



FACULTY MANUAL FOR THE INTERNET-BASED TEST

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Introduction

In spring 2010, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) requested that the Evaluation Systems group of Pearson develop an Internet-based version of the Texas Higher Education Assessment® (THEA®) for the administration of the Developmental Education Demonstration Pilot Project. In addition, students at Texas educational institutions participating in this pilot program may also take the THEA Internet-Based Test (IBT). This document is provided to assist faculty and administrators at participating institutions. It describes both examinee and institution score reports for the THEA IBT, and explains how to use the information contained in those reports.

This document serves as a supplement to the THEA Faculty Manual found on the THEA Web site at www.thea.nesinc.com. Information regarding the content of the test (e.g., a description of the test and the process used to develop it, the skills tested, worksheets for comparing those skills to course content) can be found in the THEA Faculty Manual.

Additional resources available on the THEA Web site include the following.

- The **online, interactive THEA Practice Test**, developed by Evaluation Systems, includes multiple-choice test questions, a writing assignment, and test directions that are similar to those that appear on the actual THEA Test. Examinees are provided with immediate feedback on performance, including detailed explanations for each correct response on the multiple-choice questions, as well as an analysis of their writing sample. The practice test may be used to help examinees decide which skills are strengths and which skills may require extra work. The online practice test can be purchased via a link on the THEA Web site by selecting “Prepare,” then “THEA Internet-Based Testing.”
- The **THEA Online Study Guide**, also developed by Evaluation Systems, contains thorough information about each of the skills covered by the THEA, and includes numerous examples and end-of-chapter exercises to help examinees gain the knowledge and skills needed for testing. The guide also includes an interactive practice test complete with an answer key and detailed answer explanations. Each section of the study guide (Reading, Mathematics, and Writing) contains a list of additional study resources. It may be purchased via a link on the THEA Web site by selecting “Prepare,” then “THEA Internet-Based Testing.”

Section I

Score Reporting

■ How the THEA IBT is Scored

The Reading and Mathematics sections contain multiple-choice questions that are scored electronically. An examinee's score on these two sections of the test is based on the number of multiple-choice questions answered correctly; there is no penalty for guessing.

The overall Writing Section score is based on the number of multiple-choice items answered correctly, combined with the examinee's score on the writing sample. As with the Reading and Mathematics sections, the Writing multiple-choice questions and the writing sample are scored electronically.

For consistency, test scores are reported using the same scale, in a range from 100 to 300. The minimum score needed to pass the Reading and Mathematics sections is 230. For the Writing Section, the minimum score that meets state standards is 220.

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. Therefore, the score on the writing sample portion of the test accounts for 80 percent of the total Writing Section score, while the multiple-choice questions account for 20 percent of the total Writing Section score.

The THECB set the minimum 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.

The THECB has requested that examinee scores be reported immediately following the conclusion of testing. To meet this need, Evaluation Systems utilizes Intelligent Essay Assessor (IEA) technology to provide scoring of the writing sample. Hundreds of writing sample responses are used to calibrate IEA and create the algorithms needed to produce accurate scoring.

Writing samples prepared by examinees are scored according to the degree to which the sample 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.

The writing sample of an examinee who does not meet the minimum standards of the Writing Section of the THEA Test is also scored *analytically* on the characteristics listed above. The examinee's score report indicates specific writing characteristics in which improvement is needed. This analysis helps examinees focus their preparation for retaking the test.

■ Score Points

Each response is rated on a scale of "1" to "4," with a "1" representing a response that reflects little to no command of the characteristics measured and a "4" representing a response that reflects a strong command of the characteristics measured. A description of the characteristics of writing samples for each score point follows. Writing samples that are completely off topic (i.e., 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 through 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>

■ Individual Score Reports

All scores for completed sections of the test (Reading, Mathematics, and Writing) are reported as scaled scores in the range of 100 to 300. For each section, the minimum score for meeting state standards is listed on the report. Information about examinee performance in each skill or skill area is also provided. In Mathematics and Writing, the skills are grouped into skill areas for purposes of score reporting.

Examinees may receive their scores at the test site upon completion of the test, although some writing samples may be designated as unscorable (e.g., written in a language other than English; too short to score). In this case, the examinee will receive his or her full score report within two business days. Writing samples designated as unscorable at the test site will be sent to Evaluation Systems scorers for further review, and the writing sample will either receive a score or it will be confirmed as unscorable. The total test score will then be calculated for the Writing Section of the test, and the examinee's scores will be posted to a secure Web site. If a writing sample is confirmed as unscorable, the examinee will not be able to meet the minimum standard for the Writing Section. The examinee can access the scores online by logging in to his or her account using the username and password chosen during test registration.

The second page of each score report provides information to examinees on how to read the results, as shown on the following page.

How to Read Your Score Report

Your score report shows your score on each section of the THEA Test and indicates how you performed on the THEA Test skills in each section. It also includes a description of your performance on the skills measured by each section of the test. This will provide information for you to use in identifying your areas of strength and weakness. If you do not pass a section of the test, this information will be particularly useful to you when you prepare to take that section again. If you do not pass the Writing Section, the features of your writing that need improvement will be noted on your score report in the section below your writing sample score.

■ How Scores Are Determined—Internet-Based THEA

The Reading and Mathematics sections and the multiple-choice portion of the Writing Section are scored electronically. Your scores reflect the number of questions you answered correctly.

Your writing sample score is combined with your score on the writing multiple-choice items to determine your total Writing Section score. This score is reported on the 100 to 300 scale like the Reading and Mathematics section scores. Your performance on both the writing sample *and* the writing multiple-choice items will be used to determine your total Writing Section score.

Your writing sample will be scored electronically by the Intelligent Essay Assessor (IEA). This technology uses focused holistic scoring to determine your writing sample score on a 4-point scale. Hundreds of previously scored writing sample responses were used to “train” IEA to score THEA writing samples. IEA provides nearly immediate scoring, allowing you to receive your Writing Section score at the testing center. Occasionally, IEA will be unable to assign a score to a writing sample response. In these cases, the response will be scored by a trained human scorer within two business days. Responses that are completely off topic, illegible, written in a language other than English, or otherwise unscorable receive a score of U (unscorable).

Below is a sample score report.

		<h2 style="background-color: #0056b3; color: white; padding: 5px;">EXAMINEE SCORE REPORT</h2>	
Test Date: 2/10/2011 Afirstname Alastname		THEA Status	
		Reading	Meets Feb 10 2011 12:05PM
		Math	Meets Feb 10 2011 12:05PM
		Writing	Not Meets Feb 10 2011 12:05PM

Reading - Meets		Skill Area Performance	Percent Correct
Your Score:	247	→ Word meaning	50
Minimum State Standard:	230	Main idea and detail	100
		→ Writer's purpose	50
		Idea relationships	100
		→ Critical reasoning	50
		Study skills	100

Mathematics - Meets		Skill Area Performance	Percent Correct
Your Score:	259	Fundamental Mathematics	75
Minimum State Standard:	230	Word problems	75
		Data interpretation & analysis	75
		→ Algebra	70
		Graph numbers or relationships	50
		One-two variable equations	75
		Word problems	80
		Alg. expressions & func. notation	80
		Quadratic equations	60
		→ Geometry	63
		Geometric figures	75
		→ Geometric concepts	50
		Problem Solving	78
		Reasoning skills	100
		Combination of mathematical skills	60

Writing - Not Meets		Multiple-Choice Skill Area Performance	Percent Correct
Your Score:	180	Elements of Composition	33
Minimum State Standard:	220	→ Purpose & audience	57
		→ Unity, focus, & development	29
		→ Organization	14
Your Writing Sample Score	2	Mechanics	36
		→ Effective sentences	14
		→ Usage	57

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

→ Indicates a skill area in which you may need improvement.

Evaluation Systems group of Pearson reserves the right to make necessary changes or adjustments as a result of post-administration reviews.

Reading. The score report indicates that this examinee met the state standard for the Reading Section. The total test scaled score of 247 is above the minimum state standard of 230.

In skill area performance, the examinee performed well in Main Idea and Detail, Idea Relationships, and Study Skills, answering 100 percent of the questions correctly. The examinee scored lower in Word Meaning, Writer's Purpose, and Critical Reasoning, answering 50 percent of the questions correctly in each of these areas.

Mathematics. The score report indicates that this examinee met the state standard for the Mathematics Section with a total test scaled score of 259.

In skill area performance, the examinee performed well in most skill areas, answering at least 60 percent of questions correctly in each area, with the exception of Graph Numbers or Relationships (50 percent of questions answered correctly) and Geometric Concepts (50 percent of questions answered correctly).

Writing. The score report indicates that this examinee has not yet met the state standard for the Writing Section, and has a total test scaled score of 180. The examinee received a score of 2 on the writing sample, on a scale of 1 to 4.

In skill area performance, the examinee performed most strongly in the areas of Purpose & Audience (57 percent of questions answered correctly) and Usage (57 percent of questions answered correctly). The examinee scored lowest in the areas of Organization and Effective Sentences, both with 14 percent of questions answered correctly.

Each examinee score report provides other information as well, including:

- 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
- current THEA status for each section (meets or does not meet state standards) based on this and previous test administrations

■ Access to Score Reports by Colleges and Universities

Texas educational institutions using the THEA IBT will have secure and confidential access to official THEA scores for examinees who indicated that their scores should be sent to that institution, as well as for examinees who tested at that institution. Examinee scores will be available to institutions as soon as they are issued—in most cases shortly after the examinee completes the test, and within two business days for examinees whose writing sample is designated at the test site as unscorable.

A Master User will be designated at each college and university where the IBT is offered. The Master User serves as the institutional focal point for collecting names of faculty who should have access to their student data in the THEA IBT system. The Master User will send these faculty names and their e-mail addresses to Evaluation Systems Customer Service. Evaluation Systems will create THEA IBT login credentials for each authorized faculty member and communicate these credentials directly to the faculty users. The Master User also maintains a record of the individuals to whom access has been granted, and notifies Evaluation Systems whenever THEA IBT access should be removed for a particular faculty member.

Faculty and administrators will be able to look up scores both for individual examinees and for groups of examinees. Reports for groups of examinees will include the following information:

- percent meeting the state standard on each section for the selected group of examinees
- average score on each section for the selected group of examinees
- average percent of items answered correctly by skill and skill area
- for Writing, the percentage of examinees who need improvement in each skill area assessed by the writing sample
- suggested focus areas for instruction based on skill areas in which students have not performed at a level that meets the minimum state standard

Section II

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 to 300. An examinee may take one, two, or three sections at a given test administration. The 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 meet the minimum standards of 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

An institution can access comprehensive, cumulative records of all examinees whose scores are reported to that institution in two formats: individual examinee score reports and group reports.

Individual examinee score reports are available for each test session that an examinee has completed. Institutions may also view student summary data, showing all scores for a particular student.

Group reports provide average scores by test section as well as percentage of items answered correctly by skill and skill area for each student in the group. Institutions can choose which students they would like to include in a group.

In addition, the Master User at each institution can export the data for these examinees into a data file that can be uploaded into a database or spreadsheet, or merged with student record files on current institution information systems, providing the institution with the ability to manipulate the format of THEA results to create a unique set of reports and analyses that meets the institution's particular needs.

■ 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 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.