error in its place," relegating error control to an editing skill that matters as it impedes communication or damages writers' credibility.

Results from Testing the Tools

This section reports quantitative and qualitative results from testing the tools. Blind scoring of the AWA essays with the tools, post-consultation survey data, and evidence from primary researchers' consultation notes suggest that the tools are effective in facilitating writers' transitions into a new writing context.

Blind Scoring

Data from blind scoring of the essays show that all of the analytical tools function

effectively according to standard assessment procedures. Each of the tools correlates

fairly well with the holistic score on the AWA essays, but none correlates highly (see

Table 2). This result suggests that the analytical tools identify components of writing

distinct from overall writing ability.

[Table 2]

Blind scoring also shows that the analytical tools discriminate among the four

traits of writing. The correlations in Table 3 indicate that error correlates only weakly

with task and reasoning, whereas it correlates reasonably with coherence—not unexpected

because errors can weaken cohesion. These results suggest that the error tool represents a

fairly distinct textual skill and that error-free writing is not construed as effective writing.

This is significant because research shows that error-free text tends to have a halo effect

on readers' evaluations, raising their scores on overall quality; conversely, error-ridden text

tends to have a negative effect on readers' impressions, lowering their scores on a text's

overall quality (Bloom, 1956; Haswell, 1998; Raforth & Rubin, 1984).

[Table 3]

Apart from error, the task, coherence, and reasoning tools correlate quite highly

with each other, but none is identical to any other. These results suggest that each of

these tools does, at least to a limited degree, differentiate a distinctive component of

writing. The relatively high correlations are not surprising; considerable research shows

that evaluators cannot easily differentiate such traits, particularly those as closely related

as logical reasoning and coherence (Durst et al., 1990; Raforth & Rubin, 1984; Witte &

Flach, 1994; Yeh, 1998).

Furthermore, interrater reliability of researchers' scores for this study

demonstrates that each tool comprises a distinct writing trait and discriminates among

levels of performance relevant to it (Table 4). Confirming previous research on scoring

error, the highest agreement among raters was achieved on the error tool (Haswell, 1998).

Whereas the scoring agreement on the task and reasoning tools is decidedly "fair to good"

(according to Fleiss's interpretation of Cohen's Kappa, 1981), agreement is just above the

level of "poor" for coherence.[6] Still, the interrater reliability is comparable or better than

rates achieved in many analytical assessments (DeRemer, 1998; and see Hayes et al.,

2000). Indeed, the rates of agreement are rather high considering that readers were not

trained or monitored to achieve conformity in their judgments and that they scored the

two AWA essays as a unit (a more complex task than in a conventional assessment in

which readers score each sample separately).

[Table 4]

Scoring as Reader-Evaluators

Subsequent to the blind scoring, each researcher prepared for the writing

consultations by rescoring the essays as an authentic reader-evaluator, taking into account

background information about the student as well as the blind scores. The resulting scores

correlate quite highly with the original blind scores, but less so than might be expected

were the goal of the reader-evaluators simply to achieve interrater agreement. As Table 5

shows, although the individual readers' scores on all tools except reasoning correlate with

the blind scores in the "excellent" range (according to Fleiss, 1981), none is higher than

.85. Clearly, in reading and rescoring the essays prior to the writing consultations, the

researchers did do something different in attempting to respond authentically to the full

individual and anticipate his/her needs.

[Table 5]

Student Post-consultation Survey

Post-consultation survey data demonstrate that the student-writers involved in

this study found the consultations with the analytical tools enhanced their learning about

writing in the MBA environment. Overall, the students explicitly said that they found the

consultation worthwhile (mean = 4.6 on the 5-point Likert-type scale), and their answers

to most of the other survey questions supported this view (Table 6).

[Table 6]

Responses on several questions show that students believed that the consultations

helped them begin to differentiate the academic writing represented by the AWA essays

from the MBA writing they were beginning to experience in their business school classes.

In effect, their survey responses ratify the notion that the traits presented in the

analytical tools can be applied in two different discourses. For example, most students

agreed strongly that some of the problems they were experiencing with their MBA

assignments had been identified by discussing their AWA essays (mean 4.7). Most also

acknowledged that the consultations went another step by helping them learn ways to go

about improving some problem areas that would be important for their MBA studies

(mean 4.4). Though with somewhat less enthusiasm, students also affirmed the value of

the analytical tools--both for learning about their problem areas in the AWA essays and

for understanding how to improve for their MBA writing assignments (mean 4.2).

Finally, about three-quarters of the students agreed that as a result of their participation

in the consultations, they felt "more confident about doing writing assignments in the

MBA program" (mean 3.8 at elite school; 4.2 at mainstream school). Since lack of

confidence can undermine writing performance (Pajares & Johnson, 1994), any claimed

increase in confidence is beneficial.

Notably, post-consultation survey results were quite similar between the two

business school sites for this study. Mean responses to four survey items directly

concerning learning about writing (getting answers to their questions, learning about their

problems, learning how to improve, and finding value in the consultation) were 4.61 (n =

18, SD .40) at the elite school and 4.63 (n = 19, SD .46; $t_{(35}$ = .14, p = .88) at the

mainstream school.

Researcher Consultation Notes

The consultation notes comprise the primary researchers' attempts to record

students' reactions to the consultations and the tools so that they are available for review

(Chin, 1994; Cross, 1994; Smagorinsky, 1994). Researcher notes of meetings with

individual students strongly suggest that the analytical tools facilitate a collaborative

discussion around issues of consequence for student-writers making the transition into the

new writing context. Indeed, these notes show that the traits presented in the tools

proved significant not only in regard to the graduate business school environment, but

also to the students' various workplace environments (Table 7[7]).

[Table 7]

The students in our sample typically found the analytical tools relevant to many

of their individual writing concerns and meaningful for evaluating their writing in

unfamiliar contexts, both in the business school and at work. While some of the concepts

presented in the tools were entirely new to them, researcher notes indicate that students

were able to use the tools with little or no instruction. Indeed, the tools prompted

students to apply the traits to their current writing tasks, to raise questions about

recurring problems they had experienced or about possible alternatives to their writing

habits, and to draw conclusions about the usefulness of the tools for evaluating their

MBA and workplace writing.

Discussion

This study demonstrates that students find the analytical tools helpful in

analyzing their AWA essays and can readily apply the tools to their MBA assignments.

Indeed, the tools facilitate students' discussion and personal assessment of their own

writing, enabling them to recognize significant opportunities to improve their writing in

the unfamiliar context of the MBA program. Although our student sample size is too small

to generalize from the results, the schools in this exploratory field study do represent

sharply contrasting educational contexts, and the participating students represent a wide

range of overall academic abilities and writing deficiencies. Therefore, the results may be

applicable to quite diverse contexts and users.

In practical terms, the tools offer an opportunity for MBA programs worldwide to

incorporate the AWA into their communications curricula, taking advantage of this largely

ignored resource. The task, reasoning units, and error interference tools work effectively to

assist student writers transitioning into the new writing context of the business school, and

the coherence tool works reasonably well. The correlative data suggest that the tools are

highly interrelated traits in terms of overall text quality, yet each constitutes a distinctive

concern. This allows the tools to function as an interactive set. Moreover, the isolation of

error in a separate tool attenuates conventional tendencies for evaluators to be unduly

influenced by errors when judging other components of writing (Haswell, 1998), and

thereby frees readers to focus, say, on the development of reasoning units. Indeed, the

power of the tools as a set derives partly from the limited array and composition of the

traits. Since the tools were developed to reflect traits in academic essays relevant to MBA

writing, they do not explicitly address some important requirements for business-school

writing (such as visual formatting), nor do they cover criteria that are part of the AWA

evaluation (such as syntactical variety, style, and diction; GMAC, n.d.).

In more theoretical terms, the study suggests that the tools may be applicable to

writers making other transitions besides moving from the AWA academic essays to MBA

writing. As the researcher consultation notes show, many students participating in this

study related the tools to their own workplace writing experiences. Subsequently, we

have extended these applications to other genres and contexts (see the pedagogical section

below).

Moreover, given the communicative perspective governing the tools, the particular

traits are likely to be of central significance to many discourse practices, including those in

the workplace. Rather than focusing on textual components, the tools raise such matters

as they are relevant to the writer-reader dialogue: the task tool focuses on whether the writer fulfills the assigned task for readers and the situation; the coherence tool on whether writers present a message that "hangs together" and makes sense for readers; the reasoning tool on whether writers develop claims and support that readers find logical and credible; the error tool on whether writers control errors sufficiently so that readers are not disrupted in trying to grasp the meaning. In effect, viewed through the lens of "communicative interaction," the traits may be applied in quite different ways to various writing contexts.

This focus on the communicative activity shifts attention to observations regarding what the writer and the reader do with the text. The communicative focus enables us to use the familiar writing of the academic essay to help student-writers to identify potential problems in the unfamiliar writing of MBA programs, and informally, to their workplace writing as well. As Witte argues, studies of writing in particular settings cannot be limited "to the study of printed and spoken linguistic utterances" (1992, p. 240). Discussing Toulmin's claim-data structure for logical argument, Bracewell explains that the "terms refer not to characteristics of an argument text, but to how information functions in the text, and as such implicate interpretive processes by the reader" (1998, p. 153), and we might add, implicate processes by the writer as well.

One might further argue that the writer-reader dynamic bridges different genres, contexts, and discourse communities. As numerous studies have shown, for example, argument structure can be appropriated to very specific disciplinary demands and to practices of diverse discourse communities--what is convincing to an attorney, for

example, may be quite unconvincing to an engineer (Miller & Selzer, 1985; Spilka, 1990;

Winsor, 1996). Focusing on reader needs, the reasoning tool accounts for such contextual

variation. Similarly, coherence and error may be perceived quite differently by

management professors, their peers in English departments, or managers (Hairston, 1981,

1992; Leonard & Gilsdorf, 1990, 1999). Construing the task, reasoning logically,

developing coherent and relatively error-free text all do matter to these readers across the

board, although each is likely to perceive and operationalize each trait quite differently,

context to context. By focusing on reader needs, the tools allow for such differences; they

can be variously applied.

Implications for Research

As an exploratory study, this project suggests a variety of research opportunities

involving the individual tools, the tool set, and the larger notion of transcending writing

contexts. Of the four tools, task and coherence cry out for investigation. Since the task tool

was designed to focus on the argument essay in the AWA, we adapted it into a generic,

analytic task tool for use in classrooms and training programs (Appendix F). While we find

the generic version works well for us, it has not been tested. In addition, we found the task

tool somewhat difficult to operationalize as a tool. Not only does it embrace a wide array of

writing skills (including audience analysis), but its focal point lies in that often hidden factor

in evaluating writing, the potential discrepancy between the assigned writing task and the

notion of "task" that writers individually construe for themselves (Cherry & Witte, 1998;

Ruth & Murphy, 1988). In short, rather than assuming that all writers "get" the same

supposedly real assignment, the tool evaluates writers' interpretations of the assigned task.

The coherence tool could also benefit from further exploration. Our scoring data on

the coherence tool is not as complete as data collected for the rest of the tools because

this tool was derived later from two earlier drafts and thus tested on a smaller sample.

Embracing both coherence and cohesion in one tool also means that this tool covers a very wide range of skills. To focus non-expert users on essential matters, we omitted a number of things, including the "given-new contract" (see Kent, 1984). After considerable experience using the coherence tool, however, we believe that the notion of familiar before unfamiliar information would enrich this tool considerably and we have added this concept to the version we use in our own programs.

Regarding the tools as a set, we know that after using them students feel more confident that they can succeed in the unfamiliar writing environment of the business school. Unpublished exit assessment results at the elite school further indicate that the tools actually work to help students with their MBA writing. Determining the extent to which the tools facilitate writer transitions to the new environment would require follow-up research tracing student progress to see if, in fact, the tools contributed to their writing performance in the MBA program. Furthermore, we have presented the tools at various conferences and distributed them along with the program we developed for GMAC (Rogers & Rymer, 1996c & d), but we have only anecdotal evidence regarding how or the tools are being applied in other business schools. Thus, some sort of follow-up survey might prove informative.

Most significant, future research might explore the applicability of the traits to other transitions, and the notion that some "fundamental traits" might transcend contexts, genres, and media.

Implications for Pedagogy

Our experience using the analytical tools for writing consultations (Rogers & Rymer, 1996d), classroom exercises, and exit assessments suggest that the analytical tools can be used successfully by non-experts alone or with the guidance of a writing expert.

The tools can be employed for individual goal setting and revising of writing as well as for

training activities, writing consultations, and writing assessment programs. For all such

applications, we have found that the tools heighten writer awareness of how interaction

with the reader affects all aspects of writing. Indeed, the tools become a means by which

to impress writers that they are obligated to consider reader and situational needs.

Scoring the AWA essays to diagnose individual writers' potential problems in

MBA writing is an obvious application of the analytical tools.[8] The Eccles School at the

University of Utah has used the tools for writing consultations during MBA orientation

(Walker, 2000), as does the University of Michigan Business School, where the tools are

also employed for follow-up assessments that allow students to measure their

improvement. In a course required of all matriculating MBAs who score less than 3.5 on

the AWA, students at Wayne State University assess their own GMAT essays with the

analytical tools and write a memo to set goals for improving their MBA writing.

Although scoring activities of this kind are useful, we have found that the actual

analytical scores become much less important than what can be learned via the process of

scoring. Scoring sessions involving comparison and discussion can dramatically confront

writers with the necessity of considering how and why readers respond as they do. If,

for example, peers score one piece of writing higher than another, the writer with the

lower score invariably wants to discuss why; peers typically draw concepts from the

tools to explain their judgments.

Comparative analysis of self and others' scores is also very productive. For

example, we frequently ask individuals to score their own writing on the tools and,

simultaneously, have the same piece of writing scored blind by another colleague, class

member, writing consultant, or instructor. When the blind scoring process is completed,

we compare writer scores with those of the other evaluator, noting the degree of

agreement as the basis for follow-up discussion and evaluation. (It's sometimes helpful if

this blind scoring is proceeded by a brief introduction to the tools, along with sample

papers to practice scoring.)

Another more ambitious use of comparative scoring involves pre- and post-

training evaluations. Simply put, the tools are used to evaluate a writing task at the

beginning of training and, subsequently, to evaluate a similar task near the end. The

resulting pre-post comparison provides writers with some evidence of improvement on

specific aspects of their writing; it can also accentuate areas where their continued

attention may assist future development. Indeed, using comparative scoring in our classes

over the last several years, we have found that scores tend to improve, and in those few

instances where scores stayed the same or fell, follow-up discussion, typically instigated

by the writer anxious to know why, contributed to the learning process. In this way, the

tools become a benchmarking mechanism, including not only descriptive but quantitative

results, something business school students relish and have even been known to use in job

interviews as "proof" of writing ability.

Conclusion

We regard the tools as reflective and planning as well as instructional and

evaluative devices; summations of communicative concerns that are as valuable for guiding

the decisions of an individual writer, as for assisting an instructor in determining writer

needs. In other words, although the tools can be applied to determine specific writing

problems in holistically scored texts (which may be of interest to assessment

practitioners and researchers), our experience in using the tools in training reveals that

they support a wide range of writing activities ranging from individual writer decision-

making to collaborative analyses.

Even more significantly, the analytical tools, in effect, are "tools" with the

potential to enable learning across discourses. They may further understanding about the

communicative core of writing across contexts, namely, the dialogue between writers and

readers. The tools then can become a basis for discussions about the specific goals,

expectations, and standards particular to a situation, enabling a conversation about

communicative issues that may prove consequential for writing in unfamiliar contexts.

Notes

1. This study was conducted in the 1995-96 academic year and includes AWA scores mainly from March and June 1995. The mean GMAT score of the entering daytime class at the elite school was 642 and the mean AWA was 4.4 (with 6.0 being the top score) The mean GMAT score at the mainstream school was 512 and the mean AWA was 3.9. (The mean GMAT score for all test-takers was 503 and the mean AWA was 3.8.)

2. Literature consulted in developing the task tool included the following: Bitzer, 1968; Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Cherry & Witte, 1998; Couture & Rymer, 1993; Farr, 1993; Flower & Hayes, 1980; Forman & Rymer, 1999a & b; Miller, 1984; Penrose, 1992; Ruth & Murphy, 1988; Swales, 1990; Witte & Cherry, 1994; Witte & Flach, 1994.

3. Literature consulted in developing the coherence tool included: Bamberg, 1983; Barton, 1995; Cheng & Steffensen, 1996; Clark & Haviland, 1977; Connor, 1990; Connor & Johns, 1990; Connor & Lauer, 1985; Durst et al., 1990; Fairclough, 1993; Forman & Rymer, 1999; Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Haswell, 1989; Huckin, 1992; Kent, 1984; Kolln, 1996; Lorch & O'Brien, 1995; Markels, 1984; Thomas, 1995; Williams, 1981; Yeh, 1998.

4. Literature consulted in developing the reasoning units tool included the following: Barton, 1993; Chambliss, 1995; Chambliss & Garner, 1996; Connor, 1990; Crammond, 1998; Fulkerson, 1996a, 1996b; Hairston, 1992; Locker & Keene, 1983; Purves, Gorman, & Takala, 1988; Rogers, 1994; Toulmin, 1958; van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983; Williams, 1991; Walter, 1966; Yeh, 1998.

5. Literature consulted in developing the error interference tools included the following: Barton, Halter, McGee, & McNeilley, 1998; Beach, 1989; Connors & Lunsford, 1988; Faigley et al., 1985; Hairston, 1981; Harris & Silva, 1993; Hillocks, 1986; Horning, 1987; Leonard & Gilsdorf, 1990; Leki, 1992; Ochsner, 1990; Reid, 1993; Rymer, Beard, & Williams, 1990; Shaughnessy, 1977; Sloan, 1990; Wall & Hull, 1989; Williams, 1982; Yeh, 1998.

6. These designations, according to Fleiss's interpretation of Cohen's Kappa used for calculating agreement are as follows: .75 as excellent; .40 to .75 as fair to good; and .40 and below as poor agreement beyond chance (1981, p. 218). Cohen's Kappa, a conservative method for analyzing interrater reliability, requires that means be calculated for all pairs of raters and then averaged. As is customary in writing assessments, scores were considered in agreement if they were the same or one point adjacent; that is, discrepant scores lay more than one point apart on the 6-point scale (see Cherry & Meyer, 1993; White, 1994).

7. Passages in Table 7 are condensations from researchers' consultation notes; quotations are their verbatim notations. Neither are audiotaped transcriptions.

8. Tool users should be guided how to interpret scoring results. Typically in standard scoring, a difference of more than one point on any tool is significant (that is, a 3 versus a 5, but not a 4 and a 5). Also, scores that fall on the lower half (score 3 and below) merit particular attention.

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Task Tool for AWA argument essay

The Task tool evaluates how well the writing fulfills the assigned task and reader expectations. The Task tool applies to the argument essay, focusing on how well the writer analyzes the line of reasoning and the use of evidence in the argument. It also includes how well the writer interprets the assignment, figuring out what is appropriate for the type of writing (an analytical essay), the reader, and the situation.

The task for the GMAT argument essay requires the writer to critique the argument by analyzing the line of reasoning, especially by identifying and analyzing significant flaws. An effective critique identifies questionable assumptions, lack of evidence, or logical fallacies (e.g., making hasty generalizations, oversimplifying, and drawing inadequate cause/effect conclusions). A critique may also present alternative explanations, raise counter arguments, suggest what would make the argument more persuasive or facilitate evaluation of its conclusions. To complete the argument essay successfully, the writer must focus on critiquing the argument rather than on analyzing it for some other purpose (e.g., to propose a business solution to a problem described in the argument).

Score	Explanation
6	Critiques the argument thoroughly, identifying several significant flaws and exploring them in some depth.
5	Critiques the argument quite thoroughly, identifying and explaining some significant flaws.
4	Critiques the argument, identifying some significant flaws and providing some explanation.
3	Begins to critique the argument, but may identify flaws without explaining them adequately; or may identify flaws that are not of central significance; or may narrowly identify and analyze a single significant flaw; or may analyze several aspects of the argument without directly critiquing it.
2	Solves business problem inherent in the argument without directly critiquing it; or may focus on insignificant aspects of the argument. May attempt to critique but without a clear understanding of the argument.
1	No critique of the argument; or may discuss the business problem without any critique.

Figure 1: Task tool for the AWA argument essay

Coherence Tool

The Coherence Tool focuses on how well the piece of writing forms a meaningful whole for the assumed reader. A coherent analytical essay is built around a controlling idea that is logically developed with each passage moving clearly to the next. A coherent essay holds together. It is a logical, unified, and complete text that the reader can readily comprehend.

A writer facilitates the reader's sense of coherence in a text by providing sufficient context for interpreting the piece of writing (such as "in my training at the X Company"); indicating the relevance of the context to the situation (such as "causes for this problem"); and explaining the relationships among the ideas in the text (such as "most significant of all"). A writer enhances coherence by using cohesive devices that connect words, sentences, and paragraphs together, devices such as transitional words (such as "therefore," "yet," and "however"); appropriate pronoun references (such as "it," "this," "she"); synonyms (such as "Mary," "my manager," the boss"); and repeated words and phrases. However, textual devices by themselves do not ensure that the underlying meaning will be clear to the reader. In fact, although the factors contributing to coherence may be difficult to pinpoint, readers can intuitively distinguish texts that are not fully coherent (often responding with "I don't quite get it," or "It doesn't all hang together").

A coherent piece of writing provides all the essential information the assumed reader will need at every point to comprehend the meaning--usually without rereading. If many passages remain unclear even after rereading, the text usually lacks coherence.

Score	Explanation
6	Text forms a meaningful whole with a controlling idea that is logically developed, each passage clearly related to the next. Rereading is unnecessary, even if content is complex.
5	Text largely forms a meaningful whole with a controlling idea that is logically developed, each passage clearly related to the next. Rereading is rarely necessary, and there are no unclear passages.
4	Text forms some overall sense of meaning around a central idea and a generally logical movement from one passage to the next. Occasional rereading may be necessary, but unclear passages are few and minor.
3	Some passages hold together, but do not form a meaningful whole; context may be missing, parts may be unclear, inconsistent, or unrelated. Cohesive devices may be used appropriately, but some may be inappropriate, and cohesive devices may not compensate for the lack of overall meaning. Frequent rereading of passages may be required; some passages may remain unclear.
2	Many passages do not hold together; there is no overall sense of a meaningful whole. Cohesive devices may be needed or inappropriately used. Passages may require rereading; many may remain unclear.
1	Passages are disjointed and there is no overall sense of meaning. Text requires rereading; many passages remain unclear.

Figure 2: Coherence tool

Reasoning Units Tool

The Reasoning Units Tool examines how logically convincing the reader finds the claims and support presented in the writing. Specifically, the Reasoning Tool focuses on <u>logical units of discourse</u> in which the writer presents claims and establishes their merit with supporting evidence (e.g., explanation, examples, comparison).

A <u>claim</u> is a viewpoint or position statement, an opinion that the writer is trying to support, or a conclusion that the writer is trying to establish. Claims are frequently stated using a form of the verb "to be" ("could," "should," or "must") or opinion words ("fails," "hinders," "demonstrates"). <u>Support</u> provides evidence or proof for a claim, defining, explaining, and substantiating it. Support in analytical essays may rely heavily on analysis with explanation and examples. Support may be drawn from personal experience, observations and reading, and may include real or hypothetical examples, comparison/analogies, citations/quotations of authorities, survey data, and statistics.

To convince the reader that the piece of writing is logical and reasonable, the writer provides "reasoning units." Each unit should consist of a significant claim that is explained and demonstrated with several kinds of supporting evidence. Packaged together to form a "data set," the evidence should be sufficient and relevant for the reader and the situation.

Score	Explanation
6	Reasoning units, consisting of claims and support, are logical, credible, and complete. Claims are explicitly stated, explained, and substantiated with supporting evidence. Support is relevant to claims, varied, concrete, and engaging.
5	Reasoning units, consisting of claims and support, are logical and credible. Claims are explicitly stated and sufficiently explained. Support is relevant to claims and varied.
4	Reasoning units, consisting of claims and support, are adequate. Claims are relatively apparent. Support is reasonably relevant to claims.
3	Reasoning units are incomplete or inadequate. Claims may be undeveloped with little or no support. Support may be insufficient; or seem simplistic (the "everyone knows" type); or may be inappropriate to the claim.
2	Claims may be very vague, difficult to find, insignificant, or irrelevant. Little or no support for claims; or support may be presented without claims.
1	No claims; no support.

<u>Figure 3</u>: Reasoning units tool

Error Interference Tool

The Error Interference Tool assesses whether errors interfere with the writer's communication and/or damage his/her credibility. A writer's communication may be judged partly on how closely the language follows conventions in sentence structure, grammar, usage, mechanics, spelling, etc. Severe and frequent errors (and in some circumstances even milder forms and degrees of error) can negatively impact the writer's communication and/or credibility. All errors are not equally intrusive or offensive to all readers, but they can be differentiated into categories by their typical impact on readers who are attempting to read for meaning rather than hunt for errors.

Disruptive Errors (e.g., unintelligible sentences, omitted words/phrases, unclear pronoun references, incorrect verb forms, run-on sentences, wrong words) tend to make the reader's task more difficult, even intruding on the reading process. Disruptive errors may also interfere with communication, preventing the reader from comprehending what the writer means.

Credibility Errors (e.g., faulty subject/verb agreements, some punctuation errors, spelling errors) do not usually disrupt communication, but they tend to reflect negatively on the writer's credibility, reducing the reader's confidence in what a writer has to say. Credibility errors become serious if they cause the reader to judge a writer's character or management ability by the frequency or mere presence of certain violations of Standard English.

Etiquette Errors (e.g., substituting "I" for "me" after prepositions; substituting "someone left their report," instead of his/her; misplacing apostrophes; confusing it's and its) are errors that many readers--but not all-- hardly notice, especially if reading quickly for meaning. However, etiquette errors can reduce the writer's credibility, especially with those readers who are concerned about professional image or those who believe that critical thinking is reflected in the observance of grammar rules.

Accent Errors (e.g., missing or wrong articles, wrong prepositions, incorrect use of idioms) commonly characterize the writing of non-native speakers. Accent Errors--which are nearly impossible for non-native speakers to correct in the short term--will often be ignored by readers. Accent Errors rarely interfere with communication, and they usually do not seriously damage the writer's credibility.

Score	Explanation
6	No errors interfere with communication or damage credibility. No disruptive errors, but may have a few credibility and/or etiquette errors, and/or accent errors.
5	Errors do not interfere with communication or damage credibility. No disruptive errors, but may have occasional credibility and/or etiquette errors; may have some accent errors.
4	Errors do not seriously interfere with communication or damage credibility. Occasional disruptive errors and/or some credibility errors and etiquette errors; may have frequent accent errors.
3	Errors interfere with communication and/or damage credibility. Some disruptive errors and/or frequent credibility and etiquette errors; may have numerous accent errors.
2	Errors interfere seriously with communication and damage credibility. Frequent disruptive errors and numerous credibility and etiquette errors; may have numerous accent errors.
1	Numerous errors of many types severely interfere with communication and damage credibility.

Figure 4: Error interference tool

Table 1

Mid- and Low-Scoring Students Percentages for Consultation Sample
and Nationally

AWA Scores	Consultation Sample	National Data[a]
Below 4.5	$N = 42$	$N = 197,368$
4.0	26%	34%
3.5	31%	28%
3.0	26%	18%
2.5	14%	11%
2.0	2%	6%
(1.5)	NA[b]	3%
(1.0)	NA	0%
Total	100%	100%

Note. [a]National summary statistics are reported for the first year of AWA
administration (10/15/94 to 06/17/95), the testing period during which most participants
in this study took the AWA. [b]The 1.5 and 1.0 scores are not applicable to this field
study because the number of students scoring below 2.0 at the site schools is so low.

Table 2

Correlations Between Multiple Readers'[a] Analytical Tool

Scores and Holistic Scores

Analytical Tool	Sample of Essay Sets[b]	Correlation with Holistic Score
Task Tool	$n = 58$	.67
Coherence Tool	$n = 36$	.68
Reasoning Tool	$n = 58$	.71
Error Tool	$n = 58$	.65

Notes: $p < .05$.

[a]Most essays were scored by four independent readers. However, in ten cases there were only two or three readers.

[b]The sample included the essays of students participating in the consultations, as well as the essays used for the last stage of developmental scoring. Except for the task tool, all tool scores reflect scoring both essays in each student's AWA essay set as a unit. The sample was smaller for the coherence tool because it was developed later in the study.

Table 3

Correlations Between Pairs of Analytical Tools

Scored by Multiple Readers[a]

Analytical Tool Pairs	Sample of Essay Sets[b]	Correlation Between Readers' Mean Scores on Two Tools
Task and Coherence	$n = 37$	.84
Coherence and Reasoning	$n = 37$	.84
Task and Reasoning	$n = 59$	.82
Error and Coherence	$n = 37$	.65
Error and Reasoning	$n = 59$	.54
Error and Task	$n = 59$	.50

Notes: $p < .05$.

[a]Most essays were scored by four independent readers. However, in ten cases there were only two or three readers.

[b]The sample included the essays of students participating in the consultations, as well as the essays used for the last stage of developmental scoring. Except for the task tool, all tool scores reflect scoring both essays in each student's AWA essay set as a unit. The sample was smaller for the coherence tool because it was developed later in the study.

Table 4

Interrater Reliability Between Multiple Readers[a]

Analytical Tool Scores

Analytical Tool	Sample of Essay Sets [b]	Mean	Median
Task Tool	$\underline{n} = 58$	.56	.63
Coherence Tool	$\underline{n} = 36$	.47	.42
Reasoning Units Tool	$\underline{n} = 58$	.59	.59
Error Tool	$\underline{n} = 58$	.66	.71

Notes: Interrater reliabilities were calculated using weighted Cohen's Kappa (with "agreement" considered to be the same score or one-point adjacent.)

[a]Most essays were scored by four independent readers. However, in ten cases there were only two or three readers.

[b]The sample included the essays of students participating in the consultations, as well as the essays used for the last stage of developmental scoring. except for the task tool, all tool scores reflect scoring both essays in each student's AWA essay set as a unit. The sample was smaller for the coherence tool because it was developed later in the study.

Table 5

Correlations Between Multiple Readers[a] and

Individual Consultants[b] Analytical Tool Scores

Analytical Tool	Sample of Essay Sets[c]	Correlation Between Readers' Mean Score and Consultant's Score
Task Tool	$n = 34$	.84
Coherence Tool	$n = 31$	.80
Reasoning Units Tool	$n = 34$	.71
Error Tool	$n = 34$	.84

Notes: $p < .05$.

[a]Most essays were scored by four independent readers. However, in ten cases there were only two or three readers.

[b]Individual consultants' analytical tool scores were assigned by one of the readers in the original multiple scoring who, in preparing for a consultation, reviewed the original scores for a student's essays, and scored the essays again.

[c]The sample included the essays of students participating in the consultations during the 1996 winter semester only. Except for the task tool, all tool scores reflect scoring both essays in each student's AWA essay set as a unit. The sample was smaller for the coherence tool because it was developed later in the study.

Table 6

Survey Responses on Writing Consultation

With Analytical Tools

	Scale				
Question	Highly Disagree 1	2	3	4	Highly Agree 5
Writing Problems[a]					
Elite School	0%	0%	0%	6(33%)	12(67%)
Mainstream	0%	0%	1(5%)	3(16%)	15(79%)
Total Sample	0%	0%	1(3%)	9(24%)	27(73%)
Ways to Improve[b]					
Elite School	0%	1(6%)	2(11%)	5(28%)	10(56%)
Mainstream	0%	0%	1(5%)	7(37%)	11(58%)
Total Sample	0%	1(3%)	3(8%)	12(32%)	21(57%)
Tools Helpful[c]					
Elite School	0%	0%	0%	9(60%)	6(40%)
Mainstream	0%	0%	3(27%)	5(46%)	3(27%)
Total Sample	0%	0%	3(12%)	14(54%)	9(35%)
More Confidence[d]					
Elite School	6%	6%	0%	14(78%)	2(11%)
Mainstream	0%	0%	6(32%)	3(16%)	10(53%)
Total Sample	1(3%)	1(3%)	6(16%)	17(46%)	12(32%)
Consultation Worthwhile[e]					
Elite School	0%	0%	0%	6(33%)	12(67%)
Mainstream	0%	0%	2(11%)	4(21%)	13(68%)
Total Sample	0%	0%	2(5%)	10(27%)	25(68%)

Notes. Analysis done using Fisher's Exact Test since sample sizes were too small for Chi Square (Agresti, 1990). Using Fisher's there was no significant difference between the Elite and Mainstream Schools in terms of ratings.

[a] $p = .352$

[b] $p = .834$

[c] $p = .138$

[d] $p < .001$

[e] $p = .484$

Table 7

Researcher Notes

What Students Gain by Using the Tools

| Identify Deficiencies | An international student from Belgium with high GMAT scores (710 with a Verbal score of 41) believed his AWA 4.0 score did not reflect his writing abilities. Encouraged to read through his essays in light of the tools, he began identifying many writing problems. After reading the second paragraph in his argument essay, for example, he immediately recognized that he had not followed through on the contract he originally established with the reader. I confirmed his observations and encouraged him to review his MBA writing, looking for connections from paragraph-to-paragraph and sentence-to-sentence, as described in the coherence tool.

Defending his "list-like" AWA essays, this student recalled workplace proposals and technical reports, including communications with Japanese colleagues. He explained that he was expected to communicate with clarity and authority, using a "bullet format" to present the end product, without much elaboration or analysis. After being introduced to concepts in the tools, the student said that he wished that he had them before taking the AWA. He noted that although he was already writing reports for his MBA classes, and that he felt confident about his writing, the consulting session was helpful, especially the reasoning units tool which had given him a new sense of what it meant to support his position

An international student from India read portions of his argument essay aloud. I jotted down errors that the student corrected orally as he read, such as substituting the correct word "there" for "they" in the text. Gradually this student became aware of what was happening and expressed his astonishment at this phenomenon-- he himself was correcting his errors without realizing it. Using this discovery of his potential to edit his own writing, I helped him apply the error tool to classify patterns of significant errors (such as omitted and confused words). |
|---|---|

Table 7 (continued)

| Learn about New Discourses | A student described her writing of the AWA with some chagrin: "I didn't get a good grasp of the questions," she admitted, adding that she just got caught up in the ideas, letting one idea lead to the next without even thinking about what she was trying to say. Then with increased embarrassment she noted the similarities between the deficiencies in her essays and her first MBA writing assignment which had been recently returned to her. According to her, the professor's comment essentially said that her paper didn't address the assignment and that she lacked adequate writing skills for a graduate program. Focusing on the needs for writing in her MBA courses, I used the task and coherence tools as the basis for discussing ways to help her figure out the demands of the assignment and to develop a coherent message.

An accountant for a bank, a student explained that she rarely writes in her job--only an occasional memo with bullet points--but her writing at school was always "okay." When I asked her to assess her essays from a reader's perspective, she soon responded that she had not quite answered the AWA questions, that her points were not quite clear, and that she seemed to repeat herself. Using the reasoning tool she saw how the examples in her argument essay needed additional explanation in order to clarify their connection to her major claim. Immediately she began providing those connections orally. Then we discussed the kinds of explanation required for various MBA assignments she was preparing.

With high scores on the GMAT (including the Verbal section), this student's AWA holistic score of 3.0 and analytical tool scores of 2.5 to 3.0 indicated that he knew the rules for textual conventions (error score was 4.5), but he didn't understand how to analyze the task or develop a coherent argument. When using the tools to examine his essays, he responded strongly to each one as if a light bulb were going on, and at the end of the session, commented: "These [tools] provide a very interesting template for thinking about writing. I've never thought about it in this kind of organized way." |
|---|---|
| Facilitate Workplace Writing | Wanting to explore the reasoning tool in light of his experience marketing products for a pharmaceutical company, the student asked: "How do you know when the amount of support is sufficient?" Building upon the notion of data as described in the reasoning tool, we discussed the need to package support based on the situation and the readers. After the consultation, the student said he would use the tools not only for himself but also for reviewing other people's documents, including some of the "poor" memos at work.

In this student's AWA essays the assertions lacked development and support. In fact, his essays scored 2.0 on the reasoning tool. As an engineer, he wrote procedural manuals. This involved giving specific answers, the student explained, to questions in "brief, not flowery, communication." All he had to do was "explain the facts," he said. Using the notion of support in the reasoning tool, he began to reflect on what constitutes "a fact" and to reinterpret his workplace writing. Noting that the amount of support he had to provide depended upon the type of communication involved, he finally admitted that for the more technical aspects of his projects he did need to elaborate his positions more to be convincing. |

Appendix A

Student Sample Essays Scored 3.0

Essay 1: Issue

The directors of a security and safety consulting service recommend the use of identification badges to all of its clients believing this is the reason why none of their clients have reported any incident of employee theft. There are a lot of uncertainties proving this claim.

The directors are assuming the badges are the reason no theft is reported. The problem may be that unreported company theft is a possibility. Companies may have company theft but choose not to report it because it may result in higher theft insurance rates or promote a bad reputation of the company name. Companies may also not be aware of any employee theft. It took Comerica Bank Incorporated years to discover that tellers were internally withdrawing money from stagnant customer accounts into their own accounts.

Several weaknesses are evident with the theory of identification badges. The identification badges may be fraudelent with false names or pictures. The practice of checking identification badges is also questionable. Entry into a company may be possible as long as the person has an identification badge. The badge might not rightfully belong to this individual. Comerica Bank Incorporated checks badges of all employees entering their buildings and allows entry if only a badge is in possession.

The directors would have a stronger argument with additional evidence of their security practices. They should show that the identification badges are further checked for authenticity during the day. Further practices such as renewal of badges periodically would prove that employees have the appropriate badge.

Essay 2: Argument

I agree that "there are essentially two forces that motivate people: self-interest and fear." These two forces occur daily in the workplace and our personal lives.

Self-interest is a motivation for many people. In the corporate world, there is strong competition which strengthens an individual's self-interest. Successful people want to be ahead of everyone else and motivate themselves to be the best they can be. To be the best you have to further yourself as much as possible. Examples of improving yourself can be taking on more challenges at work, furthering your education, and improving yourself person??

Fear is also strong motivation for many people. In this world, a lot of emphasis is placed on success. The world judges people by their jobs and relationships. Many people are afraid of not having a successful job and this motivates people to strive to successful. Many people are afraid that if they do not take the steps to be successful they will not be able to support themselves or their families. As a result, they fear they will not fit. Many people are afraid of being alone and not in love and this motivates them to take the steps needed to accomplish their goals. The forces of self-interest and fear are very strong factors for motivation. Motivation may not always be easy but the individual desire to succeed and the fear of not succeeding forces motivation for many people.

Appendix A (continued)

Student Sample Essay Score 3.5

Essay 1: Argument

The directors of a security and safety consulting service reported that from their research it was found that requiring employees to wear photo identification badges would prevent employee theft. This advice is not very sound because their argument has many flaws.

First, from my own personal experience identification badges do not prevent theft. At my company all employees must wear a badge and yet we have items stolen all the time.

Second, the security force must check the badges and personal belongings of people leaving a build in order for them to work efficiently.

Finally, the security consulting service should conduct more research to find more simularities between the ten companies mentioned. I am sure that they will find other practices that all the companies perform. The security service should recommend these as well.

Essay 2: Issue

"There are essentially two forces that motivate people: self-interest and fear." I find this statement to be very compelling. There are examples throughout society to support this statement. It can be seen in the laws we make, at work, and in schools.

Many of the laws we have rely on either self-interest or fear. For example we have tax laws that let you deduct money from your income if you makes donations to the United Way. This motivates people to give money away so that they will save on their taxes. Fear is used in laws when we want to control ones actions. For example, people fear going to jail so they will not commit crimes.

At work fear is used to get people to perform. Someone might fear losing their job if they do not finish a certain report. At the same time people are paid to work. This envokes ones self-interest to make money and buy something that they desire.

These two forces can also be found in school. One might fear getting a low grade on a test because they will be punished. Someone else might be trying to get the best grade because they think that it will mean a larger paycheck later in life. Therefore, self-interest and fear are the two forces that motivate people. We use both of them in the laws we enact, at the work place, and in our schools to motivate people.

Major Problems MBA Writing Tutors

Identified in Essays

	Reader 1	Reader 2	Reader 3	Reader 4
A*	• Organization of ideas • Organizational approach • Incomplete paragraph development • Development of essay as a whole • Grammatical & usage errors	• Lack of logical flow • Simplistic & superficial understanding & argumentation	• Failure to take a position • Failure to do what the instructions said • Too many grammar & punctuation mistakes	• Cohesion -transitions between ideas are rough • Focus - staying on topic a problem in Essay #1; Essay #2 contradicts itself • Issues are approached only superficially, especially in Essay #2
B	• Organization generally strong • Addresses reasoning and use of evidence in prompt • Content/depth analysis: useful ideas, could use more examples • Contend/evidence weak in Essay #2 • Position statement buried in Essay #2	• Tighter organization/argumentation needed: a workable proposal is needed and examples/reasoning too vague • Clearer evidence/support for statements needed	• From the evidence in these essays, I would not worry about the student. Shows a grasp of logic and ability to focus. • Has not come to grips w/issue in Essay #2 • Point in last paragraph of Essay #2 unclear	• Most ideas are explored on a superficial level - needs work developing ideas • No concrete support for statements in either essay • Vague language
C	• Superficial analysis • Problems with clarity • Errors in grammar, spelling, usage; awkward use of idioms • Reasoning seems circular (Essay #2)	• Logical flow, coherence needs improvement, especially in Essay #1 • Depth of analysis and conclusions drawn need work • Problems w/word choice, syntax, style (probably non-native speaker)	• Needs to write in active voice; many nominalizations bury meaning • Paragraph two in both essays wend their way to a conclusion; try to write topic sentences that focus • Spelling mistakes	• Narrowness of argument - in each essay, only one example or piece of reasoning is given • Convoluted logic • Language control problems - word choice, grammatical structure, use of idiom
D	• Tighter organizational strategy needed (Essay #1); serious organizational problems (Essay #2) • Contradictory ideas (Essay #2) • Needs more detailed development of ideas • Rough, disjointed style • Grammatical/spelling errors	• Flow of ideas, logical argumentation a problem • "Supporting" evidence not clearly connected to claims made • Style, syntax problems	• Essay #1 failed to complete task of analyzing argument; Essay #2 much better • Great imprecision of language • Many spelling, grammar, punctuation errors	• Internal contradictions • Complexity - arguments (especially in Essay #2) limit discussion to the superficial • Overall cohesion a problem

Appendix B cont.

	Reader 1	Reader 2	Reader 3	Reader 4
E	• Seems not to understand instructions re: providing support • Tone is general, lacking a clear position statement (Essays #1&2) • Serious problems with clarity and organization (Essay #2) • Problems w/word choice, sentence structure, use of idioms • Problems w/cohesion/flow	• Order of ideas, logical flow a problem (especially in Essay #2) • Support, evidence, examples not well organized • Vague, too general (especially in Essay #1)	• Essay #1 fails to complete assigned task - does little more than repeat the statement in the prompt • Main problem in both essays is lack of substance; student develops whole piece around a trivial point	• Development of ideas - both essays restate the prompt and seem to take a position, but never explain why • Examples must relate to main point, rather than being a "laundry list" • Explanation of "how" and "why" consistently missing
F	• Organizational problems • Rambling style • Problems w/sentence structure: direct repetition of words & phrases • Superficial analysis in Essay #2	• Needs better connection between statement/claim & examples/evidence • Clear intro and/or conclusion needed; make sure the question/statement is explicitly answered/addressed	• Lack of focus a problem in both essays: stick to a topic, figure out what to say about it, identify what doesn't fit • Topic sentences would help	• Essay #1 bases its conclusions on generalizations • Awkward words and phrases in Essay #1 especially • Essay #2 has a clear, focused argument, with some analysis
G	• Serious language control problems • Problems w/content & depth analysis • Problems w/expressing content succinctly • Lack of clarity throughout Essay #2 • Had trouble understanding Essay #2 at all	• Needs clear connection between claim & support/evidence • Logical flow of ideas needed • Grammatical problems	• Essay #1 - very undeveloped thoughts • Essay #2 - had to read it many times before understanding what it meant • Work on word choice and other language problems	• Organization a problem - although superficial markers like "first," "second," etc. are used, connection between paragraphs is tenuous at best • Support for main points must be more than scattered, anecdotal examples • Language control - writer cannot express ideas clearly • Repetition w/o advancement of ideas a problem
H	• Organizational problems • Language control problems, awkward sentence structure, word choice problems • Does not attempt to provide two examples that are relevant • Needs help focusing in Essay #2	• Responses off-target - need to recognize & focus on what prompt is addressing • Support/evidence/examples unconvincing or not central • Grammar, syntax problems	• Lack of focus a major problem in Essay #1, though not in #2 • Many language problems, both mistakes and imprecision	• Explanation of why examples support claims needed in Essay #1 • Needs to come to grips w/main question in Essay #2 • All of essay #2 is one paragraph. Organization could be enhanced if there were three - one to frame issues and one for each part

Appendix B cont.

	Reader 1	Reader 2	Reader 3	Reader 4
I	• Essay #1 well organized, addresses questions in some depth • Essay #1 has clear and flowing style, but might need to work on transitions • Essay #2 is strong "narrative" piece • Essay #2: needs more content development	• Clarify intro to relate more clearly to prompt • Be sure to address all parts of prompt	• This student is in good shape - no flaws in logic, excellent sentence structure and language control • Should state the opposing case in Essay #2; give the argument some context w/reader • Essay #1 is a little "thin" in terms of development (but since this is a timed exercise, wouldn't assume it's a problem)	• Writer attempts to contextualize argument in both essays w/marginal success. Needs to make intro work w/main point rather than just getting attention • Use of vague terms hinders meaning • Essay #2 has a position and some clear reasoning, but it, too, fails to "nail down" the evidence in a convincing manner
J	• Lacks clear position statement • Serious problems with sentence structure, word choice, general language control • Superficial analysis • Needs topic sentences	• Superficial treatment; complexity of issues not addressed • Support missing or unconvincing	• Logic relatively sound in both essays • Trouble with language control: abrupt shift of subject w/in sentences, from one sentence to another, and from one paragraph to another. Some sentences don't fit. Vague & imprecise words • Need to tighten paragraph focus	• Use of "charged language" (especially in Essay #2) hurts credibility • Repetition of claims, rather than development, gives impression of bullying, more than arguing • Opening of Essay #2 does not provide clear focus - is it discussing the specific issue or legislative change in general

Appendix C

Writing Profile for a Phone Consultation

FROM: ·

SUBJ: Writing Profile

DATE: January 28, 1996

This is a profile of your writing skills based on our review of your GMAT essays. The profile indicates some of your strengths and some suggestions to improve your writing for the MBA program. Also included is a brief survey (and a stamped envelope) for you to let us know your views about the AWA consultation.

I enjoyed talking with you and will look forward to receiving a copy of your term paper from the fall semester management class. After I have reviewed it, I will contact you to set up a telephone consultation. If you ever want to contact me directly, please call.

STRENGTHS:

- Some good ideas and concrete examples.

- Adequate vocabulary, control of Standard English and language conventions.

- Engaged and committed to the subject.

SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE:

- Figure out what's wanted in terms of the writing assignment before you get started. Read/listen to the task, considering carefully what is assigned. What are the expectations? What are the specific tasks and/or questions posed? Then describe for yourself (paraphrase in your own words) what you are supposed to do.

- Determine your purpose and major message responding to the assignment and develop pertinent ideas. Plan your overall statement to make sure that everything fits. Outline if you have time, making sure you are staying on target to achieve the task.

- Develop each point adequately before moving on, providing evidence to support it.

- After drafting, review/revise to make certain that you have made your message clear from the start and that one idea leads logically to the next.

Appendix C

Writing Profile for a Face-to-Face Consultation

TO:

FROM:

SUBJ: Writing Profile

DATE: Feb. 18, 1996

This is a profile of your writing skills based on a review of your GMAT essays. The profile indicates some of your strengths and some suggestions to improve your writing for the MBA program. Also included is a brief survey for you to give your views about the AWA consultation.

STRENGTHS:

Essay 2 has a clear overall organization with a beginning, middle, and end, providing coherence to the essay.

Essay 2 begins to address an important issue in the argument essay. ·

Essay 2 indicates a smooth writing style.

SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE:

Task focus could be strengthened by the following:

*Identifying as many of the major issues as possible in the situation
*Offering more explanation and support for each issue identified

Reasoning in each essay could be strengthened by the following:

*Stating claims/points up front
*Providing more support, with more complete explanations, reasons and evidence
*Using specific statements for each point; providing more context for each.

Appendix D

<u>Consultation Protocol</u>

- Establish rapport.

    Begin the consultation by engaging the student in conversation about the MBA
    program and about him/herself. Establish rapport and develop a sense of his/her
    situation and circumstances. Ask questions about his/her background and
    experience in writing, and then ask specifically for his/her opinions regarding the
    GMAT writing test. Aim to develop some perspective on the writer, including
    his/her readiness to explore needs for improvement, for the MBA program and
    what approaches seem most suited to discuss.

- Define consultation's purpose and forecast the session's contents.

    <u>The goal of this consultation is to review your GMAT writing test to identify your
    writing strengths and any needs that are important for performing well in the
    MBA program at this business school. We will discuss your experiences as a
    writer, including your writing of the AWA essay, we will review your essays, and
    we will identify some ways you might want to work to improve your writing.
    Please feel free to ask questions, make comments, and ask for clarification. The
    session will last from 20 to 30 minutes.</u>

    (If the student is engaged in meaningful conversation about writing, the session
    may continue up to 45 minutes or even an hour.)

    Motivate the student's interest in discussing the AWA essays by noting that the
    goal is not to find fault with the essays, but to explore how the essay writing
    might help him/her with MBA writing.

- Discuss the student's attitude toward the AWA essays and their score.

    <u>Do you recall writing the AWA essays? How did you feel about your
    performance on the test that day? How did you feel about your AWA score?</u>

    Some students want to unburden themselves about an "off day" etc., and it is wise
    to let them do this early. Also, get the student to talk about the AWA score
    because it is helpful to know the student's attitude and it may provide some idea
    on his/her agenda for the consultation. Did the AWA score simply confirm the
    student's perspective of mediocre skills, shatter a belief that he/she was a good
    writer, or prompt anger without altering a belief in the superiority of his/her
    skills?

(If the student asks about the AWA scoring: The AWA score represents at least 4 different blind readings, two raters for each of the essays. The score is the average of the two essays, rounded up to the nearest half point interval.)

Reviewing your AWA essays can be very useful to you in beginning your MBA career. Although these essays are quite different from MBA writing, we can evaluate features in your essays that are important for preparing assignments in the MBA program. For most students, a review of the AWA essays can indicate some deficiencies that represent opportunities to improve in key ways necessary to succeed in MBA writing assignments.

- Introduce copies of the student's AWA essays

  You may recall that you wrote two essays for the GMAT writing test, one to critique an argument and the other to analyze an issue.

  Show the student the set of essays and the AWA questions for their test administration, allowing him/her sufficient time to review the essays and bring them back to memory.

  Both essays require analytical writing, but the issue essay is relatively open compared with the argument essay which required you to identify the important flaws of the stated argument and analyze those flaws. In effect, the argument essay is much more narrowly defined or circumscribed than the issue essay.

  The way to understand why you got a particular AWA score is to review the essays themselves. Each essay is scored holistically on the basis of certain criteria, but the specific elements in your writing which influenced the evaluators to give you the overall score are never recorded. Therefore, the essays are provided to your school so that a diagnostic consultation/review is possible.

- Read/review one essay.

  Read one essay with the student at this point, unless it is clearly inappropriate because of the student's attitude or the circumstances. Asking the student to read the essay aloud has several benefits: she/he becomes actively involved and reacquainted with the essay and begins to remember actually writing it; you can learn through the oral reading what problems the student sees for him/herself; and frequently reading aloud causes students to recall what they were trying to do in constructing the essay, as well as notice problems in the writing themselves. Encourage the student to stop and comment during the reading.

  Paraphrase your own reading of sections of one essay, indicating your responses and any difficulties in reading.

- Engage the student in conversation about the essay, soliciting his/her views about the writing, attempting to understand what he/she were trying to do.

  Do you have any comments to make about your essays?
  What were you trying to do in this essay (passage)?

  Identify problematic areas and ask the student questions about them so that you can better understand how to help them.

- Provide positive feedback.

  When I was reading your essays, I found some strengths in your writing:

  Discuss strengths, alluding to anything of relevance to MBA writing, even if not included in the AWA criteria or the analytical tools.

- Use the analytical tools to discuss some critical aspects of MBA writing that can be observed in the student's AWA essays.

  Use the analytical tools for the specific areas of strength and of weakness in the AWA essays. Discuss the tools one by one either according to the natural progression of the writing process (with the task tool first) or according to your priorities for the student.

  Read the description of the analytical tool, followed by the description of the scoring levels, focusing on the scores at and adjacent to your evaluation of the student's performance. Refer to specific passages in the student's essays that demonstrate strengths or areas to improve as identified by discussion of the tool. Then discuss suggestions for specific improvement and procedures for making those improvements, referring the student to particular passages in one or both of the essays.

  In making suggestions for improvement, refer to the student's writing processes and indicate links with typical kinds of MBA writing that would require similar skills. If the student seems more attuned to workplace writing, refer to it as well.

  If the student does not seem to accept or understand the weaknesses in his/her writing, show samples of high-scoring essays. Point out some of the strengths in these essays that correlate with weaknesses you are aiming to explain in the student's essays. (You might consider showing models of AWA essays scored 5 to 6 at any point during the consultation to clarify what a strong response might be.)

- Summarize the student's strengths and the suggestions to improve.

    You might provide a writer profile to the student. You may prepare the profile prior to the consultation or you may write it out with the student during the consultation.

- Suggest local resources in the MBA program, business school, university, and/or community for helping students improve their writing.

    Adapt the suggestions to your school, providing concrete options and focusing them on the needs of the individual student. Talk about ways the student can take advantage of writing courses, consultants, tutors, and workshops. Also discuss using regular courses to improve writing, for example by asking for instructors' feedback, by encouraging peers' feedback, by participating as a writer in team assignments rather than by crunching the numbers and letting someone else do the writing. Discuss courses, workshops, English-as-a-second-language facilities, tutorial services, community college courses, whatever might be available.

- Conclude by answering any questions and by offering encouragement.

    Ask if the student has any questions or comments. Encourage the student to take advantage of the opportunities available to improve his/her writing, both for the MBA program and for a career in management.

    Give the student the AWA essays and the analytical tools used in the session.

Appendix E

Post-consultation Survey

Please respond on the scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 is highly disagree and 5 is highly agree) by circling the number most closely representing your opinion. When you have completed the survey, please put it into the stamped envelope and mail it to us. Thanks for your response.

1. I received answers to my questions about the GMAT writing test during the consultation.

        1   2   3   4   5
  highly disagree   highly agree

2. During the consultation, I learned about some problem areas of my writing that need improvement for the MBA program.

        1   2   3   4   5

3. During the consultation, I learned ways to go about improving some problem areas of my writing for the MBA program.

        1   2   3   4   5

4. I found the tools (e.g. task tool, coherence, reasoning, error) to be helpful in understanding how to improve my writing.

        1   2   3   4   5

5. During the consultation, I learned about resources available at my school to help me improve my writing for the MBA program.

        1   2   3   4   5

6. As a result of the consultation, I feel more confident about doing writing assignments in the MBA program.

        1   2   3   4   5

7. Overall, I found the consultation worthwhile.

        1   2   3   4   5

Please add your comments, suggestions, and questions regarding the consultation or the GMAT writing test below:

Appendix F

Generic Version of the Task Tool

Task Tool

The Task Fulfillment Tool evaluates how well the writing meets the reader expectations and situational demands necessary to fulfill the assigned task. Accomplishing the task requires the writer to understand why the writing is necessary, what generic form it should take, and how it will be read and used. To fulfill the task, the writer must successfully interpret it, figuring out what the writing needs to accomplish, the content that should and should not be included, and the type of writing required for the context.

The reader-evaluator of GMAT Analytical Writing Assessment argument question, for example, expects the writer to provide an essay that describes flaws in argument; the reader-evaluator does not expect the writer to provide a memo outlining solutions to the business problem suggested in the argument question. Or, for example, a professor may reward an MBA student's case write-up because it analyzes key issues relevant to improving the performance of the business in the case, but find another student's retelling of the case without a clear recommendation. Different again, an employee may expect a manager to clarify whether the company's hiring policy has changed because recent practices seem to break that policy and, consequently, dismiss as irrelevant the manager's e-mail giving reasons for recent hiring decisions. In such a situation, the managerial writer's task analysis was flawed and the resulting e-mail did not meet reader expectations.

Score	Explanation
6	Fulfills the task completely by addressing reader expectations and meeting situational requirements for the writing. Content addresses reader requirements, issues, concerns, or questions; form is fully appropriate for the context and situation.
5	Fulfills the task to a great degree, addressing most reader expectations and meeting situational requirements for the writing. Content is largely relevant and form is sufficiently appropriate for context and situation.
4	Fulfills the task to some degree, addressing some reader expectations and, for the most part, complies with situational requirements for the writing. The content may meet reader expectations to some extent, but not completely. Form may depart from the contextual and situational norms in some respects.
3	Begins to fulfill the task. Includes some content that the reader finds relevant. Content leaves the reader expectations largely unfulfilled, however.
2	Questionable as to whether the writing fulfills the task. Content may seem somewhat relevant to the task, but may addresses it in a roundabout fashion. The reader may need to hunt hard to determine the writer's reason for writing or what the writing is actually for.
1	Does not fulfill the task. Content evidences writer misunderstanding regarding what the writing needs to accomplish. It may be irrelevant to the task. It may surprise or disappoint the reader. Can be characterized as "off-task."