READING AND WRITING CENTER
Westfield State University

Preparation Materials for the
Massachusetts Test for Educator Licensure:
Communication and Literacy Skills Test

WRITING SUBTEST

Written Summary
Revised:  November, 2012  
Reading and Writing Center, Westfield State University  

Including information adapted from:  
The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, ’09  
Pearson Education, ’09  
Jennifer Cook, The University of Massachusetts Amherst,  
School of Education and Division of Continuing Education, ’02, ’01, ’00
**Written Summary**

This section of the Writing subtest presents approximately 500 to 700 words of an extended written passage on an educational topic for candidates to summarize in **100 to 150 words**. Candidates must read the passage, understand its main ideas and supporting points, and produce a written summary in **their own words** using standard English conventions. The relevant information of the original passage should be communicated clearly and concisely without candidates introducing their own ideas. The response is evaluated on the extent to which candidates effectively communicate the main idea and essential points of the passage accurately, clearly, and concisely. [See the Scoring Rubric for the summary on page 3.]

To write an effective summary on the Communication and Literacy Skills test, candidates need to do the following:

- Select only the most important ideas (the main ideas and supporting details) from the passage given.
- Combine them into clear sentences. It is extremely important that the summary is
  - written in the candidate’s own words and
  - written with original sentence constructions.
- The response should conform to standard English conventions (i.e., be free of grammatical errors).

**Length**

One of the most common errors made on the Written Summary is to make the summary either too long or too short. In general, the summary should be **100 to 150 words**. Since the test makers change the length of the original passage with each test administration, it is difficult to provide candidates with a precise length of the passage to be summarized. [See the sample summary passage of approximately 430 words on page 5.]

However, a graphic organizer can help. It is a chart to aid in setting up and planning the response. Using the one that we have designed (a template is provided on page 4 of this booklet), candidates should be able to effectively organize all of the main ideas and important details from the passage to determine exactly how long the summary must be.

- Candidates may use the small dry erase “white board” provided at the test site for the template.

**Some guidelines to follow when writing the summary:**

- Each paragraph of the summary should contain at least three sentences.
- Candidates may combine **two main ideas into one sentence**, and they should try not to write a sentence for each main idea, as it tends to make the writing sound too simple.
- Candidates **do not** need to provide an introduction or conclusion to the summary. Simply begin the summary where the passage begins, and end the summary where the passage ends.
- Finally, candidates should **not include their voices or opinions** in the summary.

**TRANSITIONAL WORDS AND PHRASES**

Using these words can be an advantage to help the flow of ideas from one point to the next while providing clarity.

**Sequential order:**

- **Contrast** – although, however, instead, otherwise, alternately, but, on the contrary, yet, despite, still, nevertheless, on the one hand…on the other hand, even though.
- **Similarity** – likewise, similarly, in the same manner or way.
- **Addition** – and, in addition, next, additionally, also, furthermore, equally important, moreover, one…another, not only…but also, too.
- **Illustration** – for example, for instance, in particular, specifically, such as.
- **Reasons** – because, because of, due to, for, since.
- **Cause or effect** – as a result, because, consequently, hence, since, so, therefore, thus.
- **Prominence** – most/least important, primary, secondary, especial, above all, first, second, third.
- **Finality** – therefore, as a result, so, lastly, in conclusion, in short, finally.
Strategies for Writing the Summary

1. Read the entire passage and make sure it is understood completely. Perhaps jot down on the “white board” provided the main ideas and important details in each paragraph while reading.
   - When thinking about the important information in the passage, it may help to ask the “reporter’s questions” of
     1. who,
     2. what,
     3. when,
     4. where,
     5. why,
     6. (and sometimes “how” when applicable)

2. Candidates should try to get the big picture rather than substituting words here and there.

3. Construct the graphic organizer (see sample on page 4) on the white board. Candidates should remember to draw as many columns as there are paragraphs in the passage.

4. Fill in the graphic organizer with the main ideas and important details from each paragraph. Candidates should make these brief notes detailed enough to understand once the original passage is put aside. Do not write in complete sentences.

5. Once the graphic organizer is completed, candidates should try NOT to go back to the original passage again while typing the response. Looking at the original passage may tempt candidates (subconsciously) into using the author’s words, sentences, and sentence constructions. The summary needs to be original in the way it is written, not copied. Yet the ideas should be the author’s, not those of the candidate.

6. When starting the response, candidates should begin writing an original summary of the passage. Remember, candidates should not introduce the summary; but should just jump right in where the passage begins.

7. While writing, the order and logic of the passage should be retained.

8. Candidates should be careful not to state any individual opinions or ideas.

9. When finished, candidates should check the summary for accuracy and conciseness. (Refer to the scoring rubric on page 3 of this packet for the evaluation categories.) Candidates should ask the following while reading over the response:
   - Is the author’s original point of view retained?
   - Are the supporting details contained in the original compressed in the response?
   - Could another person get the main idea of the original passage by reading the summary?

10. Candidates should PROOFREAD the summary for mechanical and grammatical errors being sure to notice the little things where points might be lost.

11. Now, while still practicing for the MTEL, candidates should compare their written responses with the sample strong responses and analyses in the back of this packet by identifying, for example, what those responses include that theirs may not. It will also be helpful to read the sample weak responses and analyses to see why they would not receive high scores.
Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure®
SCORING RUBRIC FOR COMMUNICATION AND LITERACY SKILLS:
WRITTEN SUMMARY EXERCISE

Performance Characteristics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scoring Scale</th>
<th>Score Point Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The response accurately and clearly conveys all of the main ideas and significant details of the original passage. It does not introduce information, opinion, or analysis not found in the original. Relationships among ideas are preserved. The response is concise while providing enough statements of appropriate depth and specificity to convey the main ideas and significant details of the original passage. The response is written in the candidate's own words, clearly and coherently conveying main ideas and significant details. The response shows excellent control of grammar and conventions. Sentence structure, word choice, and usage are precise and effective. Mechanics (i.e., spelling, punctuation, and capitalization) conform to the standard conventions of written English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The response conveys most of the main ideas and significant details of the original passage, and is generally accurate and clear. It introduces very little or no information, opinion, or analysis not found in the original. Relationships among ideas are generally maintained. The response may be too long or too short, but generally provides enough statements of appropriate depth and specificity to convey most of the main ideas and significant details of the original passage. The response is generally written in the candidate's own words, conveying main ideas and significant details in a generally clear and coherent manner. The response shows general control of grammar and conventions. Some minor errors in sentence structure, word choice, usage and mechanics (i.e., spelling, punctuation, and capitalization) may be present.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>The response conveys only some of the main ideas and significant details of the original passage. Information, opinion, or analysis not found in the original passage may substitute for some of the original ideas. Relationships among ideas may be unclear. The response either includes or excludes too much of the content of the original passage. It is too long or too short. It may take the form of a list or an outline. The response may be written only partially in the candidate's own words while conveying main ideas and significant details. Language not from the passage may be unclear and/or disjointed. The response shows limited control of grammar and conventions. Errors in sentence structure, word choice, usage, and/or mechanics (i.e., spelling, punctuation, and capitalization) are distracting.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>The response fails to convey the main ideas and details of the original passage. It may consist mostly of information, opinion, or analysis not found in the original. The response is not concise. It either includes or excludes almost all the content of the original passage. The response is written almost entirely of language from the original passage or is written in the candidate's own words and is confused and/or incoherent. The response fails to show control of grammar and conventions. Serious errors in sentence structure, word choice, usage, and/or mechanics (i.e., spelling, punctuation, and capitalization) impede communication.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The response is unrelated to the assigned topic, illegible, primarily in a language other than English, not of sufficient length to score, or merely a repetition of the assignment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>U</td>
<td>There is no response to the assignment.</td>
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(The graphic organizer below is simply a model and will not be supplied during the test. Candidates will create their own templates on the dry erase white board at the test.)

| Written Summary—Template for Graphic Organizer—  
  for use with “school breakfast” passage |
<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph 1</td>
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An elementary school principal in Seattle, Washington, recently announced that she had discovered a secret disciplinary weapon: crackers and peanut butter. Whenever children are sent to her office for misbehavior during the pre-lunch hours, she asks if they have eaten breakfast. In most cases, the youngsters have not had anything to eat, and the provision of a secret snack goes a long way towards remedying the behavioral problem. Unfortunately, situations like this are not isolated occurrences, and it is time to find a permanent solution to the problem of hunger and food insecurity in our schools.

There are numerous physical, emotional, and behavioral consequences of not getting enough food. Children in food-insecure households are more likely to experience ear infections, headaches, stomachaches, and other health problems than children from food-secure households. They generally have difficulty making friends, often exhibiting antisocial behavior as well as increased levels of irritability and anxiety. All of these problems clearly detract from a child's ability to succeed in a learning environment. In one national study, kindergarten children from households without sufficient food were shown to score lower on pre-assessment tests and to learn less over the school year than other children. Hungry children at all grade levels also have a much higher rate of absences and suspensions.

School breakfast programs offer one of the most promising solutions to the problem. Many of those currently in place, however, are structured in ways that make them less successful than they could be. Often, children do not arrive at school early enough to participate. They may face a social stigma for eating breakfast at school. A more successful variation provides all children a free meal in their classroom at the start of the school day. With all of the students in a school participating, the program soon becomes an accepted part of everyone's daily routine that takes no longer than 10 to 15 minutes each morning and gives children the healthy start they need to perform successfully in the classroom.

It is unfair to expect children to behave well and engage in learning when they are hungry. Although the solution to this problem already exists and could have remarkably far-reaching effects if more fully implemented, legislators in many states have been reluctant to take the steps necessary to correct the problem. One way to push them in the right direction is by changing public perceptions of government-subsidized child nutrition programs. Rather than viewing such programs as mere handouts, we need to start seeing them as an investment in the nation's future.
WRITING SUMMARY EXERCISE SAMPLE RESPONSES AND ANALYSES

FIRST SAMPLE **WEAK** RESPONSE FOR WRITING SUMMARY EXERCISE

Recently a school administrator from Seattle has discovered that by providing a small snack for students, that problematic behaviors decreased. When children do not eat prior to coming to school this causes a great deal of problems. A solution to this is to provide within the begining of the school day is a small snack to all students. This will help the children learn.

ANALYSIS FOR FIRST **WEAK** RESPONSE TO WRITING SUMMARY EXERCISE

This is an example of a weak response because it is characterized by the following:

**Fidelity:** The response does not convey most of the main points and significant supporting details of the original passage. It does say that there are problems associated with children coming to school unfed, and that a solution would be to provide a snack "within the begining of the school day" to all students, which would help them learn. However, the response does not mention the scope of the problem of food insecurity, its specific consequences, the shortcomings of existing school breakfast programs, or the need for legislative action. "When children do not eat" does not accurately convey the idea of hunger or food insecurity—it might simply mean that children have carelessly neglected to eat breakfast at home. At the same time, the response includes the detail of "a school administrator from Seattle," which is not significant.

**Conciseness:** The response is too short to permit the inclusion of the essential points.

**Expression:** The response is written in the candidate's own words, though some vocabulary from the original passage is used. However, the language is general ("problematic behaviors," "a great deal of problems"), and thus fails to convey significant supporting details.

**Grammar and Conventions:** Two words are misspelled ("administator" and "begining"). A comma is wrongly used in the first sentence. Sentence structure is flawed in two of the four sentences ("a school administrator . . . has discovered that by providing a small snack for students, that . . ." and "A solution to this is . . . is a small snack . . ."). "Within the begining of the school day" and "a great deal of problems" are not idiomatic English. It would be better usage to say "At the begining of the school day" and "a great many problems." The errors are distracting.
SECOND SAMPLE WEAK RESPONSE FOR WRITING SUMMARY EXERCISE

Breakfast in bed is bad. But a child without having breakfast can face difficult realities in school. Statistics show a child who has had breakfast perform well and are able to express and sustain the class well. Push to make it mandatory in schools has brought alot of debate. The child could arrive late or face social stigma from his or hers peers. Children can be given a time slot in the morning for them allow to have breakfast. Children without proper food experience ear infections, headaches, stomachs, and other health problems.

ANALYSIS FOR SECOND WEAK RESPONSE TO WRITING SUMMARY EXERCISE

This is an example of a weak response because it is characterized by the following:

Fidelity: The response does not accurately convey the main points and significant supporting details of the original passage. It does say that a child who has not had breakfast may face "difficult realities" in school and that children "without proper food" have health problems. However, the response does not identify those "difficult realities" (such as discipline or social problems, low test scores, or poor attendance) or clearly describe a school breakfast program or the recommendation that state legislators support such a program. Neither does the response clearly identify hunger or food-insecurity as the reason that children skip breakfast. At the same time, the response introduces opinion and information not found in the original passage ("Breakfast in bed is bad," "Push to make it mandatory has brought alot of debate," and "Statistics show a child who has had breakfast perform well"—a conclusion that may be implied by the passage but is not stated there).

Conciseness: The response is so short that in order to include the essential points and key supporting details, it would have to be very precisely and accurately written. Because it is not, it is short without being concise.

Expression: The response is mostly written in the candidate's own words, but expression is often unclear. The opening sentence appears unrelated to the rest of the response. It is unclear what is meant by "difficult realities," or "express and sustain the class." Expression is not coherent because ideas are not presented in a logical order: after the statement that children who eat breakfast perform well, the sentence "Push to make it mandatory" presumably refers to school breakfast programs, but these have not been mentioned. So the next statement, that "the child could arrive late or face social stigma," has no context. The final sentence, about "ear infections, headaches, stomachs, and other health problems" is copied, incorrectly, from the passage, and its content should have appeared earlier, as specific detail clarifying "difficult realities."

Grammar and Conventions: The response does not demonstrate good control of grammar and conventions. There are subject-verb disagreements ("a child . . . perform well and are able," "push . . . has brought"), usage errors ("his or hers peers," "for them allow to have breakfast"), awkward constructions ("a child without having breakfast"), and a misspelling ("alot").

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FIRST SAMPLE **STRONG RESPONSE FOR WRITING SUMMARY EXERCISE**

Some disciplinary problems in schools may have a simple solution: breakfast. Children who come to school hungry are more likely to demonstrate antisocial behavior. They also are more susceptible to illnesses, less likely to do well academically, and more frequently absent or suspended from school.

To address the problems posed by food-insecure households, some schools have instituted preschool breakfast programs. However, many children may not arrive early enough to permit them to take part. Another stumbling block is the social stigma that may be attached to being fed at school. Thus it has been proposed that breakfast programs would be more effective if they included everyone. In just fifteen minutes per day, schools could ensure that each child is well prepared for classroom activities.

Some state legislators have shown reluctance to adopt such programs, but they need to view them as investments rather than handouts.

**ANALYSIS FOR FIRST **STRONG** **RESPONSE TO WRITING SUMMARY EXERCISE**

*This is an example of a strong response because it is characterized by the following:*

**Fidelity:** The response accurately and clearly conveys all the main ideas and significant details of the original passage: the specific problems that hungry children have at school, the shortcomings of current school breakfast programs and their solution, and the need for legislative support for that solution. All ideas in the response are found in the original passage. No new ideas were introduced in the response.

**Conciseness:** The response includes the essential information from the original passage while omitting less important details, such as the peanut butter and crackers.

**Expression:** The response is written in the candidate's own words; though a few terms and phrases from the original passage are used ("food-insecure households," "social stigma"), these are used judiciously where paraphrase would be awkward or wordy. The response is coherently organized in three succinct paragraphs that cover the three main points of the passage.

**Grammar and Conventions:** There are no errors in spelling, capitalization, or punctuation.
SECOND SAMPLE STRONG RESPONSE FOR WRITING SUMMARY EXERCISE

Children who come from food-insecure homes often have emotional and behavioral difficulties at school, creating disciplinary issues in the classroom. In addition, these children experience more health problems, do less well on assessments, and have higher rates of absenteeism and suspensions. Before-school breakfast programs, where they are offered, may be inconvenient and carry a social stigma. An effective remedy would be a daily breakfast that is provided to all students, taking very little time away from the school day. Some state legislatures have balked at proposing yet another government-subsidized program supporting child nutrition. But these programs should be regarded as investments in our country's future.

ANALYSIS FOR SECOND STRONG RESPONSE TO WRITING SUMMARY EXERCISE

This is an example of a strong response because it is characterized by the following:

**Fidelity:** The response accurately and clearly conveys all the main ideas and significant details of the original passage: the specific problems that hungry children have at school, the shortcomings of current school breakfast programs and their solution, and the need for legislative support for that solution. No ideas not found in the original passage are introduced.

**Conciseness:** The response is very concise. Unnecessary details are omitted (such as the difficulty hungry children have making friends), while the central points are compactly conveyed ("these children experience more health problems, do less well on assessments, and have higher rates of absenteeism and suspensions"). The idea that "often, children do not arrive at school early enough to participate" is communicated in the single word "inconvenient."

**Expression:** The response is written in the candidate's own words and coherently organized in a single paragraph. Transitional words such as "in addition" and demonstrative pronouns ("these children," "these programs") allow the points to flow logically.

**Grammar and Conventions:** There are no errors in spelling, capitalization, or punctuation.