

THEA[®]

Texas Higher Education Assessment[®]

FACULTY MANUAL

This manual is available at
www.thea.nesinc.com

**A Guide to
THEA[®] Test Results**



Developed by the Evaluation Systems group of Pearson in cooperation with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the State Board for Educator Certification.

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Introduction

This manual is provided to assist faculty and administrators at educational institutions in understanding the Texas Higher Education Assessment (THEA®) Test. The faculty manual contains four sections described below.

- Section 1 Presents a brief description of the THEA Test and the test development process used to create it.
- Section 2 Presents the THEA skills and provides worksheets for use in comparing those skills to course content.
- Section 3 Describes the score reports and explains how the test is scored.
- Section 4 Explains how to use the information contained in the THEA score reports.

If you would like to print additional copies of this manual free of charge, please visit the THEA Web site at **www.thea.nesinc.com**. You may also photocopy this manual for noncommercial use by educators in Texas.

Additional resources include:

The Official THEA™ Test Study Guide contains a detailed instructional chapter on each of the skills eligible for testing, and includes numerous examples and exercises and a full-length practice test complete with an answer key and detailed answer explanations. Each section of the study guide (Reading, Mathematics, and Writing) has a list of study resources and study ideas. This is the only official study guide for the THEA Test. It was written by the Evaluation Systems group of Pearson, the developer of the THEA Test. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) and the Texas Education Agency (TEA) participated in its development.

The study guide is sold at bookstores throughout Texas. It may also be ordered from Evaluation Systems. An order form is available on the THEA Web site at **www.thea.nesinc.com**.

The Official THEA™ Test Study Guide is also available on audiotape. For further information, please contact Recording for the Blind & Dyslexic, 20 Roszel Road, Princeton, NJ 08540; (800) 221-4792.

Additional preparation resources are also available on the THEA Web Site. These include a THEA Test Preparation Quick Reference Guide containing skill descriptions, sample test items, test-taking strategies, and a full-length practice test with an answer key.

Section I

OVERVIEW OF THE THEA TEST

■ Purpose of the Program

In 2003, the Texas Higher Education Assessment (THEA) was approved by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), under Senate Bill 286, Section 51.3062, the Texas Success Initiative (TSI), for use by Texas institutions of higher education as an assessment instrument to evaluate incoming students. It provides the diagnostic data required by this legislation; its content is the same as that of the former Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP) Test.

A major impetus for the development of the TASP was *A Generation of Failure: The Case for Testing and Remediation in Texas Higher Education*, a report prepared by the THECB in July 1986. This report called attention to the problem of underpreparedness in academic skills of many Texas college students—a problem common in higher education across the country. In response to this report, the Texas legislature mandated Texas Education Code (TEC) 51.306 in spring 1987, which called for the development and implementation of a basic skills test.

The THECB, the Texas Education Agency (TEA), and the Evaluation Systems group of Pearson worked together to create a basic skills test, the TASP Test (now THEA), in order to provide information about the reading, mathematics, and writing skills of students entering Texas public colleges and universities and educator preparation programs in public and private institutions.

As part of the TSI, colleges and universities assess the academic skills of each entering undergraduate student to determine the student's readiness to enroll in freshman-level academic coursework. The THEA Test is the only assessment developed specifically to evaluate the readiness of students for college-level coursework in Texas. It was developed through a rigorous review and approval process supported by skilled and experienced Texas educators. All THEA Test questions have been reviewed by committees of Texas educators to ensure content accuracy and prevent potential bias.

■ Test Development Process

The THEA skills and item specifications were developed and approved by committees of Texas faculty from community colleges and universities. The skills were validated in surveys of Texas educators and were finalized for testing by the test development committees. Committees reviewed and validated test items. The test items were pilot tested in Texas and finalized by the committees based on pilot test results. Independent panels of Texas higher education faculty reviewed and revalidated the items and provided input to the THECB and the State Board of Education for use in setting passing standards. These boards are responsible by law for setting the passing standards. The test development committees included:

- **Content Advisory Committees.** The THECB and the TEA jointly established a Content Advisory Committee for each of the three basic skill areas (reading, mathematics, and writing). Each committee had approximately 30 members, all of whom were Texas college or university faculty members. Faculty were selected for their expertise in their content areas and to reflect the diversity of Texas colleges and universities.
- **Bias Review Panel.** A separate panel of approximately 30 educators specifically addressed the issue of test fairness to students in Texas in relation to gender, ethnicity, race, geographic region, handicapping conditions, or other factors.

- **Regional Review Forums.** Nine regional groups of college and university educators reviewed test materials at various stages of development and made recommendations to the Content Advisory Committees. Approximately 300 Texas educators participated in these regional reviews.
- **THECB Committees.** In addition to the content advisory committees and review panels, the THECB formed a number of committees that participated in the nontesting aspects of the program. For example, these committees focused on developmental education, academic advising, and faculty development.

■ Identification of Skills to Be Tested

To gather empirical data on the appropriateness of the skills identified by the committees and to validate the content of the test, Evaluation Systems conducted a series of surveys of Texas educators to determine which skills they considered important for first-year students. The surveyed populations included college and university faculty, educator preparation faculty, public school educators, college and university students, and educator preparation students.

Combining the results of the validation surveys with their own professional judgments, the review committees of Texas educators recommended the final list of skills to be used in the THEA. The THECB and the State Board of Education have determined that these skills are eligible for testing.

Development of Test Questions

Test questions were written to match the defined skills for reading, mathematics, and writing. These questions were reviewed and revised by the committees of Texas educators.

Conducting the Item Tryout

With the cooperation of colleges and universities throughout Texas, Evaluation Systems conducted an item tryout of the test questions. The purpose of the item tryout was to gather data on the statistical performance of the test questions and to identify any questions possibly requiring revision. The results of the item tryout were reviewed by Texas educators, who suggested any necessary revisions to questions.

Validation of Test Questions and Setting of Passing Standards

After Evaluation Systems completed its revision of the test questions, the various committees of Texas educators reviewed the questions again and provided information for use by the THECB and the State Board of Education in setting the final passing standards for the tests.

Test Fairness

The test development process used by the THECB, the TEA, and Evaluation Systems was designed to ensure that the THEA Test materials would be fair to the diverse population involved in the THEA. At each stage of the test development process, the Bias Review Panel examined materials explicitly for fairness. In addition, other participants in the process, including the Content Advisory Committees and members of the regional review forums, dealt specifically with test fairness as a review criterion. Moreover, the item tryout results were analyzed for potential bias issues, using statistical techniques.

■ Test Updates

Test development is an ongoing process. Since the original development of the test, additional new test items have been developed periodically and reviewed and revised by the Content Advisory Committees and the Bias Review Panel. Membership on the Content Advisory Committees and the Bias Review Panel has changed as test updating has proceeded; new members have been added, replacing some of those who served previously.

Test Changes—1993

In 1993, the THECB updated the THEA Test to enhance the diagnostic potential of the test and to provide more useful information to students and institutions. As in the original development of the test, Texas educators played a central role in each stage of the updating process.

WRITING

The writing test update focused the writing sample of the test on the type of writing students are expected to perform in college. Draft item specifications and writing assignments (prompts) were reviewed and revised by members of the Content Advisory Committee and the Bias Review Panel. The new writing prompts were pilot tested at Texas public colleges and universities. Pilot test responses were scored according to established THEA writing scoring procedures. Data from the pilot test were reviewed by the THECB and the TEA, and a final selection of eligible assignments was made. Papers used to train scorers were selected by members of the Content Advisory Committee according to established THEA procedures.

MATHEMATICS

The updated mathematics test better measures the range of skills expected as a basis for beginning college work and improves the diagnostic potential of the test. The existing skills list was reviewed and revised by members of the Content Advisory Committee and the Bias Review Panel. Next, a skills survey was conducted to determine the importance of each skill to success in college work. College faculty, college math faculty, educator preparation faculty, and public school teachers were asked to rate the importance of each skill in the revised list.

New items were developed to match the revised skills list. These new items were reviewed and revised by members of the Content Advisory Committee and the Bias Review Panel. New items were pilot tested on operational THEA test forms. Pilot test data were reviewed and items were revised by members of the Content Advisory Committee and the Bias Review Panel. The Committee members also reviewed the skills survey results.

Members of the Content Advisory Committee and the Bias Review Panel reviewed and approved a new test form. They were provided with hypothetical impact data. Committee members also recommended an advisory college-level algebra standard to help institutions assess student readiness to enter college-level algebra.

The THECB directed that new standards on the test will be phased in over time so that interested parties would have adequate notice of changes in the test. The new math test was equated to previous forms of the test using standard THEA procedures for establishing the statistical equivalence of different test forms.

In October 1993, the THECB set the college-level algebra standard based on recommendations from members of the Content Advisory Committee and the Bias Review Panel.

READING

The reading test update enhances the diagnostic potential of the test in relation to the types of reading required in college. Three test forms and hypothetical impact data were presented to members of the Content Advisory Committee and the Bias Review Panel. Reviewers selected a test form for September 1993.

The THECB directed that new standards on the test will be phased in over time so that interested parties would have adequate notice of changes in the test. The new reading test was equated to previous forms of the test using standard THEA procedures for establishing the statistical equivalence of different test forms.

New Standards—1995

In January 1995, the THECB set a new minimum passing standard of 230 for both reading and mathematics, effective in September 1995. The temporary developmental education standard was eliminated.

Section II

THEA SKILLS

The THEA skills serve as the basis of the program and the test. The approved THEA skills define what is measured by the test and are the focus of developmental education efforts for those who do not pass the test.

The purpose of the test, which was developed to support the goals of the Texas Higher Education Assessment, is to assess the reading, mathematics, and writing skills first-year students should have if they are to perform effectively in undergraduate certificate or degree programs in Texas public colleges and universities. The skills listed below are eligible to be assessed by the THEA Test.

■ Reading Skill Descriptions

The Reading section of the THEA Test consists of approximately 40 multiple-choice questions matched to reading selections of about 300 to 750 words each. The selections represent a variety of subject areas and are similar to reading materials (e.g., textbooks, manuals) that students are likely to encounter during their first year of college.

1. Determine the meaning of words and phrases.

This skill includes using the context of a passage to determine the meaning of words with multiple meanings, unfamiliar and uncommon words and phrases, and figurative expressions.

2. Understand the main idea and supporting details in written material.

This skill includes identifying explicit and implicit main ideas and recognizing ideas that support, illustrate, or elaborate the main idea of a passage.

3. Identify a writer's purpose, point of view, and intended meaning.

This skill includes recognizing a writer's expressed or implied purpose for writing; evaluating the appropriateness of written material for various purposes or audiences; recognizing the likely effect on an audience of a writer's choice of words; and using the content, word choice, and phrasing of a passage to determine a writer's opinion or point of view.

4. Analyze the relationship among ideas in written material.

This skill includes identifying the sequence of events or steps, identifying cause-effect relationships, analyzing relationships between ideas in opposition, identifying solutions to problems, and drawing conclusions inductively and deductively from information stated or implied in a passage.

5. Use critical-reasoning skills to evaluate written material.

This skill includes evaluating the stated or implied assumptions on which the validity of a writer's argument depends; judging the relevance or importance of facts, examples, or graphic data to a writer's argument; evaluating the logic of a writer's argument; evaluating the validity of analogies; distinguishing between fact and opinion; and assessing the credibility or objectivity of the writer or source of written material.

6. Apply study skills to reading assignments.

This skill includes organizing and summarizing information for study purposes; following written instructions or directions; and interpreting information presented in charts, graphs, or tables.

■ Mathematics Skill Descriptions

The Mathematics section of the THEA Test consists of approximately 50 multiple-choice questions covering four general areas: fundamental mathematics, algebra, geometry, and problem solving. The test questions focus on a student's ability to perform mathematical operations and solve problems. Appropriate formulas are provided to help examinees perform some of the calculations required by the test questions. During the test, examinees may use a 4-function (+, −, ×, ÷) calculator with square root ($\sqrt{\quad}$) and percent (%) keys.

NOTE: The Mathematics skills list was revised as of September 1993. The skills were previously numbered 7–16. They are currently numbered 1–11. The skills in reading and writing were not renumbered so that diagnostic reporting in those areas would remain consistent.

FUNDAMENTAL MATHEMATICS

- 1. Solve word problems involving integers, fractions, decimals, and units of measurement.**
This skill includes solving word problems involving integers, fractions, decimals (including percents), ratios and proportions, and units of measurement and conversions (including scientific notation).
- 2. Solve problems involving data interpretation and analysis.**
This skill includes interpreting information from line graphs, bar graphs, pictographs, and pie charts; interpreting data from tables; recognizing appropriate graphic representations of various data; analyzing and interpreting data using measures of central tendency (mean, median, and mode); and analyzing and interpreting data using the concept of variability.

ALGEBRA

- 3. Graph numbers or number relationships.**
This skill includes identifying the graph of a given equation or a given inequality; finding the slope and/or intercepts of a given line; finding the equation of a line; and recognizing and interpreting information from the graph of a function (including direct and inverse variation).
- 4. Solve one- and two-variable equations.**
This skill includes finding the value of the unknown in a given one-variable equation, expressing one variable in terms of a second variable in two-variable equations, and solving systems of two equations in two variables (including graphical solutions).
- 5. Solve word problems involving one and two variables.**
This skill includes identifying the algebraic equivalent of a stated relationship and solving word problems involving one and two unknowns.
- 6. Understand operations with algebraic expressions and functional notation.**
This skill includes factoring quadratics and polynomials; performing operations on and simplifying polynomial expressions, rational expressions, and radical expressions; and applying principles of functions and functional notation.
- 7. Solve problems involving quadratic equations.**
This skill includes graphing quadratic functions and quadratic inequalities; solving quadratic equations using factoring, completing the square, or the quadratic formula; and solving problems involving quadratic models.

GEOMETRY

8. Solve problems involving geometric figures.

This skill includes solving problems involving two-dimensional geometric figures (e.g., perimeter and area problems) and three-dimensional geometric figures (e.g., volume and surface area problems) and solving problems using the Pythagorean theorem.

9. Solve problems involving geometric concepts.

This skill includes solving problems using principles of similarity, congruence, parallelism, and perpendicularity.

PROBLEM SOLVING

10. Apply reasoning skills.

This skill includes drawing conclusions using inductive and deductive reasoning.

11. Solve applied problems involving a combination of mathematical skills.

This skill includes applying combinations of mathematical skills to solve problems and to solve a series of related problems.

■ Writing Skill Descriptions

The Writing section of the THEA Test consists of two subsections: a multiple-choice subsection and a writing sample subsection. The multiple-choice subsection includes approximately 40 questions assessing a student's ability to recognize various elements of effective writing. The writing sample subsection requires students to demonstrate their ability to communicate effectively in writing on a specified topic.

ELEMENTS OF COMPOSITION

1. Recognize purpose and audience.

This skill includes recognizing the appropriate purpose, audience, or occasion for a piece of writing and recognizing writing that is appropriate for various purposes, audiences, or occasions.

2. Recognize unity, focus, and development in writing.

This skill includes recognizing unnecessary shifts in point of view or distracting details that impair the development of the main idea in a piece of writing and recognizing revisions that improve the unity and focus of a piece of writing.

3. Recognize effective organization in writing.

This skill includes recognizing methods of paragraph organization and the appropriate use of transitional words or phrases to convey text structure and reorganizing sentences to improve cohesion and the effective sequence of ideas.

SENTENCE STRUCTURE, USAGE, AND MECHANICS

4. Recognize effective sentences.

This skill includes recognizing ineffective repetition and inefficiency in sentence construction; identifying sentence fragments and run-on sentences; identifying standard subject-verb agreement; identifying standard placement of modifiers, parallel structure, and use of negatives in sentence formation; and recognizing imprecise and inappropriate word choice.

5. Recognize edited American English usage.

This skill includes recognizing the standard use of verb forms and pronouns; recognizing the standard formation and use of adverbs, adjectives, comparatives, superlatives, and plural and possessive forms of nouns; and recognizing standard punctuation.

THE WRITING SAMPLE

The following characteristics are considered in scoring the writing samples.

1. **Appropriateness**—the extent to which the student addresses the topic and uses language and style appropriate to the given audience, purpose, and occasion.
2. **Unity and Focus**—the clarity with which the student states and maintains a main idea or point of view.
3. **Development**—the amount, depth, and specificity of supporting detail the student provides.
4. **Organization**—the clarity of the student's writing and the logical sequence of the student's ideas.
5. **Sentence Structure**—the effectiveness of the student's sentence structure and the extent to which the student's writing is free of errors in sentence structure.
6. **Usage**—the extent to which the student's writing is free of errors in usage and shows care and precision in word choice.
7. **Mechanical Conventions**—the student's ability to spell common words and use the conventions of capitalization and punctuation.

■ THEA Skill Worksheets

Following are some worksheets that you may wish to use in order to map out which courses at your institution cover which THEA skills. The purpose of the worksheets is to identify:

- which courses cover which THEA skills, and
- which THEA skills, if any, are not covered by courses.

List courses on each worksheet in the spaces provided. For each skill, place a check mark in the box corresponding to each course that covers the skill. A determination that a skill is covered by a course may be based on the fact that the skill is:

- necessary to understand course material,
- required to complete course assignments, or
- emphasized as part of the course.

Charting which courses cover which skills may help focus developmental education efforts for students who do not pass one or more sections of the test.

If a skill is *not* covered by any courses, you may want to consider ways of addressing that skill.

There is one worksheet for each test section.

THEA READING SKILLS WORKSHEET

Use this worksheet to map out which courses at your institution cover which THEA skills. List courses in the spaces provided. For each skill, place a check mark in the box corresponding to each course that covers the skill.

| THEA SKILL | C O U R S E S | | | | | | | |
|---|---------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| READING | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Determine the meaning of words and phrases. | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Understand the main idea and supporting details in written material. | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Identify a writer's purpose, point of view, and intended meaning. | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Analyze the relationship among ideas in written material. | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Use critical-reasoning skills to evaluate written material. | | | | | | | | |
| 6. Apply study skills to reading assignments. | | | | | | | | |

THEA MATHEMATICS SKILLS WORKSHEET

Use this worksheet to map out which courses at your institution cover which THEA skills. List courses in the spaces provided. For each skill, place a check mark in the box corresponding to each course that covers the skill.

| THEA SKILL | C O U R S E S | | | | | | | |
|---|---------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| MATHEMATICS | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Fundamental Mathematics</i> | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Solve word problems involving integers, fractions, decimals, and units of measurement. | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Solve problems involving data interpretation and analysis. | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Algebra</i> | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Graph numbers or number relationships. | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Solve one- and two-variable equations. | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Solve word problems involving one and two variables. | | | | | | | | |
| 6. Understand operations with algebraic expressions and functional notation. | | | | | | | | |
| 7. Solve problems involving quadratic equations. | | | | | | | | |

(continued)

THEA MATHEMATICS SKILLS WORKSHEET (continued)

Use this worksheet to map out which courses at your institution cover which THEA skills. List courses in the spaces provided. For each skill, place a check mark in the box corresponding to each course that covers the skill.

| THEA SKILL | COURSES | | | | | | | |
|--|---------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| MATHEMATICS | | | | | | | | |
| <u>Geometry</u> | | | | | | | | |
| 8. Solve problems involving geometric figures. | | | | | | | | |
| 9. Solve problems involving geometric concepts. | | | | | | | | |
| <u>Problem Solving</u> | | | | | | | | |
| 10. Apply reasoning skills. | | | | | | | | |
| 11. Solve applied problems involving a combination of mathematical skills. | | | | | | | | |

THEA WRITING SKILLS WORKSHEET

Use this worksheet to map out which courses at your institution cover which THEA skills. List courses in the spaces provided. For each skill, place a check mark in the box corresponding to each course that covers the skill.

| THEA SKILL | C O U R S E S | | | | | | | |
|--|---------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| WRITING | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Elements of Composition</i> | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Recognize purpose and audience. | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Recognize unity, focus, and development in writing. | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Recognize effective organization in writing. | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Sentence Structure, Usage, and Mechanics</i> | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Recognize effective sentences. | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Recognize edited American English usage. | | | | | | | | |

(continued)

THEA WRITING SKILLS WORKSHEET (continued)

WRITING SAMPLE SUBSECTION

Demonstration of the following skills are measured by the writing sample portion of the test.

| THEA SKILL | C O U R S E S | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| WRITING | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Appropriateness | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Unity and Focus | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Development | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Organization | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Sentence Structure | | | | | | | | |
| 6. Usage | | | | | | | | |
| 7. Mechanical Conventions | | | | | | | | |

Section III

SCORE REPORTING

■ How the Test Is Scored

The questions in the Reading and Mathematics sections are all multiple-choice questions and are scored electronically. An examinee's score on the test is based on the number of items answered correctly; there is no penalty for guessing. Scores are determined for each section.

The overall Writing section score represents the writing sample score or a combination of the writing sample score and the score on the writing multiple-choice questions. As in the Reading and Mathematics sections, the multiple-choice questions are scored electronically.

Writing samples prepared by examinees are scored by a process called *focused holistic scoring*. All writing samples are scored by calibrated scorers according to standardized procedures. This scoring process is described in detail below.

Focused Holistic Scoring

The principle underlying the holistic scoring process is that a writing sample should be evaluated on the basis of *how effectively it communicates a whole message to a specified audience for a given purpose*. That is, scorers judge the overall effectiveness of the writing sample rather than individual aspects of writing considered in isolation. Specific characteristics of competent writing, such as organization, unity, and mechanical conventions, are focused on during scoring; however, the scoring process is holistic because the final score for a writing sample rates the *overall* effectiveness of these characteristics working together.

A satisfactory writing sample is one that demonstrates the ability to communicate effectively in writing based on the following characteristics:

- **Appropriateness**—the extent to which the student addresses the topic and uses language and style appropriate to the given audience, purpose, and occasion.
- **Unity and Focus**—the clarity with which the student states and maintains a main idea or point of view.
- **Development**—the amount, depth, and specificity of supporting detail the student provides.
- **Organization**—the clarity of the student's writing and the logical sequence of the student's ideas.
- **Sentence Structure**—the effectiveness of the student's sentence structure and the extent to which the student's writing is free of errors in sentence structure.
- **Usage**—the extent to which the student's writing is free of errors in usage and shows care and precision in word choice.
- **Mechanical Conventions**—the student's ability to spell common words and use the conventions of capitalization and punctuation.

The examinee is expected to perform adequately in all areas of writing, ranging from the use of conventions to broader aspects such as development and organization. A high level of performance in only one or two areas (e.g., spelling and grammar) will not likely result in an adequate essay or a high score.

Scoring the Writing Sample

Persons who score the THEA Test writing samples are individuals whose expertise is in language arts or a related field. Scorers must possess at least a bachelor's degree, and most scorers have teaching experience at the high school or college level.

The scoring of the writing sample is a highly structured, complex process. Scorers receive comprehensive orientation before scoring to enable the same scoring standards and methods to be applied objectively and consistently throughout the scoring process. In addition, during the scoring process the scorers are monitored closely and recalibrated to ensure the accuracy and reliability of scoring.

Each writing sample is scored independently by two scorers. The scorers each assign a rating of 1, 2, 3, or 4 to the essay. (A description of the characteristics for each score point is provided on the next page.) The two ratings are added together for a writing sample score from 2 to 8. If the ratings from the two scorers differ by more than 1 point, the essay undergoes additional scoring to resolve the discrepancy.

Analytic Scoring

The writing sample of an examinee who does not pass the writing section of the THEA Test is also scored *analytically*. A third scorer evaluates the essay analytically and identifies specific writing characteristics in which improvement is needed. This analysis helps examinees to focus their preparation for retaking the test.

The seven characteristics of writing analyzed are:

- Appropriateness
- Unity and Focus
- Development
- Organization
- Sentence Structure
- Usage
- Mechanical Conventions

Score Points

A description of the characteristics of writing samples for each score point follows. Writing samples that are completely off topic (appear to be written in response to a topic other than that which was assigned), illegible, written in a language other than English, too short to score, or otherwise unscorable receive a score of "unscorable."

| Score Point | Description |
|-------------|---|
| 4 | <p>A well-formed writing sample that effectively communicates a whole message to a specified audience</p> <p>The writer maintains unity of a developed topic throughout the writing sample and establishes a focus by clearly stating a purpose. The writer exhibits control in the development of ideas and clearly specifies supporting detail. Sentence structure is effective and free of errors. Choice of words is precise, and usage is careful. The writer shows mastery of mechanical conventions, such as spelling and punctuation.</p> |
| 3 | <p>An adequately formed writing sample that attempts to communicate a message to a specified audience</p> <p>The focus and the purpose of the writing sample may be clear; however, the writer's attempts to develop supporting details may not be fully realized. The writer's organization of ideas may be ambiguous, incomplete, or partially ineffective. Sentence structure within paragraphs is adequate, but minor errors in sentence structure, usage, and word choice are evident. There may also be errors in the use of mechanical conventions, such as spelling and punctuation.</p> |
| 2 | <p>A partially developed writing sample in which the characteristics of effective written communication are only partially formed</p> <p>The statement of purpose is not clear, and although a main idea or topic may be announced, focus on the main idea is not sustained. Ideas may be developed by the use of specific supporting detail, and the writer may make an effort to organize and sequence ideas, but development and organization are largely incomplete or unclear. Paragraphs contain poorly structured sentences with noticeable and distracting errors. The writer exhibits imprecision in usage and word choice and a lack of control of mechanical conventions, such as spelling and punctuation.</p> |
| 1 | <p>An inadequately formed writing sample that fails to communicate a complete message</p> <p>The writer attempts to address the topic, but language and style may be inappropriate for the given audience, purpose, and/or occasion. There is often no clear statement of a main idea and the writer's efforts to present supporting detail are confused. Any organization that is present fails to present an effective sequence of ideas. Sentence structure is ineffective and few sentences are free of errors. Usage and word choice are imprecise. The writer makes many errors in the use of mechanical conventions, such as spelling and punctuation.</p> |

Marker Papers

Scorers receive comprehensive orientation before scoring to enable the same scoring standards and methods to be applied objectively and consistently throughout the scoring process. The goal of the orientation process is to calibrate the scorers to the THEA score points. To achieve calibration, the scorers are calibrated to recognize and respond to the overall impression that the writing sample has conveyed to the reader. Specially selected writing samples used for calibration purposes are referred to as marker papers. Marker papers for each writing sample assignment are selected by a committee of Texas faculty whose expertise is in writing. Marker papers are chosen to be exemplars of each of the four THEA score points. During scoring, the scorers are monitored closely and recalibrated using marker papers to ensure the quality and consistency of scoring.

■ Passing Standards—Effective September 1995

The THECB set the passing standard(s) for each section of the THEA Test to meet the requirements of the Texas Success Initiative. These are the same standards that have been effective since 1995.

Reading and Mathematics. Within either the Reading test section or the Mathematics test section, the passing score is based on the total test section score.

Reading—The *Minimum Passing Standard* is a scaled score of 230.

Mathematics—There are two standards. The *Minimum Passing Standard* is a scaled score of 230.

Effective beginning September 1993, there is also a *College-level Algebra Standard*. This is a scaled score of 270. If a student meets or exceeds this standard and meets other requirements at his or her institution, that student is prepared to begin college-level algebra or an equivalent course.

Writing. The THECB and the TEA, as well as committees of experts from Texas colleges who were advising the Boards during the development of the test, felt strongly that the writing sample portion of the test should be the preeminent measure of writing skill. Consequently, an examinee's performance on the writing multiple-choice items affects pass/fail status on the Writing section only if the score on the writing sample is a "5." (That is, if one scorer rates the essay a "3" [passing] and the other scorer rates the essay a "2" [failing], performance on the multiple-choice items provides additional information by which pass/fail status is determined.)

Writing—The *Minimum Passing Standard* is a scaled score of 220.

The passing standard adopted for the Writing section is as follows:

- A writing sample score of **6 or above** is passing, regardless of performance on the multiple-choice items.
- A writing sample score of **4 or below** is failing, regardless of performance on the multiple-choice items.
- If the writing sample score is **5**, then the equivalent of 70 percent of the writing multiple-choice items must be answered correctly in order to pass the Writing section.

■ Individual Score Reports

All scores for complete sections of the test (Reading, Mathematics, and Writing) are reported as scaled scores in the range of 100–300. The minimum passing score for each section is listed on the report. Information about examinee performance in each skill or skill area is also provided. In Mathematics, the skills are grouped into skill areas for purposes of score reporting. The back of each score report provides information to examinees on how to read the results, as illustrated on the following page.

HOW TO READ YOUR EXAMINEE SCORE REPORT

Your Examinee Score Report indicates:

- 1) your score on each section, reported as a number from 100 to 300,
- 2) the passing standard for each of the three sections,
- 3) your status, reported as **Passed**, **Not Yet Passed**, or **Not Taken**, and
- 4) how you performed on each skill area. Your performance in the multiple-choice sections is indicated next to each skill area title. For each skill area, the percentage of questions you answered correctly is reported. **NOTE:** Because skill areas may contain different numbers of questions and because the total test score is a scaled score, the average of the skill area scores does not equal the total test score. For tests taken prior to February 1998, skill area performance is designated H (high), M (medium), or L (low). Because skill areas contain fewer items than the total test section, skill area results are not as reliable as the total test section score.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the State Board for Educator Certification set the standard(s) for each section of the THEA Test.

MINIMUM PASSING STANDARD. If your score is below this standard, you did not pass this section of the THEA Test.

Reading. Your score for the Reading Section is based on the total number of questions you answered correctly.

Mathematics. Your score for the Mathematics Section is based on the total number of questions you answered correctly. **College-Level Algebra Standard:** If your score is 270 or higher and you have met other requirements of your college, you are ready to begin college-level algebra or equivalent courses. **The college-level algebra standard does not apply to scores prior to September 1993.**

Writing. Your score for the Writing Section is based on your performance on the writing sample and, in certain circumstances, is also based on your performance on the writing multiple-choice questions. Scores on the writing sample range from 2 to 8. A writing sample may also be designated “unscorable.” If you did not pass the Writing Section, the features of your writing sample that may need improvement are indicated in the section below your writing sample score.

REPORTING OF SCORES. Test results have been reported to the Texas institutions you designated when you filled out your test registration form. **You should keep this score report for your own records.** See the **THEA Test Registration Bulletin** for more information on requesting additional score reports.

NOTE: For tests taken before September 1, 2003, the test name was TASP. Thereafter, the name of the test is THEA. The scores reported did not change.

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Rv 2/07

Below is a sample score report for Examinee A.



EXAMINEE SCORE REPORT

Test Date: July XX, XXXX

See the back of this report for information on how to interpret your scores.

SAMPLE EXAMINEE A

THEA Status*

| | | |
|-------------|----------------|-----------|
| Reading | Not Yet Passed | |
| Mathematics | Passed | XX-Jul-XX |
| Writing | Passed | XX-Jul-XX |

*For tests taken before September 1, 2003, the name was TASP, thereafter, the name is THEA.

77375A/0016

SSN: 999-99-9999



Reading – Not Yet Passed

| | | | |
|----------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| Your Score: | 210 | Skill Area Performance | Percent Correct |
| Minimum Passing Standard: | 230 | Word Meaning | 33 |
| | | Main Idea and Detail | 50 |
| | | Writer's Purpose | 83 |
| | | Idea Relationships | 33 |
| | | Critical Reasoning | 67 |
| | | Study Skills | 67 |

Mathematics – Passed

| | | | |
|----------------------------------|-----|---|------------------------|
| Your Score: | 238 | Skill Area Performance | Percent Correct |
| Minimum Passing Standard: | 230 | Fundamental Mathematics | 63 |
| | | Word Problems | 50 |
| | | Data interpretation & analysis | 75 |
| | | Algebra | 52 |
| | | Graph numbers or relationships | 25 |
| | | One-two variable equations | 100 |
| | | Word problems | 60 |
| | | Algebraic expressions & functional notation | 40 |
| | | Quadratic equations | 40 |
| | | Geometry | 75 |
| | | Geometric figures | 75 |
| | | Geometric concepts | 75 |
| | | Problem Solving | 67 |
| | | Reasoning skills | 75 |
| | | Combination of mathematical skills | 60 |

Writing – Passed

| | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----|---|------------------------|
| Your Score: | 300 | Multiple-Choice Skill Area Performance | Percent Correct |
| Minimum Passing Standard: | 220 | Purpose & Audience | 86 |
| Your Writing Sample Score: | 8 | Unity, Focus, & Development | 86 |
| | | Organization | 57 |
| | | Effective Sentences | 57 |
| | | Usage | 86 |

Your writing sample shows that you have met or exceeded the minimum passing standard.

Examinee Name:

Social Security Number: 999-99-9999

Texas Institution(s) to which your scores have been reported:

Austin Community College

San Jacinto College - South

Texas A&M University-Galveston

Evaluation Systems

Reading. The score report indicates that this examinee did not pass the Reading section. The total test scaled score of 210 is below the minimum passing score of 230.

In skill area performance, the examinee did well in Writer's Purpose with a score of 83 percent correct. The examinee scored 67 percent correct in two other skill areas, Critical Reasoning and Study Skills, while scoring lower in three skill areas, 50 percent for Main Idea and Detail and 33 percent for both Word Meaning and Idea Relationships.

Mathematics. The score report indicates that this examinee passed the Mathematics section with a total test scaled score of 238. However, that score is below the optional college-level algebra advisory standard of 270.

In skill area performance, the examinee did best in Geometry (75 percent correct) and Problem Solving (67 percent correct). The examinee's lowest skill area score was 52 percent in Algebra. Within the Algebra skill area, the examinee achieved scores ranging from 100 percent (one–two variable equations) to 25 percent (graph numbers or relationships).

Writing. The examinee passed Writing with a total test scaled score of 300. The writing sample score was 8, indicating that both scorers assigned a score of 4 (on the 1–4 scale) to the examinee's writing sample.

A second sample score report, for Examinee B, is shown below.



EXAMINEE SCORE REPORT

Test Date: July XX, XXXX

See the back of this report for information on how to interpret your scores.

SAMPLE EXAMINEE B

THEA Status*

| | | |
|-------------|----------------|-----------|
| Reading | Passed | XX-Jul-XX |
| Mathematics | Passed | XX-Jul-XX |
| Writing | Not Yet Passed | |

*For tests taken before September 1, 2003, the name was TASP, thereafter, the name is THEA.

78687A/0001

SSN: 999-99-9999



Reading – Passed

| | | | |
|----------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| Your Score: | 300 | Skill Area Performance | Percent Correct |
| Minimum Passing Standard: | 230 | Word Meaning | 100 |
| | | Main Idea and Detail | 83 |
| | | Writer's Purpose | 100 |
| | | Idea Relationships | 100 |
| | | Critical Reasoning | 100 |
| | | Study Skills | 100 |

Mathematics – Passed

| | | | |
|----------------------------------|-----|---|------------------------|
| Your Score: | 266 | Skill Area Performance | Percent Correct |
| Minimum Passing Standard: | 230 | Fundamental Mathematics | 63 |
| | | Word Problems | 75 |
| | | Data interpretation & analysis | 50 |
| | | Algebra | 70 |
| | | Graph numbers or relationships | 75 |
| | | One-two variable equations | 75 |
| | | Word problems | 80 |
| | | Algebraic expressions & functional notation | 80 |
| | | Quadratic equations | 40 |
| | | Geometry | 100 |
| | | Geometric figures | 100 |
| | | Geometric concepts | 100 |
| | | Problem Solving | 78 |
| | | Reasoning skills | 100 |
| | | Combination of mathematical skills | 60 |

Writing – Not Yet Passed

| | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----|---|------------------------|
| Your Score: | 180 | Multiple-Choice Skill Area Performance | Percent Correct |
| Minimum Passing Standard: | 220 | Purpose & Audience | 57 |
| Your Writing Sample Score: | 4 | Unity, Focus, & Development | 57 |
| | | Organization | 43 |
| | | Effective Sentences | 29 |
| | | Usage | 29 |

Your writing sample shows a need for improvement in the following areas: organization, effective sentences, and usage.

Examinee Name:

Social Security Number: 999-99-9999

Texas Institution(s) to which your scores have been reported:

University of Texas at Austin

Evaluation Systems

Reading. This examinee passed the Reading test with a total test scaled score of 300. The examinee performed well in all six skill areas, with five skill area scores of 100 percent correct and one skill area score of 83 percent correct.

Mathematics. The examinee passed the Mathematics test with a total test scaled score of 266 but did not achieve the college-level algebra standard of 270.

In skill area performance, the examinee scored best in Geometry (100 percent correct) and Problem Solving (78 percent correct). The examinee scored less well in Fundamental Mathematics (63 percent), with 75 percent correct in word problems and 50 percent correct in data interpretation and analysis.

Writing. The examinee did not pass the Writing test with a scaled score of 180. The writing sample score of 4 indicates that both scorers gave the writing sample a score of 2 on the scale of 1–4. The report also indicates that the examinee's writing sample showed a need for improvement in three areas (Organization, Effective Sentences, and Usage).

The writing multiple-choice scores range from 57 percent correct (Purpose and Audience, and Unity, Focus, and Development) to 29 percent correct (Effective Sentences and Usage).

Each examinee score report provides other information as well:

- the Texas institutions indicated by the examinee for receipt of scores,
- any section or sections of the test that the examinee did not take at the given administration, and
- current THEA status (sections passed) based on this and previous test administrations.

■ Score Reports Sent to Colleges and Universities

Evaluation Systems supports the online THEA Test Score Distribution System (SDS) to deliver official THEA scores securely and confidentially to colleges, universities, public high schools, and educator preparation programs. Scores are posted to a password-protected account on the SDS following each test administration. Institutions may also access individual examinee scores. Institutions are encouraged to make these reports accessible to faculty. At most colleges and universities, results are issued to the Registrar. However, some institutions have requested that the results be issued to an office other than that of the Registrar.

For ease of processing, the score reporting layout is available in two types of files: a browsable examinee results report, which can be viewed or printed, and a downloadable file, formatted for compatibility with the institution's data management systems. The browsable report, as illustrated on the following page, includes all score information presented on the individual examinee score report for the current administration.

The downloadable file includes results up to and including the current administration so that for each student a cumulative record is provided.

| Name/SSN/Birthdate | Test Date | Section Scaled Score | Skill Area Performance | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|-----------|----------------------------|------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | (<- Reading & Writing; Math below) | | | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | | |
| | | | T | 1 | 2 | T | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | T | 8 | 9 | T | 10 | 11 |
| ALICANTE ELENA 111-22-3341 12-01-78 | 07-30-05 | R: 245 M: n/a W: 0 | 100 | 33 | 100 | 83 | 50 | 67 | | | | | | | | | |
| BLACK JOHN 111-22-3331 06-12-76 | 07-30-05 | R: 287 M: n/a W: n/a | 100 | 100 | 83 | 100 | 83 | 83 | | | | | | | | | |
| GRANO JUAN 111-22-2339 02-25-79 | 07-30-05 | R: 251 M: 241 W: n/a | 67 | 83 | 83 | 83 | 67 | 67 | | | | | | | | | |
| GREEN BRIAN 111-22-3338 11-11-80 | 07-30-05 | R: 240 M: 257 W: 270 | 50 | 83 | 67 | 83 | 67 | 67 | | | | | | | | | |
| JOHNSON CHRIS 111-22-3336 09-22-79 | 07-30-05 | R: 281 M: n/a W: 240 | 100 | 83 | 83 | 100 | 67 | 100 | | | | | | | | | |
| JONES CINDY 111-22-3335 07-13-77 | 07-30-05 | R: 218 M: 155 W: n/a | 67 | 67 | 83 | 33 | 67 | 50 | | | | | | | | | |
| OBREGON SUSANA 111-22-3337 08-28-80 | 07-30-05 | R: 226 M: 228 W: 270 | 50 | 83 | 100 | 50 | 67 | 33 | | | | | | | | | |
| O'CONNOR ANDREW 111-22-3332 09-11-54 | 07-30-05 | R: 185 M: 210 W: 200 | 67 | 0 | 33 | 100 | 33 | 17 | | | | | | | | | |
| ROBERTS JOAN 111-22-3334 06-14-80 | 07-30-05 | R: 164 M: 203 W: 180 | 50 | 17 | 33 | 33 | 17 | 50 | | | | | | | | | |
| SMITH MICHAEL 111-22-3333 08-23-66 | 07-30-05 | R: 258 M: 245 W: 240 | 100 | 50 | 83 | 67 | 100 | 67 | | | | | | | | | |
| ZUNIGA MARTIN 111-22-3342 02-11-80 | 07-30-05 | R: 240 M: n/a W: 240 | 67 | 67 | 83 | 50 | 67 | 83 | | | | | | | | | |

Explanation of Codes Used on the Browsable Examinee Results Report.

Test section results are reported as scaled scores. The scaled score is a conversion of the number of questions answered correctly to a score in a range of 100 – 300. On the examinee results report, the total scaled score is listed first. Sections not taken are indicated by 'n/a'. Next, skill or skill area performance is indicated with the following codes.

| <p>Skill Area Performance Indicators. As of February 1998, skill area performance indicators are reported as the percent correct for the area. Mathematics performance indicators are reported for eleven detail areas. Indicators for results from February 1998 and after should not be combined with indicators from prior to February 1998.</p> | | |
|--|--|---|
| <p>(9/93 – 1/98) H = Scaled Score of 230 – 300 M = Scaled Score of 170 – 229 L = Scaled Score of 100 – 169</p> | <p>(prior to 9/93) 70% – 100% correct 50% – 69% correct 0% – 49% correct</p> | |
| <p>Skill Area Descriptions are listed below.</p> | | |
| Test Section | Skill Areas | Detail Skill Areas |
| Reading (R) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Word Meaning 2. Main Idea and Detail 3. Writer's Purpose 4. Idea Relationships 5. Critical Reasoning 6. Study Skills | |
| Mathematics (M) | <p>(Prior to 9/93)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fundamental Mathematics 2. Algebraic Graphing & Equations 3. Algebraic Operations and Quadratics 4. Geometry and Reasoning <p>(As of 9/93)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fundamental Math 2. Algebra 3. Geometry 4. Problem Solving | <p>(As of 2/98)</p> <p>T. Fundamental Mathematics</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Word problems 2. Data interpretation and analysis <p>T. Algebra</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Graph numbers or relationships 4. One- and two-variable equations 5. Word problems 6. Algebraic expressions and functional notation 7. Quadratic equations <p>T. Geometry</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Geometric figures 9. Geometric concepts <p>T. Problem Solving</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Reasoning skills 11. Combination of mathematical skills |
| Writing (W) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Purpose & Audience 2. Unity, Focus, & Development 3. Organization 4. Effective Sentences 5. Usage | |
| Writing Sample Score Analysis | ANALYTIC CODES | |
| | ANALYTIC | UNSCORABLE |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The writing sample subsection is scored on a scale of 2 – 8, 8 being highest score possible A score of '0' indicates that the writing sample was blank or unscorable Analytic codes (AN) are used to indicate features of the examinee writing that may need improvement for failing essays Unscorable codes (AN) are used to indicate the reason the essay is unscorable | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 = Appropriateness 2 = Unity and Focus 3 = Development 4 = Organization 5 = Sentence Structure 6 = Usage 7 = Mechanical conventions | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 = Off Topic 2 = Illegible 3 = Not in English 4 = Too short to score |

Section IV

USING SCORE REPORTS

Score reports provide information for identifying areas of strength and weakness for individual students. The total score for each section of the test (Reading, Mathematics, and Writing) is reported on a scale of 100–300. An examinee may take one, two, or three sections at a given test administration. All three sections *do not* need to be passed at a single administration. Once a section is passed, it need not be taken again.

■ Using Individual Examinee Performance Results

The test questions are based directly on the skills. Skill or skill-area results provide information about an individual's strengths and weaknesses relative to the content defined by the skill(s).

Skill and skill-area results along with other information about examinee performance can be used to target areas that require further preparation.

The Writing section of the test includes two parts: the writing sample and multiple-choice questions. Performance levels for the multiple-choice skills are always given, but analytic scoring information on the writing sample is given only if an examinee does not pass the writing section.

While skill or skill-area results provide useful information for identifying strengths and weaknesses, these results are based on a smaller number of questions than the total section score. Thus, skill or skill-area results are not as reliable as the total section score. Consequently, skill or skill-area information should not be used in lieu of further diagnostic assessment, where warranted. The skill or skill area-information can best be used as an initial indication of where further diagnostic assessment may be useful.

■ Using the Examinee Results Report

The Examinee Results Report provides a comprehensive, cumulative record of individual results for all examinees requesting that their scores be sent to a particular institution in two formats: a browsable/printable report and a downloadable report. Each report is in alphabetical order, providing accessible score information for all examinees. If an examinee has taken the test more than once, all scores are listed together on the downloadable report, with the most recent results given first. This format allows for easy tracking of an individual's results over time.

■ Interpretive Cautions

Before making any inferences from the THEA Test score reports, those who receive them should note a number of interpretive cautions.

- **Skill or skill-area information.** Caution is also appropriate in interpreting skill or skill-area information, since this information is based on fewer items than a total test section score. For this reason, skill or skill-area information may not be as reliable as total test section scores.
- **Using test results.** The purpose of the THEA Test is to identify those students needing developmental education in basic academic skills in order to be successful in higher education. Results should be interpreted along with any other available sources of information concerning a student's academic skills.

Individual examinee results are confidential. Institutions with small numbers of examinees are advised to use caution in sharing test information publicly, since they may inadvertently compromise an individual examinee's confidentiality as a result.

Further questions about test use should be directed to Evaluation Systems.

Developed and Produced by

PEARSON

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