



GRADUATE RECORD EXAMINATIONS®

## Overview of the Analytical Writing Section



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# *Graduate Record Examinations*<sup>®</sup>

## **Overview of the Analytical Writing Section**

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## ***Introduction***

The Analytical Writing section of the *Graduate Record Examinations*<sup>®</sup> (GRE<sup>®</sup>) tests your critical thinking and analytical writing skills. It assesses your ability to articulate and support complex ideas, construct and evaluate arguments, and sustain a focused and coherent discussion. It does not assess specific content knowledge.

The Analytical Writing section consists of two separately timed analytical writing tasks:

1. A 30-minute “Analyze an Issue” task
2. A 30-minute “Analyze an Argument” task

(Note that the times listed are standard times, and that test takers approved for accommodations involving extended time will have the amount of time approved by E T S.)

The Analyze an Issue task presents an opinion on an issue of broad interest followed by specific instructions on how to respond to that issue. You are required to evaluate the issue, taking into consideration its complexities, and to develop an argument that includes reasons and examples supporting your views.

Analyze an Argument task presents a different challenge from that of the Analyze an Issue task: it requires you to evaluate a given argument according to specific instructions. You will need to consider the logical soundness of the argument rather than to agree or disagree with the position it presents.

The two tasks are complementary in that one requires you to construct your own argument by taking a position and providing evidence supporting your views on the issue, while the other requires you to evaluate someone else’s argument by assessing its claims and evaluating the evidence it provides.

## ***Preparing for the Analytical Writing Section***

Everyone—even the most practiced and confident of writers—should spend some time preparing for the Analytical Writing section before arriving at the test center. It is important to review the skills measured, how the section is scored, and scoring guides and score level descriptions, sample topics, scored sample essay responses, and reader commentary.

The tasks in the Analytical Writing section relate to a broad range of subjects—from the fine arts and humanities to the social and physical sciences—but no task requires specific content knowledge. In fact, each task has been field-tested to ensure that it possesses several important characteristics, including the following:

1. GRE test takers, regardless of their field of study or special interests, understood the task and could easily respond to it.
2. The task elicited the kinds of complex thinking and persuasive writing that graduate school faculty consider important for success in graduate school.
3. The responses were varied in content and in the way the writers developed their ideas.

To help you prepare for the Analytical Writing section of the GRE General Test, the GRE Program has published the entire pool of Analyze an Issue and Analyze Argument tasks from which your test tasks will be selected. You might find it helpful to review the Issue and Argument tasks included in the pool. You can view the published pool on the Web at [www.ets.org/gre](http://www.ets.org/gre) or you can obtain a copy by writing to GRE Program, PO Box 6000, Princeton, NJ 08541-6000.

## ***Test-Taking Strategies for the Analytical Writing Section***

It is important to budget your time. Within the 30-minute time limit for the Analyze an Issue task, you will need to allow sufficient time to consider the issue and the specific instructions, plan a response and compose your essay. Within the 30-minute time limit for the Analyze an Argument task, you will need to allow sufficient time to consider the argument and the specific instructions, plan a response, and compose your essay. Although GRE readers understand the time constraints under which you write and will consider your response a first draft, you still want it to be the best possible example of your writing that you can produce under the testing conditions.

Save a few minutes at the end of each timed task to check for obvious errors. Although an occasional spelling or grammatical error will not affect your score, severe and persistent errors will detract from the overall effectiveness of your writing and thus lower your score.

## ***How the Analytical Writing Section Is Scored***

Each response is holistically scored on a 6-point scale according to the criteria published in the GRE Analytical Writing Scoring Guides (see the sections GRE Scoring Guide: Analyze an Issue, page 40, and GRE Scoring Guide: Analyze an Argument, page 43). Holistic scoring means that each response is judged as a whole: readers do not separate the response into component parts and award a certain number of points for a particular criterion or element such as ideas, organization, sentence structure, or language. Instead, readers assign scores based on the overall quality of

the response, considering all of its characteristics in an integrated way. Excellent organization or poor organization, for example, will be part of the readers' overall impression of the response and will, therefore, contribute to the score, but the organization, as a distinct feature, receives no specific score.

All GRE readers have undergone careful training, passed stringent GRE qualifying tests, and demonstrated that they are able to maintain scoring accuracy.

To ensure fairness and objectivity in scoring, the following procedures are used:

1. Responses are randomly distributed to readers.
2. All identifying information about the test takers is concealed from the readers.
3. Each response is scored by two readers.
4. Readers do not know what other scores a response received.
5. The scoring procedure requires that each response receive identical or adjacent scores from two readers; any other score combination is adjudicated by a third GRE reader.

The scores given for the two tasks are then averaged for a final reported score. The score level descriptions, presented on page 46, provide information about how to interpret the total score on the Analytical Writing section. The primary emphasis on scoring the Analytical Writing section is on critical thinking and analytical writing skills.

Your essay responses on the Analytical Writing section will be reviewed by E T S essay similarity detection software and by experienced essay readers during the scoring process. In light of the high value placed on independent intellectual activity within United States graduate schools and universities, E T S reserves the right to cancel test scores of any test taker when there is substantial evidence that an essay response includes, but is not limited to, any of the following:

1. Text that is substantially similar to that found in one or more other GRE essay responses
2. Quoting or paraphrasing, without attribution, language or ideas that appear in published or unpublished sources
3. Unacknowledged use of work that has been produced through collaboration with others without citation of the contribution of others
4. Text submitted as work of the examinee when the ideas or words have, in fact, been borrowed from elsewhere or prepared by another person

When one or more of the above circumstances occurs, your essay, in E T S's professional judgment, does not reflect the independent, analytical writing skills that this test seeks to measure. Therefore, E T S must cancel the essay score as invalid and

cannot report the GRE General Test scores of which the essay score is an indispensable part.

Test takers whose scores are canceled will forfeit their test fees and must pay to take the entire GRE General Test again at a future administration. No record of the score cancellation, or the reason for cancellation, will appear on future score reports sent to colleges and universities.



## *Analyze an Issue Task*

### **Understanding the Issue Task**

The Analyze an Issue task assesses your ability to think critically about a topic of general interest according to specific instructions, and to clearly express your thoughts about it in writing. Each issue statement makes a claim that test-takers can discuss from various perspectives and apply to many different situations or conditions. The issue statement is followed by specific instructions. Your task is to present a compelling case for your own position on the issue according to the specific instructions. Before beginning your written response, be sure to read the issue and instructions carefully and to think about the issue from several points of view, taking into consideration the complexity of ideas associated with those views. Then, make notes about the position you want to develop, and list the main reasons and examples that you could use to support that position.

You must address the central issue according to the specific instructions. The specific instructions might ask you to do one or more of the following:

1. Discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with a general statement and consider circumstances in which the statement might or might not hold.
2. Discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with a recommendation and consider specific circumstances in which adopting the recommendation would or would not be advantageous.
3. Discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with a claim and anticipate and address the most compelling reasons and/or examples that could be used to challenge your position.
4. Discuss your views on policy and explain the possible consequences of implementing the policy.
5. Discuss two opposing views and explain which view more closely aligns with your position.
6. Discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with a claim and the reason on which it is based.

The GRE readers scoring your response are not looking for a single right answer there is no correct position to take. Instead, the readers are evaluating the skill with which you address the specific instructions and articulate and develop an argument to support your evaluation of the issue.

## **Understanding the Context for Writing: Purpose and Audience**

Analyze an Issue task is an exercise in critical thinking and persuasive writing. The purpose of this task is to determine how well you can (1) develop a compelling argument supporting your own evaluation of an issue and (2) effectively communicate that argument in writing to an academic audience. Your audience consists of GRE readers who are carefully trained to apply the scoring criteria identified in the Analyze an Issue scoring guide (see GRE Scoring Guide: Analyze an Issue, page 40).

To get a clearer idea of how GRE readers apply the Analyze an Issue scoring criteria to actual responses, you should review the scored sample Analyze an Issue essay responses and readers' commentaries beginning on page 16. The sample responses, particularly at the 5 and 6 score levels, will show you a variety of successful strategies for organizing, developing, and communicating a persuasive argument. The readers' commentaries discuss specific aspects of evaluation and writing, such as the use of examples, development, and support, organization, language fluency, and word choice. For each response, the commentary points out aspects that are particularly persuasive as well as any that detract from the overall effectiveness of the essay.

## **Preparing for the Analyze an Issue Task**

Because the Analyze an Issue task is meant to assess the persuasive writing skills that you have developed throughout your education, it has been designed neither to require any particular course of study nor to advantage students with a particular type of training.

Many college textbooks on composition offer advice on persuasive writing and argumentation that you might find useful, but even this advice might be more technical and specialized than you need for the Analyze an Issue task. You will not be expected to know specific critical thinking or writing terms or strategies; instead, you should be able to respond to the specific instructions and use reasons, evidence, and examples to support your position on an issue. Suppose, for instance, that an Analyze an Issue topic asks you to consider a policy that would require government financial support for art museums and the implications of implementing the policy. If your position is that the government should fund art museums, you might support your position by discussing the reasons art is important and explain that government funding would make access to museums available to everyone. On the other hand, if your position is that the government should not support museums, you might point out that, given limited governmental funds, art museums are not as deserving of government funding as are other, more socially important, institutions, which would

suffer if the policy were implemented. Or, if you are in favor of government funding for art museums only under certain conditions, you might focus on the artistic criteria, cultural concerns, or political conditions that you think should determine how—or whether—art museums receive government funds. It is not your position that matters so much as the critical thinking skills you display in developing your position.

An excellent way to prepare for the Analyze an Issue task is to practice writing on some of the published topics. There is no best approach: some people prefer to start practicing without regard to the 30-minute time limit. Others prefer to practice writing under the same timed conditions as the actual test. No matter which approach you take when you practice the Analyze an Issue task, you should review the task directions, then do the following:

1. Carefully read the claim and the specific instructions, and make sure you understand them; if they seem unclear, discuss them with a friend or teacher.
2. Think about the claim and instructions in relation to your own ideas and experiences, events you have read about or observed, and people you have known; this is the knowledge base from which you will develop compelling reasons and examples in your argument that reinforce, negate, or qualify the claim in some way.
3. Decide what position on the issue you want to take and defend.
4. Decide what compelling evidence (reasons and examples) you can use to support your position.

Remember that this is a task in critical thinking and persuasive writing. The most successful responses will explore the complexity of the claim and instructions. As you prepare for the Analyze an Issue task, you might find it helpful to ask yourself the following questions:

1. What, precisely, is the central issue?
2. What, precisely, are the instructions asking me to do?
3. Do I agree with all or with any part of the claim? Why or why not?
4. Does the claim make certain assumptions? If so, are they reasonable?
5. Is the claim valid only under certain conditions? If so, what are they?
6. Do I need to explain how I interpret certain terms or concepts used in the claim?
7. If I take a certain position on the issue, what reasons support my position?
8. What examples—either real or hypothetical—could I use to illustrate those reasons and advance my point of view? Which examples are most compelling?

Once you have decided on a position to defend, consider the perspective of others who might not agree with your position. Ask yourself:

1. What reasons and/or examples might someone use to refute or undermine my position?
2. How should I acknowledge or defend against those views in my essay?

To plan your response, you might want to summarize your position and make brief notes about how you will support the position you're going to take. When you've done this, look over your notes and decide how you will organize your response. Then write a response to developing your position on the issue. Even if you don't write a full response, you should find it helpful to practice with a few of the Analyze Issue topics and to sketch out your possible responses. After you have practiced with some of the topics, try writing responses to some of the topics within the 30-minute time limit so that you have a good idea of how to use your time in the actual test.

It would probably be helpful to get some feedback on your response from an instructor who teaches critical thinking or writing or to trade papers on the same topic with other students and discuss one another's responses in relation to the scoring guide. Try to determine how each paper meets or misses the criteria for each score point in the guide. Comparing your own response to the scoring guide will help you see how and where you might need to improve.

### **The Form of Your Response**

You are free to organize and develop your response in any way that you think will effectively communicate your position on the issue and address the specific task instructions. Your response may, but need not, incorporate particular writing strategies learned in English composition or writing-intensive college courses. GRE readers will not be looking for a particular developmental strategy or mode of writing; in fact, when GRE readers are trained, they review hundreds of Analyze Issue responses that, although highly diverse in content and form, display similar levels of critical thinking and persuasive writing. Readers will see, for example, some Analyze Issue responses at the 6 score level that begin by briefly summarizing the writer's position on the issue and then explicitly announcing the main points to be argued. They will see others that lead into the writer's position by making a prediction, asking a series of questions, describing a scenario, or defining critical terms in the quotation. The readers know that a writer can earn a high score by giving multiple examples or by presenting a single, extended example. Look at the sample Analyze Issue responses, particularly at the 5 and 6 score levels, to see how other writers have successfully developed and organized their arguments.

You should use as many or as few paragraphs as you consider appropriate for your argument—for example, you will probably need to create a new paragraph whenever your discussion shifts to a new cluster of ideas. What matters is not the number of examples, the number of paragraphs, or the form your argument takes but, rather, the cogency of your ideas about the issue and the clarity and skill with which you communicate those ideas to academic readers.

### **Sample Analyze an Issue Task**

As people rely more and more on technology to solve problems, the ability of humans to think for themselves will surely deteriorate.

Discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement and explain your reasoning for the position you take. In developing and supporting your position, you should consider ways in which the statement might or might not hold true and explain how these considerations shape your position.

### **Strategies for This Topic**

In this task, you are asked to discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement. Thus, responses may range from the strong agreement or strong disagreement to a qualified agreement or qualified disagreement. You are also instructed to explain your reasoning and to consider ways in which the statement might or might not hold true. A successful response need not comment on all or any one of the points listed below and may well discuss other reasons or examples not mentioned here in support of its position.

Because this topic is so accessible to respondents of all levels of ability, for any response to receive a top score, it is particularly important that you remain focused on the task and provide clearly relevant examples and/or reasons to support the point of view you are expressing. Responses that receive lower scores may be long and full of examples of modern technology, but those examples may not be clearly related to a particular position. For example, a respondent who strongly disagrees with the statement may choose to use computer technology as proof that thinking ability is not deteriorating. The mere existence of computer technology, however, does not adequately prove this point (perhaps the ease of computer use inhibits our thinking ability). To better support this position, the respondent could explain situations in which the development or use of computer technology calls for or requires humans to think for themselves.

This topic could elicit a wide variety of approaches, especially considering the different possible interpretations of the phrase “the ability of humans to think for

themselves.” Although most respondents may take it to mean problem-solving, others, with equal effectiveness, could interpret it as emotional and/or social intelligence (i.e., the ability to communicate and/or connect with others). With any approach, it is possible to discuss examples such as calculators; word-processing tools such as spell-checking and grammar-checking applications; tax return software; Internet research tools; and a variety of other common home and business technologies.

You may agree with the prompt and argue that:

1. Reliance on technology leads to dependency; we have come to rely on problem-solving technologies to such a degree that when they fail, we are in worse shape than if we didn't have them.
2. Everyday technologies such as calculators and cash registers have decreased our ability to perform simple calculations—a “use it or lose it” approach to thinking ability.

Or you may take issue with the prompt, and argue that technology facilitates and improves our thinking skills, providing any of the following arguments:

1. Developing, implementing, and using technology requires problem-solving skills.
2. Technology frees us from mundane problem solving (e.g., calculations) and allows us to engage in more complex thinking.
3. Technology provides access to information otherwise unavailable.
4. Technology connects people at a distance and allows them to share ideas.
5. Technology is dependent on the human ability to think and make choices (e.g., every implementation of and advance in technology is driven by human intelligence and decision making).

On the other hand, you could decide to explore the middle ground in the debate and point out that while technology may diminish some mental skill sets, it enables other (perhaps more important) types of thinking to thrive. Such a response might distinguish between complex problem solving and simple “data maintenance” (i.e., performing calculations and organizing information). Other approaches could include taking a historical, philosophical, or sociological stance, or, with equal effectiveness, using personal examples to illustrate a position. One could argue that the value or detriment of relying on technology is determined by the individual (or society) using it, or that only those who develop technology (i.e., technical specialists) are maintaining their problem-solving skills, while the rest of us are losing them.

Again, it is important to avoid using overly general examples or listing examples without expanding on them. It is also essential to do more than paraphrase the prompt. Please keep in mind that what counts is the ability to clearly express a particular point

of view in relation to the issue and specific task instructions, and to support that position with relevant reasons and/or examples.

## **Essay Responses and Reader Commentary**

All responses in this publication are reproduced exactly as written, including errors and misspellings, if any.

### **Essay Response—Score 6**

The statement linking technology negatively with free thinking plays on the recent human experience over the past century. Surely there has been no time in history where the lived lives of people have changed more dramatically. A quick reflection on a typical day reveals how technology has revolutionized the world. Most people commute to work in an automobile that runs on an internal combustion engine. During the workday, chances are high that the employee will interact with a computer that processes information on silicon bridges that are .09 microns wide. Upon leaving home, family members will be reached through wireless networks that utilize satellites orbiting the earth. Each of these common occurrences would have been inconceivable at the turn of the 19th century.

The statement attempts to bridge these dramatic changes to a reduction in the ability for humans to think for themselves. The assumption is that increased reliance on technology negates the need for people to think creatively to solve previous quandaries. Looking back at the introduction, one could argue that without a car, computer, or mobile phone, the hypothetical worker would need to find alternate methods of transport, information processing, and communication. Technology short circuits this thinking by making the problems obsolete.

However, this reliance on technology does not necessarily preclude the creativity that marks the human species. The prior examples reveal that technology allows for convenience. The car, computer, and phone all release additional time for people to live more efficiently. This efficiency does not preclude the need for humans to think for themselves. In fact, technology frees humanity to not only tackle new problems but may itself create new issues that did not exist without technology. For example, the proliferation of automobiles has introduced a need for fuel conservation on a global scale. With increasing energy demands from emerging markets, global warming becomes a concern inconceivable to the horse-and-buggy generation. Likewise, dependence on oil has created nation-states that are not dependent on taxation, allowing ruling parties to oppress minority groups such as women. Solutions to these complex problems require the unfettered imaginations of maverick scientists and politicians.



In contrast to the statement, we can even see how technology frees the human imagination. Consider how the digital revolution and the advent of the internet have allowed for an unprecedented exchange of ideas. WebMD, a popular internet portal for medical information, permits patients to self-research symptoms for a more informed doctor visit. This exercise opens pathways of thinking that were previously closed off to the medical layman. With increased interdisciplinary interactions, inspiration can arrive from the most surprising corners. Jeffrey Sachs, one of the architects of the UN Millennium Development Goals, based his ideas on emergency care triage techniques. The unlikely marriage of economics and medicine has healed tense, hyperinflation environments from South America to Eastern Europe.

This last example provides the most hope in how technology actually provides hope for the future of humanity. By increasing our reliance on technology, impossible goals can now be achieved. Consider how the late 20th century witnessed the complete elimination of smallpox. This disease had ravaged the human race since prehistorical days, and yet with the technology of vaccines, free-thinking humans dared to imagine a world free of smallpox. Using technology, battle plans were drawn out, and smallpox was systematically targeted and eradicated.

Technology will always mark the human experience, from the discovery of fire to the implementation of nanotechnology. Given the history of the human race, there will be no limit to the number of problems, both new and old, for us to tackle. There is no need to retreat to a Luddite attitude to new things, but rather embrace a hopeful posture to the possibilities that technology provides for new avenues of human imagination.

### **Reader Commentary for Essay Response—Score 6**

The author of this essay stakes out a clear and insightful position on the issue and follows the specific instructions by presenting reasons to support that position. The essay cogently argues that technology does not decrease our ability to think for ourselves, it merely provides “additional time for people to live more efficiently.” In fact, the problems that have developed alongside the growth of technology (pollution, political unrest in oil-producing nations) actually call for more creative thinking, not less. In further examples, the essay shows how technology allows for the linking of ideas that may never have been connected in the past (like medicine and economic models), pushing people to think in new ways. Examples are persuasive and fully developed; reasoning is logically sound and well supported.

Ideas in the essay are connected logically, with effective transitions used both between paragraphs (“However” or “In contrast to the statement”) and within paragraphs.

Sentence structure is varied and complex, and the essay clearly demonstrates facility with the “conventions of standard written English (i.e., grammar, usage, and mechanics)” (see GRE Scoring Guide: Analyze an Issue, page 40), with only minor errors appearing. Thus, this essay meets all the requirements for receiving a top score, a 6.

### **Essay Response—Score 5**

Surely many of us have expressed the following sentiment, or some variation on it, during our daily commutes to work: “People are getting so stupid these days!” Surrounded as we are by striding and strident automatons with cell phones glued to their ears, PDA’s gripped in their palms, and omniscient, omnipresent CNN gleaming in their eyeballs, it’s tempting to believe that technology has isolated and infantilized us, essentially transforming us into dependent, conformist morons best equipped to sideswipe one another in our SUV’s.

Furthermore, hanging around with the younger, pre-commute generation, whom tech-savviness seems to have rendered lethal, is even less reassuring. With “Teen People” style trends shooting through the air from tiger-striped PDA to zebra-striped PDA, and with the latest starlet gossip zipping from juicy Blackberry to teeny, turbo-charged cell phone, technology seems to support young people’s worst tendencies to follow the crowd. Indeed, they have seemingly evolved into intergalactic conformity police. After all, today’s tech-aided teens are, courtesy of authentic, hands-on video games, literally trained to kill; courtesy of chat and instant text messaging, they have their own language; they even have tiny cameras to efficiently photo document your fashion blunders! Is this adolescence, or paparazzi terrorist training camp?

With all this evidence, it’s easy to believe that tech trends and the incorporation of technological wizardry into our everyday lives have served mostly to enforce conformity, promote dependence, heighten consumerism and materialism, and generally create a culture that values self-absorption and personal entitlement over cooperation and collaboration. However, I argue that we are merely in the inchoate stages of learning to live with technology while still loving one another. After all, even given the examples provided earlier in this essay, it seems clear that technology hasn’t impaired our thinking and problem-solving capacities. Certainly, it has incapacitated our behavior and manners; certainly, our values have taken a severe blow. However, we are inarguably more efficient in our badness these days. We’re effective worker bees of ineffectiveness!

If T\technology has so increased our senses of self-efficacy that we can become veritable agents of the awful, virtual CEO’s of selfishness, certainly it can be

beneficial. Harnessed correctly, technology can improve our ability to think and act for ourselves. The first challenge is to figure out how to provide technology users with some direly-needed direction.

### **Reader Commentary for Essay Response—Score 5**

The language of this essay clearly illustrates both its strengths and weaknesses. The flowery and sometimes uncannily keen descriptions are often used to powerful effect, but at other times, this descriptive language results in errors in syntax. See, for example, the problems of parallelism in the second to last sentence of paragraph 2 (“After all, today’s tech-aided teens are, courtesy of authentic, hands-on video games, literally trained to kill; courtesy of chat and instant text messaging, they have their own language; they even have tiny cameras to efficiently photo document your fashion blunders!”).

There is consistent evidence of facility with syntax and complex vocabulary (“Surrounded as we are by striding and strident automatons with cell phones glued to their ears, PDA’s gripped in their palms, and omniscient, omnipresent CNN gleaming in their eyeballs, it’s tempting to believe ...”). Such lucid prose, however, is often countered with an over-reliance on abstractions and tangential reasoning (what does the fact that video games “literally train [teens] to kill” have to do with the use or deterioration of thinking abilities, for example?).

Because this essay takes a complex approach to the issue (arguing, in effect, that technology neither enhances nor reduces our ability to think for ourselves, but can be used to do one or the other depending on the user), and because the author makes use of “appropriate vocabulary and sentence variety” (see GRE Scoring Guide: Analyze an Issue, page 40), a score of 5 is appropriate.

### **Essay Response—Score 4**

In all actuality, I think it is more probable that our bodies will surely deteriorate long before our minds do in any significant amount. Who can’t say that technology has made us lazier, but that’s the keyword, lazy, not stupid? The ever-increasing amount of technology that we incorporate into our daily lives makes people think and learn every day, possibly more than ever before. Our abilities to think, learn, philosophize, etc. may even reach limits never dreamed of before by average people. Using technology to solve problems will continue to help us realize our potential as a human race.

If you think about it, using technology to solve more complicating problems gives humans a chance to expand their thinking and learning, opening up whole new worlds

for many people. Many of these people are glad for the chance to expand their horizons by learning more, going to new places, and trying new things. If it wasn't for the invention of new technological devices, I wouldn't be sitting at this computer trying to philosophize about technology. It would be extremely hard for children in much poorer countries to learn and think for themselves without the invention of the internet. Think what an impact the printing press, a technologically superior machine at the time, had on the ability of the human race to learn and think.

Right now we are seeing a golden age of technology, using it all the time during our everyday lives. When we get up there's instant coffee and the microwave and all these great things that help us get ready for our day. But we aren't allowing our minds to deteriorate by using them; we are only making things easier for ourselves and saving time for other important things in our days. Going off to school or work in our cars instead of a horse and buggy. Think of the brainpower and genius that was used to come up with that single invention that has changed the way we move across this globe.

Using technology to solve our continually more complicated problems as a human race is definitely a good thing. Our ability to think for ourselves isn't deteriorating; it's continuing to grow, moving on to higher though functions and more ingenious ideas. The ability to use what technology we have is an example

### **Reader Commentary for Essay Response—Score 4**

This essay meets all the criteria of a 4-level essay. The writer develops a clear position (“Using technology to solve problems will continue to help us realize our potential as a human race”). The position is then developed with relevant reasons (“using technology to solve more [complicated] problems gives humans a chance to expand their thinking and learning ...” and “we are seeing a golden age of technology...”). Point 1, “using technology” is supported by the simple but relevant notions that technology allows us access to information and abilities to which we would not normally have access. Similarly, point 2, “the golden age” is supported by the basic description of our technologically saturated social condition. Though the overall development and organization of the essay do suffer from an occasional misdirection (see paragraph 3's abrupt progression from coffeepots to the benefits of technology to cars), the essay as a whole flows smoothly and logically from one idea to the next.

It is useful to compare this essay to the 3-level essay presented next. Though they both utilize some very surface-level discussion and often fail to probe deeply into the issue, this writer does, however, take the analysis a step further. The distinction between this essay and the next one (the 3-level response) can most clearly be seen in paragraph 2.

To support the notion that advances in technology actually help increase thinking ability, the writer draws a clever parallel between the promise of modern, sophisticated technology (computer) and the equally substantial/pervasive technology of the past (printing press).

Like the analysis, the language in this essay clearly meets the requirements for a score of 4. The writer displays sufficient control of language and the conventions of standard written English. The preponderance of mistakes is of a cosmetic nature (“using technology to solve more complicating problems”). There is a sentence fragment (“Going off ...”) along with a comma splice (“Our ability ... isn’t deteriorating, it’s continuing to grow ...”) in paragraph 4. These errors, though, are minor and do not interfere with the clarity of the ideas being presented.

### **Essay Response—Score 3**

There is no current proof that advancing technology will deteriorate the ability of humans to think. On the contrary, advancements in technology had advanced our vast knowledge in many fields, opening opportunities for further understanding and achievement. For example, the problem of debilitating illnesses and diseases such as Alzheimer’s disease is slowly being solved by the technological advancements in stem cell research. The future ability to grow new brain cells and the possibility to reverse the onset of Alzheimer’s is now becoming a reality. This shows our initiative as humans to better our health demonstrates the greater ability of humans to think.

One aspect where the ability of humans may initially be seen as an example of deteriorating minds is the use of the internet and cell phones. In the past humans had to seek out information in many different environments and aspects of life. Now humans can sit in a chair and type anything into a computer and get an answer. Our reliance on this type of technology can be detrimental if not regulated and regularly substituted for other information sources such as human interactions and hands-on learning. I think if humans understand that we should not have such a reliance on computer technology, which we as a species will advance further by utilizing the opportunity of computer technology as well as the other sources of information outside of a computer. Supplementing our knowledge with internet access is surely a way for technology to solve problems while continually advancing the human race.

### **Reader Commentary for Essay Response—Score 3**

This essay never moves beyond a superficial discussion of the issue. The writer attempts to develop two points: that advancements in technology have progressed our knowledge in many fields, and that supplementing rather than relying on technology is

“surely a way for technology to solve problems while continually advancing the human race.” Each point, then, is developed with relevant but inefficient evidence. In discussing the ability of technology to advance knowledge in many fields (a broad subject rife with possible examples), the writer uses only one limited and very brief example from a specific field (medicine and stem-cell research).

The development of the second point is hindered by a lack of specificity and organization. The writer creates what might most be comparable to an outline. The writer cites a need for regulation/supplementation and warns of the detriment of over-reliance on technology. However, the explanation of both the problem and solution is both vague and limited (“Our reliance ... can be detrimental . . . If humans understand that we should not have such reliance ... we ... will advance further”). There is neither explanation of consequences nor clarification of what is meant by “supplementing.” This second paragraph is a series of generalizations that are loosely connected and lack a much-needed grounding.

In the essay, there are some minor language errors and a few more serious flaws (e.g., “The future ability to grow new brain cells” and “One aspect where the ability of humans may initially be seen as an example of deteriorating minds ...”). Despite the accumulation of such flaws, the meaning is generally clear. Thus, this essay earns a score of 3.

### **Essay Response—Score 2**

In recent centuries, humans have developed the technology very rapidly, and you may accept some merit of it, and you may see a distortion in society that occurred by it. To be lazy for humans in some meaning is one of the fashion issues in these days. There are many symptoms and reasons for it. However, I cannot agree with the statement that technology makes humans be reluctant to thinking thoroughly.

Of course, you can see the phenomena of human laziness along with developed technology in someplace. However, they would happen in a specific condition, not general. What makes humans be laze of thinking is not merely technology, but the tendency of humans that they treat them as a magic stick and a black box. Not understanding the aims and theory of them courses the disapproval problems.

The most important thing to use the technology, regardless of the new or old, is to comprehend the fundamental idea of them and to adapt suit tech to tasks in need. Even if you recognize a method as an all-mighty and it is extremely over-spec to your needs, you cannot see the result you want. In this procedure, humans have to consider as long as possible to acquire adequate functions. Therefore, humans cannot escape from using their brains.

In addition, the technology as it does not vain automatically is created by humans. Thus, the more developed tech and the more you want a convenient life, the more you think and emit your creativity to breakthrough some banal method sarcastically.

Consequently, if you are not passive to the new tech, but offensive to it, you would not lose your ability to think deeply. Furthermore, you may improve your ability by adopting it.

### **Reader Commentary for Essay Response—Score 2**

The language of this essay is what most clearly links it to the score point of 2. Amidst sporadic moments of clarity, this essay is marred by serious errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics that often interfere with meaning. It is unclear what the writer means when he or she states, “To be lazy for human in some meaning is one of the fashion issues in these days” or “... to adapt suit tech to tasks in need.” Despite such severe flaws, the writer has made an obvious attempt to respond to the prompt (“I cannot agree with the statement that the technology makes humans be reluctant to thinking thoroughly”) as well as an unclear attempt to support such an assertion (“Not understanding the aims and theory of them [technology] causes the disapproval problems” and “The most important thing to use the technology ... is to comprehend the fundamental idea of them”). Holistically, the essay displays a seriously flawed but not fundamentally deficient attempt to develop and support its claims.

(Note: In this specific case, the analysis is tied directly to the language. As the language falters, so too does the analysis.)

### **Essay Response—Score 1**

Humans have invented machines but they have forgotten it and have started everything technically so clearly their thinking process is deteriorating.

### **Reader Commentary for Essay Response—Score 1**

The essay is clearly on topic, as evidenced by the writer’s usage of the more significant terms from the prompt: “technically” (technologically), “humans,” “thinking” (think), and “deteriorating” (deteriorate). Such usage is the only clear evidence of understanding. Meaning aside, the brevity of the essay (one sentence) clearly indicates the writer’s inability to develop a response that addresses the specific instructions given (“Discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement above and explain your reasoning for the position you take”).

The language, too, is clearly at the 1 level because the sentence fails to achieve coherence. The coherent phrases in this one-sentence response are those tied to the prompt “Humans have invented machines” and “their thinking process is deteriorating.” Otherwise, the point made is unclear.

## *Analyze an Argument Task*

### **Understanding the Analyze an Argument Task**

Analyze an Argument task assesses your ability to understand, analyze, and evaluate arguments according to specific instructions and to clearly convey your evaluation in writing. The task consists of a brief passage in which the author makes a case for some course of action or interpretation of events by presenting claims backed by reasons and evidence. Your task is to discuss the logical soundness of the author’s case according to the specific instructions by critically examining the line of reasoning and use of evidence. This task requires you to read the argument and instructions very carefully. You might want to read them more than once and possibly make brief notes about points you want to develop more fully in your response. In reading the argument, you should pay special attention to the following elements:

1. What is offered as evidence, support, or proof
2. What is explicitly stated, claimed, or concluded
3. What is assumed or supposed, perhaps without justification or proof
4. What is not stated, but necessarily follows from what is stated

Besides, you should consider the structure of the argument—the way in which these elements are linked together to form a line of reasoning; that is, you should recognize the separate, sometimes implicit steps in the thinking process and consider whether the movement from each one to the next is logically sound. In tracing this line of reasoning, look for transition words and phrases that suggest that the author is attempting to make a logical connection (e.g., however, thus, therefore, evidently, hence, in conclusion).

An important part of performing well on the Analyze an Argument task is remembering what you are not being asked to do. You are not being asked to discuss whether the statements in the argument are true or accurate. You are not being asked to agree or disagree with the position stated. You are not being asked to express your own views on the subject being discussed (as you were in the Analyze an Issue task). Instead, you are being asked to evaluate the logical soundness of an argument of another writer according to specific instructions and, in doing so, to demonstrate the



critical thinking and analytical writing skills that university faculty consider important for success in graduate school.

It is important that you address the argument according to the specific instructions. The specific instructions might ask you to do the following:

1. Discuss what specific evidence is needed to evaluate the argument and explain how the evidence would weaken or strengthen the argument.
2. Discuss the unstated assumptions of the argument, how the argument depends on the assumptions, and what the implications are if the assumptions prove unwarranted.
3. Discuss what questions would need to be answered in order to evaluate the argument's soundness or validity properly.
4. Discuss what alternative explanations could challenge the argument's explanation of a certain phenomenon and demonstrate how the alternatives would do so.

Evaluate an Argument is primarily a critical-thinking task requiring a written response. Consequently, the analytical skills displayed in your evaluation carry great weight in determining your score; however, the clarity with which you convey ideas is also important to your overall score.

### **Understanding the Context for Writing: Purpose and Audience**

The purpose of the task is to see how well equipped you are to insightfully evaluate an argument written by someone else and to effectively communicate your evaluation in writing to an academic audience. Your audience consists of GRE readers who are carefully trained to apply the scoring criteria identified in GRE Scoring Guide: Analyze an Argument on page 43.

To get a clearer idea of how GRE readers apply the Analyze an Argument scoring criteria to actual essays, you should review the scored sample Analyze an Argument essay responses and readers' commentaries. The sample responses, particularly at the 5 and 6 score levels, will show you a variety of successful strategies for organizing and developing an insightful evaluation. The readers' commentaries discuss specific aspects of analytical writing, such as cogency of ideas, development and support, organization, syntactic variety, and facility with language. These commentaries will point out aspects that are particularly effective and insightful as well as any that detract from the overall effectiveness of the responses.

## **Preparing for the Analyze an Argument Task**

Because the Analyze an Argument task is meant to assess analytical writing and informal reasoning skills that you have developed throughout your education, it has been designed so as not to require any specific course of study or to advantage students with a particular type of training. Many college textbooks on rhetoric and composition have sections on informal logic and critical thinking that might prove helpful, but even these might be more detailed and technical than the task requires. You will not be expected to know the methods of analysis or technical terms. For instance, in one topic an elementary school principal might conclude that the new playground equipment has improved student attendance because absentee rates have declined since it was installed. You will not need to see that the principal has committed the post hoc, ergo propter hoc fallacy; you will simply need to see that there are other possible explanations for the improved attendance, to offer some commonsense examples, and perhaps to suggest what would be necessary to verify the conclusion. For instance, absentee rates might have decreased because the climate was milder. This would have to be ruled out for the principal's conclusion to be valid.

Although you do not need to know special analytical techniques and terminology, you should be familiar with the directions for the Analyze an Argument task and with certain key concepts, including the following:

1. **Alternative explanation:** A possible competing version of what might have caused the events in question; an alternative explanation that undercuts or qualifies the original explanation because it too can account for the observed facts
2. **Analysis:** The process of breaking something (e.g., an argument) down into its component parts in order to understand how they work together to make up the whole
3. **Argument:** A claim or a set of claims with reasons and evidence offered as support; a line of reasoning meant to demonstrate the truth or falsehood of something
4. **Assumption:** A belief, often unstated or unexamined, that someone must hold in order to maintain a particular position; something that is taken for granted but that must be true in order for the conclusion to be true
5. **Conclusion:** The endpoint reached by a line of reasoning, valid if the reasoning is sound; the resulting assertion
6. **Counterexample:** An example, real or hypothetical, that refutes or disproves a statement in the argument

7. **Evaluation:** An assessment of the quality of evidence and reasons in an argument and of the overall merit of an argument

An excellent way to prepare for the Analyze an Argument task is to practice writing on some of the published Analyze Argument topics. There is no one way to practice that is best for everyone. Some prefer to start practicing without adhering to the 30-minute time limit. Others prefer to practice by taking practice tests under the same timed conditions as the actual test. If you follow this approach, take all the time you need to evaluate the argument. No matter which approach you take, you should do the following:

1. Carefully read the argument and the specific instructions—you might want to read them over more than once.
2. Identify as many of the argument’s claims, conclusions, and underlying assumptions as possible, and evaluate their quality.
3. Think of as many alternative explanations and counterexamples as you can.
4. Think of what specific additional evidence might weaken or lend support to the claims.
5. Ask yourself what changes in the argument would make the reasoning more sound.

Write down each of these thoughts as a brief note. When you’ve gone as far as you can with your evaluation, look over the notes and put them in good order for discussion (perhaps by numbering them). Then write an evaluation according to the specific instructions by fully developing each of your points in turn. Even if you choose not to write a full essay response, you should find it very helpful to practice evaluating a few of the arguments and sketching out your responses. When you become quicker and more confident, you should practice writing some Analyze Argument responses within the 30-minute time limit so that you will have a good sense of how to pace yourself in the actual test. For example, you will not want to discuss one point so exhaustively or to provide so many equivalent examples that you run out of time to make your other main points.

You might want to get feedback on your response(s) from a writing instructor, philosophy teacher, or someone who emphasizes critical thinking in his or her course. It can also be very informative to trade papers on the same topic with fellow students and discuss one another’s responses in terms of the scoring guide. Focus not so much on giving the “right scores” as on seeing how the papers meet or miss the performance standards for each score point and what you, therefore, need to do to improve.

## **How to Interpret Numbers, Percentages, and Statistics in Argument Topics**

Some arguments contain numbers, percentages, or statistics that are offered as evidence in support of the argument's conclusion. For example, an argument might claim that a certain community event is less popular this year than it was last year because only 100 people attended this year in comparison with 150 last year, a 33 percent decline in attendance. It is important to remember that you are not being asked to do a mathematical task with the numbers, percentages, or statistics. Instead, you should evaluate this information as evidence intended to support the conclusion. In this example, the conclusion is that a community event has become less popular. You should ask yourself: Does the difference between 100 people and 150 people support that conclusion? Note that, in this case, there are other possible explanations; for example, the weather might have been much worse this year, this year's event might have been held at an inconvenient time, the cost of the event might have gone up this year, or there might have been another popular event this year at the same time. Each of these could explain the difference in attendance and thus would weaken the conclusion that the event was "less popular." Similarly, percentages might support or weaken a conclusion, depending on what actual numbers the percentages represent. Consider the claim that the drama club at a school deserves more funding because its membership has increased by 100 percent. This 100 percent increase could be significant if there had been 100 members and now there are 200 members, whereas the increase would be much less significant if there had been 5 members and now there are 10. Remember that any numbers, percentages, or statistics in Analyze an Argument tasks are used only as evidence in support of a conclusion, and you should always consider whether they actually support the conclusion.

## **The Form of Your Response**

You are free to organize and develop your response in any way that you think will effectively communicate your evaluation of the argument. Your response may, but need not, incorporate particular writing strategies learned in English composition or writing-intensive college courses. GRE readers will not be looking for a particular developmental strategy or mode of writing. In fact, when GRE readers are trained, they review hundreds of Analyze Argument responses that, although highly diverse in content and form, display similar levels of critical thinking and analytical writing. Readers will see, for example, some essays at the 6 score level that begin by briefly summarizing the argument and then explicitly stating and developing the main points

of the evaluation. The readers know that a writer can earn a high score by developing several points in an evaluation or by identifying a central feature in the argument and developing that evaluation extensively. You might want to look at the sample Analyze Argument responses, particularly at the 5 and 6 score levels, to see how other writers have successfully developed and organized their responses.

You should make choices about format and organization that you think support and enhance the overall effectiveness of your evaluation. This means using as many or as few paragraphs as you consider appropriate for your response—for example, creating a new paragraph when your discussion shifts to a new point of evaluation. You might want to organize your evaluation around the structure of the argument itself, discussing the argument line by line. Or you might want to first point out a central questionable assumption and then move on to discuss related weaknesses in the argument’s line of reasoning. Similarly, you might want to use examples if they help illustrate an important point in your evaluation or move your discussion forward. (Remember, however, that, in terms of your ability to perform the Analyze an Argument task effectively, it is your critical thinking and analytical writing, not your ability to come up with examples, that are being assessed.) What matters is not the form the response takes, but how insightfully you evaluate the argument and how articulately you communicate your evaluation to academic readers within the context of the task.

### **Sample Analyze an Argument Task**

In surveys, Mason City residents rank water sports (swimming, boating, and fishing) among their favorite recreational activities. The Mason River flowing through the city is rarely used for these pursuits, however, and the city park department devotes little of its budget to maintaining riverside recreational facilities. For years there have been complaints from residents about the quality of the river’s water and the river’s smell. In response, the state has recently announced plans to clean up the Mason River. The use of the river for water sports is, therefore, sure to increase. The city government should for that reason devote more money in this year’s budget to riverside recreational facilities.

Write a response in which you examine the stated and unstated assumptions of the argument. Be sure to explain how the argument depends on the assumptions and what the implications are if the assumptions prove unwarranted.

## **Strategies for This Topic**

This argument cites a survey to support the prediction that the use of the Mason River is sure to increase and thus recommends that the city government should devote more money in this year's budget to the riverside recreational facilities.

In developing your evaluation, you are asked to examine the argument's stated and unstated assumptions AND discuss what the implications are if these assumptions prove unwarranted. A response that does not address both parts of the task may not receive a 5 or a 6.

Though responses may well raise other points not mentioned here and need not mention all of these points, some assumptions of the argument, and some ways in which the argument depends on those assumptions, include:

1. The assumption that people who drank water sports "among their favorite recreational activities" are actually likely to participate in them. (It is possible that they just like to watch them.) This assumption underlies the claim that the use of the river for water sports is sure to increase after the state cleans up the Mason River and that the city should for that reason devote more money to riverside recreational facilities.
2. The assumption that what residents say in surveys can be taken at face value. (It is possible that survey results exaggerate the interest in water sports.) This assumption underlies the claim that the use of the river for water sports is sure to increase after the state cleans up the Mason River and that the city should for that reason devote more money to riverside recreational facilities.
3. The assumption that Mason City residents would actually want to do water sports in the Mason River. (As recreational activities, it is possible that water sports are regarded as pursuits for vacations and weekends away from the city.) This assumption underlies the claim that the use of the river for water sports is sure to increase after the state cleans up the Mason River and that the city should for that reason devote more money to riverside recreational facilities.
4. The assumption that the park department devoting little of its budget to maintaining riverside recreational facilities means that these facilities are inadequately maintained. This assumption underlies the claim that the city should devote more money to this year's budget to riverside recreational facilities. If current facilities are adequately maintained, then increased

funding might not be needed even if the recreational use of the river does increase.

5. The assumption that the riverside recreational facilities are facilities designed for people who participate in water sports and not some other recreational pursuit. This assumption underlies the claim that the city should devote more money to this year's budget to riverside recreational facilities.
6. The assumption that the dirtiness of the river is the cause of its being little used and that cleaning up the river will be sufficient to increase the recreational use of the river. (Residents might have complained about the water quality and smell even if they had no desire to boat, swim, or fish in the river.) This assumption underlies the claim that the state's plan to clean up the river will result in increased use of the river for water sports.
7. The assumption that the complaints about the river are numerous and significant. This assumption motivates the state's plan to clean up the river and underlies the claim that the use of the river for water sports is sure to increase. (Perhaps the complaints are coming from a very small minority; in which case, cleaning the river might be a misuse of state funds.)
8. The assumption that the state's cleanup will occur soon enough to require adjustments to this year's budget. This assumption underlies the claim that the city should devote more money to this year's budget to riverside recreational facilities.
9. The assumption that the cleanup, when it happens, will benefit those parts of the river accessible from the city's facilities. This assumption underlies the claim that the city should devote more money to riverside recreational facilities.
10. The assumption that the city government ought to devote more attention to maintaining a recreational facility if demand for that facility increases.
11. The assumption that the city should finance the new project and not some other agency or group (public or private).

Should any of the above assumptions prove unwarranted, the implications are:

1. The logic of the argument falls apart/is invalid/is unsound.
2. The state and city are spending their funds unnecessarily.

## **Essay Responses and Reader Commentary**

All responses in this publication are reproduced exactly as written, including errors and misspellings, if any.

### **Essay Response—Score 6**

While it may be true that the Mason City government ought to devote more money to riverside recreational facilities, this author's argument does not make a cogent case for increased resources based on river use. It is easy to understand why city residents would want a cleaner river, but this argument is rife with holes and assumptions, and thus, not strong enough to lead to increased funding.

Citing surveys of city residents, the author reports city resident's love of water sports. It is not clear, however, the scope and validity of that survey. For example, the survey could have asked residents if they prefer using the river for water sports or would like to see a hydroelectric dam built, which may have swayed residents toward river sports. The sample may not have been representative of city residents, asking only those residents who live upon the river. The survey may have been 10 pages long, with 2 questions dedicated to river sports. We just do not know. Unless the survey is fully representative, valid, and reliable, it can not be used to effectively back the author's argument.

Additionally, the author implies that residents do not use the river for swimming, boating, and fishing, despite their professed interest, because the water is polluted and smelly. While a polluted, smelly river would likely cut down on river sports, a concrete connection between the resident's lack of river use and the river's current state is not effectively made. Though there have been complaints, we do not know if there have been numerous complaints from a wide range of people, or perhaps from one or two individuals who made numerous complaints. To strengthen his/her argument, the author would benefit from implementing a normed survey asking a wide range of residents why they do not currently use the river.

Building upon the implication that residents do not use the river due to the quality of the river's water and the smell, the author suggests that a river clean up will result in increased river usage. If the river's water quality and smell result from problems which can be cleaned, this may be true. For example, if the decreased water quality and aroma are caused by pollution by factories along the river, this conceivably could be remedied. But if the quality and aroma resulting from the natural mineral deposits in the water or surrounding rock, this may not be true. There are some bodies of water that emit a strong smell of sulfur due to the geography of the area. This is not



something likely to be affected by a clean-up. Consequently, a river clean up may have no impact on river usage. Regardless of whether the river’s quality can be improved or not, the author does not effectively show a connection between water quality and river usage.

A clean, beautiful, safe river often adds to a city’s property values, leads to increased tourism and revenue from those who come to take advantage of the river, and a better overall quality of life for residents. For these reasons, the city government may decide to invest in improving riverside recreational facilities. However, this author’s argument is not likely to significantly persuade the city government to allocate increased funding.

### **Reader Commentary for Essay Response—Score 6**

This insightful response identifies important assumptions and thoroughly examines their implications. The proposal to spend more on riverside recreational facilities rests on the following three questionable assumptions:

1. The survey provides a reliable basis for budget planning.
2. The river’s pollution and odor are the only reasons for its limited recreational use.
3. Efforts to clean the water and remove the odor will be successful.

By showing that each assumption is highly suspect, this essay demonstrates the weakness of the entire argument. For example, paragraph 2 points out that the survey might not have used a representative sample, might have offered limited choices and might have contained very few questions about water sports. Paragraph 3 examines the tenuous connection between complaints and limited use of the river for recreation. Complaints about water quality and odor may be coming from only a few people, and even if such complaints are numerous, other completely different factors may be much more significant in reducing river usage. Finally, paragraph 4 explains that certain geologic features may prevent effective river cleanup. Details such as these provide compelling support.

In addition, the careful organization ensures that each new point builds on the previous ones. Note, for example, the clear transitions at the beginning of paragraphs 3 and 4, as well as the logical sequence of sentences within the paragraphs (specifically, paragraph 4).

Although this essay does contain minor errors, it still conveys ideas fluently. Note the effective word choices (e.g., “rife with holes and assumptions” and “may have swayed residents”). In addition, sentences are not merely varied; they also display skillful embedding of subordinate elements.

Since this response offers a cogent examination of the argument and also conveys meaning skillfully, it earns a score of 6.

### **Essay Response—Score 5**

The author of this proposal to increase the budget for Mason City riverside recreational facilities offers an interesting argument but to move forward on the proposal would definitely require more information and thought. While the correlations stated are logical and probable, there may be hidden factors that prevent the City from diverting resources to this project.

For example, consider the survey rankings among Mason City residents. The thought is that such high regard for water sports will translate into usage. But, survey responses can hardly be used as indicators of actual behavior. Many surveys conducted after the winter holidays reveal people who list exercise and weight loss as a top priority. Yet every profession does not equal a new gym membership. Even the wording of the survey results remains ambiguous and vague. While water sports may be among the residents' favorite activities, this allows for many other favorites. What remains unknown are the priorities of the general public. Do they favor these water sports above a softball field or soccer field? Are they willing to sacrifice the municipal golf course for better riverside facilities? Indeed the survey hardly provides enough information to discern the future use of improved facilities.

Closely linked to the surveys is the bold assumption that a cleaner river will result in increased usage. While it is not illogical to expect some increase, at what level will people begin to use the river? The answer to this question requires a survey to find out the reasons our residents use or do not use the river. Is river water quality the primary limiting factoring to usage or the lack of docks and piers? Are people more interested in water sports than the recreational activities that they are already engaged in? These questions will help the city government forecast how much river usage will increase and to assign a proportional increase to the budget.

Likewise, the author is optimistic regarding the state's promise to clean the river. We need to hear the source of the voices and consider any ulterior motives. Is this a campaign year and the plans a campaign promise from the state representative? What is the timeline for the clean-up effort? Will the state fully fund this project? We can imagine the misuse of funds in renovating the riverside facilities only to watch the new buildings fall into dilapidation while the state drags the river clean-up.

Last, the author does not consider where these additional funds will be diverted from. The current budget situation must be assessed to determine if this increase can be afforded. In a sense, the City may not be willing to draw money away from other key

projects from road improvements to schools and education. The author naively assumes that the money can simply appear without forethought on where it will come from.

Examining all the various angles and factors involved with improving riverside recreational facilities, the argument does not justify increasing the budget. While the proposal does highlight a possibility, more information is required to warrant any action.

### **Reader Commentary for Essay Response—Score 5**

Each paragraph in the body of this perceptive essay identifies and examines an unstated assumption that is crucial to the argument. The major assumptions discussed are:

1. that a survey can accurately predict behavior,
2. that cleaning the river will, in itself, increase recreational usage,
3. that state plans to clean the river will actually be realized, and
4. Mason City can afford to spend more on riverside recreational facilities.

Support within each paragraph is both thoughtful and thorough. Paragraph 2, for example, points out vagueness in the wording of the survey: Even if water sports rank *among* the favorite recreational activities of Mason City residents, other sports may still be much more popular. Thus, if the first assumption proves unwarranted, the argument to fund riverside facilities—rather than soccer fields or golf courses—becomes much weaker. Paragraph 4 considers several reasons why river cleanup plans may not be successful (the plans may be nothing more than campaign promises, or funding may not be adequate). Thus, the weakness of the third assumption undermines the argument that river recreation will increase and riverside improvements will be needed at all.

Instead of dismissing each assumption in isolation, this response places them in a logical order and considers their connections. Note the appropriate transitions between and within paragraphs, clarifying the links among the assumptions (e.g., “Closely linked to the surveys ...” or “The answer to this question requires ...”).

Along with strong development, this response also displays the facility with language. Minor errors in punctuation are present, but word choices are apt and sentences suitably varied in pattern and length. The response uses several rhetorical questions, but the implied answers are always clear enough to support the points being made.

Thus, the response satisfies all requirements for a score of 5, but its development is not thorough or compelling enough for a 6.

## Essay Response—Score 4

The problem with the argument is the assumption that if the Mason River were cleaned up, that people would use it for water sports and recreation. This is not necessarily true, as people may rank water sports among their favorite recreational activities, but that does not mean that those same people have the financial ability, time, or equipment to pursue those interests.

However, even if the writer of the argument is correct in assuming that the Mason River will be used more by the city's residents, the argument does not say why the recreational facilities need more money. If recreational facilities already exist along the Mason River, why should the city allot more money to fund them? If the recreational facilities already in existence will be used more in the coming years, then they will be making more money for themselves, eliminating the need for the city government to devote more money to them.

According to the argument, the reason people are not using the Mason River for water sports is because of the smell and the quality of water, not because the recreational facilities are unacceptable.

If the city government allotted more money to the recreational facilities, then the budget is being cut from some other important city project. Also, if the assumptions proved unwarranted, and more people did not use the river for recreation, then much money has been wasted, not only the money for the recreational facilities but also the money that was used to clean up the river to attract more people in the first place.

## Reader Commentary for Essay Response—Score 4

This competent response identifies two unstated assumptions:

1. That cleaning up the Mason River will lead to increased recreational use, and
2. The existing facilities along the river need more funding.

Paragraph 1 offers reasons why the first assumption is questionable (e.g., residents may not have the necessary time or money for water sports). Similarly, paragraphs 2 and 3 explain that riverside recreational facilities may already be adequate and may, in fact, produce additional income if usage increases. Thus, the response is adequately developed and satisfactorily organized to show how the argument depends on questionable assumptions.

This essay does not, however, rise to a score of 5 because it fails to consider several other unstated assumptions (e.g., that the survey is reliable or that the efforts to clean

the river will be successful). Furthermore, the final paragraph makes some extraneous, unsupported assertions of its own. Mason City may actually have a budget surplus so that cuts to other projects will not be necessary, and cleaning the river may provide other real benefits even if it is not used more for water sports.

This response is generally free of errors in grammar and usage and displays sufficient control of language to support a score of 4.

### **Essay Response—Score 3**

Surveys are created to speak for the people; however, surveys do not always speak for the whole community. A survey completed by Mason City residents concluded that the residents enjoy water sports as a form of recreation. If that is so evident, why has the river not been used? The blame cannot be solely be placed on the city park department. The city park department can only do as much as they observe. The real issue is not the resident's use of the river, but their desire for a more pleasant smell and more pleasant sight. If the city government cleans the river, it might take years for the smell to go away. If the budget is changed to accommodate the cleanup of the Mason River, other problems will arise. The residents will then begin to complain about other issues in their city that will be ignored because of the great emphasis being placed on Mason River. If more money is taken out of the budget to clean the river an assumption can be made. This assumption is that the budget for another part of city maintenance or building will be tapped into. In addition, to the budget being used to clean up Mason River, it will also be allocated in increasing riverside recreational facilities. The government is trying to appease its residents, and one can warrant that the role of the government is to please the people. There are many assumptions being made; however, the government cannot make the assumption that people want the river to be cleaned so that they can use it for recreational water activities. The government has to realize the long term effects that their decision will have on the monetary value of their budget.

### **Reader Commentary for Essay Response—Score 3**

Even though much of this essay is tangential, it offers some relevant examination of the argument's assumptions. The early sentences mention a questionable assumption (that the survey results are reliable) but do not explain how the survey might have been flawed. Then the response drifts to irrelevant matters—a defense of the city park department, a prediction of budget problems, and the problem of pleasing city

residents. Some statements even introduce unwarranted assumptions that are not part of the original argument (e.g., “The residents will then begin to complain about other issues . . .” and “This assumption is that the budget for another part of city maintenance or building will be tapped into . . .”). Near the end, the response does correctly note that the city government should not assume that residents want to use the river for recreation. Hence, the proposal to increase funding for riverside recreational facilities may not be justified.

In summary, the language in this response is reasonably clear, but its examination of unstated assumptions remains limited and therefore earns a score of 3.

### **Essay Response—Score 2**

This statement looks logical, but there are some wrong sentences in it which is not logical.

First, this statement mentions raking water sports as their favorite recreational activities in the first sentence. However, it seems to have a relation between the first sentence and the sentence which mentions that increase the quality of the river’s water and the river’s smell. This is a wrong cause and result to solve the problem.

Second, as a response to the complaints from residents, the state plan to clean up the river. As a result, the state expects that water sports will increase. When you look at two sentences, the result is not appropriate for the cause.

Third, the last statement is the conclusion. However, even though residents rank water sports, the city government might devote the budget to another issue. This statement is also a wrong cause and result.

In summary, the statement is not logical because there are some errors in it. The supporting sentences are not strong enough to support this issue.

### **Reader Commentary for Essay Response—Score 2**

Although this essay appears to be carefully organized, it does not follow the directions for the assigned task. In his or her vague references to causal fallacies, the writer attempts logical analysis but never refers to any unstated assumptions. Furthermore, several errors in grammar and sentence structure interfere with meaning (e.g., “This statement looks logical, but there are some wrong sentences in it which is not logical”).

Because this response does not follow the directions for the assigned task (see GRE Scoring Guide: Analyze an Argument, page 44) and contains errors in sentence structure and logical development, it earns a score of 2.

### **Essay Response—Score 1**

The statement assumes that everyone in Mason City enjoys some sort of recreational activity, which may not be necessarily true. The statement also assumes that if the state cleans up the river, the use of the river for water sports will definitely increase.

### **Reader Commentary for Essay Response—Score 1**

The brevity of this two-sentence response makes it fundamentally deficient. Sentence 1 states an assumption that is actually not present in the argument, and sentence 2 correctly states an assumption but provides no discussion of its implications. Although the response may begin to address the assigned task, it offers no development. As such, it is clearly “extremely brief and/or disorganized, providing little evidence of an organized response” (see GRE Scoring Guide: Analyze an Argument, page 45) and earns a score of 1.

## *GRE Scoring Guide: Analyze an Issue*

### **Score 6**

In addressing the specific task directions, a 6 paper presents a cogent, well-articulated analysis of the issue and conveys meaning skillfully.

A typical paper in this category exhibits the following characteristics:

1. It articulates a clear and insightful position on the issue in accordance with the assigned task.
2. It develops the position fully, with compelling reasons and/or persuasive examples.
3. It sustains a well-focused, well-organized analysis, connecting ideas logically.
4. It conveys ideas fluently and precisely, using effective vocabulary and sentence variety.
5. It demonstrates facility with the conventions of standard written English (i.e., grammar, usage, and mechanics) but may have minor errors.

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### **Score 5**

In addressing the specific task directions, a 5 paper presents a generally thoughtful, well-developed analysis of the issue and conveys meaning clearly.

A typical paper in this category exhibits the following characteristics:

1. It presents a clear and well-considered position on the issue in accordance with the assigned task.
2. It develops the position with logically sound reasons and/or well-chosen examples.
3. It is focused and generally well organized, connecting ideas appropriately.
4. It conveys ideas clearly and well, using appropriate vocabulary and sentence variety.
5. It demonstrates facility with the conventions of standard written English but may have minor errors.

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### **Score 4**

In addressing the specific task directions, a 4 paper presents a competent analysis of the issue and conveys meaning with acceptable clarity.



A typical paper in this category exhibits the following characteristics:

1. It presents a clear position on the issue in accordance with the assigned task.
  2. It develops the position with relevant reasons and/or examples.
  3. It is adequately focused and organized.
  4. It demonstrates sufficient control of language to express ideas with reasonable clarity.
  5. It generally demonstrates control of the conventions of standard written English but may have some errors.
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### **Score 3**

A 3 paper demonstrates some competence in addressing the specific task directions, in analyzing the issue, and in conveying meaning but is obviously flawed.

A typical paper in this category exhibits ONE OR MORE of the following characteristics:

1. It is vague or limited in addressing the specific task directions and in presenting or developing a position on the issue.
  2. It is weak in the use of relevant reasons or examples or relies largely on unsupported claims.
  3. It is poorly focused and/or poorly organized.
  4. It has problems in language and sentence structure that result in a lack of clarity.
  5. It contains occasional major errors or frequent minor errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics that can interfere with meaning.
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### **Score 2**

A 2 paper largely disregards the specific task directions and/or demonstrates serious weaknesses in analytical writing.

A typical paper in this category exhibits ONE OR MORE of the following characteristics:

1. It is unclear or seriously limited in addressing the specific task directions and in presenting or developing a position on the issue.
2. It provides few, if any, relevant reasons or examples in support of its claims.
3. It is unfocused and/or disorganized.

4. It has serious problems in language and sentence structure that frequently interfere with meaning.
  5. It contains serious errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics that frequently obscure meaning.
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### **Score 1**

A 1 paper demonstrates fundamental deficiencies in analytical writing.

A typical paper in this category exhibits ONE OR MORE of the following characteristics:

1. It provides little or no evidence of understanding the issue.
  2. It provides little or no evidence of the ability to develop an organized response.
  3. It has severe problems in language and sentence structure that persistently interfere with meaning.
  4. It contains pervasive errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics that result in incoherence.
- 

### **Score 0**

A 0 paper is off-topic (i.e., provides no evidence of an attempt to respond to the assigned topic), written in a foreign language, merely copies the topic, consists of only keystroke characters, or is illegible or nonverbal.

## *GRE Scoring Guide: Analyze an Argument*

### **Score 6**

In addressing the specific task directions, a 6 response presents a cogent, well-articulated examination of the argument and conveys meaning skillfully.

A typical response in this category exhibits the following characteristics:

1. It clearly identifies aspects of the argument relevant to the assigned task and examines them insightfully.
  2. It develops ideas cogently, organizes them logically, and connects them with clear transitions.
  3. It provides compelling and thorough support for its main points.
  4. It conveys ideas fluently and precisely, using effective vocabulary and sentence variety.
  5. It demonstrates facility with the conventions of standard written English (i.e., grammar, usage, and mechanics) but may have minor errors.
- 

### **Score 5**

In addressing the specific task directions, a 5 response presents a generally thoughtful, well-developed examination of the argument and conveys meaning clearly.

A typical response in this category exhibits the following characteristics:

1. It clearly identifies aspects of the argument relevant to the assigned task and examines them in a generally perceptive way.
  2. It develops ideas clearly, organizes them logically, and connects them with appropriate transitions.
  3. It offers generally thoughtful and thorough support for its main points.
  4. It conveys ideas clearly and well, using appropriate vocabulary and sentence variety.
  5. It demonstrates facility with the conventions of standard written English but may have minor errors.
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### **Score 4**

In addressing the specific task directions, a 4 response presents a competent examination of the argument and conveys meaning with acceptable clarity.

A typical response in this category exhibits the following characteristics:

1. It identifies and examines aspects of the argument relevant to the assigned task but may also discuss some extraneous points.
  2. It develops and organizes ideas satisfactorily but may not connect them with transitions.
  3. It supports its main points adequately but may be uneven in its support.
  4. It demonstrates sufficient control of language to convey ideas with reasonable clarity.
  5. It generally demonstrates control of the conventions of standard written English but may have some errors.
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### **Score 3**

A 3 response demonstrates some competence in addressing the specific task directions, in examining the argument, and in conveying meaning but is obviously flawed.

A typical response in this category exhibits ONE OR MORE of the following characteristics:

1. It does not identify or examine most of the aspects of the argument relevant to the assigned task, although some relevant examination of the argument is present.
  2. It mainly discusses tangential or irrelevant matters, or reasons poorly.
  3. It is limited in the logical development and organization of ideas.
  4. It offers support of little relevance and value for its main points.
  5. It has problems in language and sentence structure that result in a lack of clarity.
  6. It contains occasional major errors or frequent minor errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics that can interfere with meaning.
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### **Score 2**

A 2 response largely disregards the specific task directions and/or demonstrates serious weaknesses in analytical writing.

A typical response in this category exhibits ONE OR MORE of the following characteristics:

1. It does not present an examination based on logical analysis but may instead present the writer's own views on the subject.
2. It does not follow the directions for the assigned task.

3. It does not develop ideas or is poorly organized and illogical.
  4. It provides little, if any, relevant or reasonable support for its main points.
  5. It has serious problems in language and sentence structure that frequently interfere with meaning.
  6. It contains serious errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics that frequently obscure meaning.
- 

### **Score 1**

A 1 response demonstrates fundamental deficiencies in analytical writing.

A typical response in this category exhibits ONE OR MORE of the following characteristics:

1. It provides little or no evidence of understanding the argument.
  2. It is extremely brief and/or disorganized, providing little evidence of an organized response.
  3. It has severe problems in language and sentence structure that persistently interfere with meaning.
  4. It contains pervasive errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics that result in incoherence.
- 

### **Score 0**

A 0 paper is off-topic, written in a foreign language, merely copies the topic, consists of only keystroke characters is illegible, or is nonverbal.

## *Score Level Descriptions*

Although the GRE Analytical Writing measure contains two discrete analytical writing tasks, a single combined score is reported because it is more reliable than a score for either task alone. The reported score, the average of the scores for the two tasks, ranges from 0 to 6, in half-point increments.

The statements below describe, for each score level, the overall quality of analytical writing demonstrated across both the Analyze an Issue and Analyze an Argument task. Because the test assesses analytical writing, critical thinking skills (the ability to reason, assemble evidence to develop a position, and communicate complex ideas) weigh more heavily than the writer's control of fine points of grammar or the mechanics of writing (e.g., spelling).

**SCORES 6 and 5.5**—Sustains insightful, in-depth analysis of complex ideas; develops and supports main points with logically compelling reasons and/or highly persuasive examples; is well focused and well organized; skillfully uses sentence variety and precise vocabulary to convey meaning effectively; demonstrates superior facility with sentence structure and language usage but may have minor errors that do not interfere with meaning.

**SCORES 5 and 4.5**—Provides generally thoughtful analysis of complex ideas; develops and supports main points with logically sound reasons and/or well-chosen examples; is generally focused and well organized; uses sentence variety and vocabulary to convey meaning clearly; demonstrates good control of sentence structure and language usage but may have minor errors that do not interfere with meaning.

**SCORES 4 and 3.5**—Provides competent analysis of ideas; develops and supports main points with relevant reasons and/or examples; is adequately organized; conveys meaning with reasonable clarity; demonstrates satisfactory control of sentence structure and language usage but may have some errors that affect clarity.

**SCORES 3 and 2.5**—Displays some competence in analytical writing, although the writing is flawed in at least one of the following ways: limited analysis or development; weak organization; weak control of sentence structure or language usage, with errors that often result in vagueness or lack of clarity.

**SCORES 2 and 1.5**—Displays serious weaknesses in analytical writing. The writing is seriously flawed in at least one of the following ways: serious lack of analysis or development; lack of organization; serious and frequent problems in sentence structure or language usage, with errors that obscure meaning.

SCORE 1 and 0.5—Displays fundamental deficiencies in analytical writing. The writing is fundamentally flawed in at least one of the following ways: content is extremely confusing or mostly irrelevant to the assigned tasks; little or no development; severe and pervasive errors that result in incoherence.

SCORE 0—the examinee’s analytical writing skills cannot be evaluated because the responses do not address any part of the assigned tasks, are mere attempts to copy the assignments, are in a foreign language, or display only indecipherable text.

SCORE NS—the examinee produced no text whatsoever.