The University of the State of New York
THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Albany, New York 12234

REGENTS COMPETENCY TEST IN WRITING

Directions for Administering and Scoring

GENERAL INFORMATION

The general procedures to be followed in administering all Regents Competency Tests are contained in the current edition of *Regents Examinations, Regents Competency Tests, and Proficiency Examinations: School Administrator's Manual.* This manual also provides information concerning modifications in testing procedures for students with disabilities and alternative testing procedures for students whose native language is other than English.

Although the Regents Competency Test in Writing is scheduled for administration during a 3-hour examination session, there is no time limit for the test. Students should be given as much time as they need to prepare their answers. It is expected that most students will need about 3 hours of working time to complete the test. Some students, however, may need more working time, and schools should make provisions to accommodate such students.

No student should be permitted to leave the testing room before the Uniform Statewide Admission Deadlines:

Uniform Statewide Admission Deadlines

	Morning Examinations	*Afternoon Examinations*
January/June	10:00 a.m.	2:00 p.m.
August	9:15 a.m.	1:15 p.m.

GENERAL FEATURES OF THE TEST

Test Description

The Regents Competency Test in Writing is a direct measure of students' writing ability. The test requires students to produce different types of writing that are common to school, college, and professional writing and to everyday personal and business communication.

The test consists of three separate writing tasks: a Business Letter of complaint, a Report based on information given, and a Composition. The purpose(s) of the Composition will vary from administration to administration. Four of the five purposes addressed in the Department publication *Composition in the English Language Arts Curriculum K–12* will be used: narration, exposition, description, and persuasion. A Composition task may reflect more than one purpose. For example, a task might require a student to *describe* an object and then *explain* something significant about it or *narrate* an incident related to it. The topics for the three tasks on the test are presented in a context that establishes the specific purpose(s) and audience for the writer.

Each of the three tasks requires a relatively brief piece of writing, about 100–200 words. For each task, the students are directed to prepare first drafts and then to edit and revise the drafts before producing their final answers. Thus, students are given the opportunity to follow the process of planning, drafting, and revising normally used in preparing a piece of writing. As noted in Appendix A, modifications may have to be made in the writing tasks for students with disabilities.

A unique feature of the Regents Competency Test in Writing is the rating method. Using a holistic method of scoring, i.e., scoring for total effect, the rater judges the level of writing shown by the student's response in light of criteria that reflect the characteristics of an exemplary response to the specific task. This judgment is expressed in terms of a percentage score. Students must attain a mean (average) score of 65% for their three pieces of writing in order to pass the Regents Competency Test in Writing.

Answer Paper

Please note that starting with the January 2008 administration of the Regents Competency Test in Writing, the Department has replaced the no-carbon-required (NCR) answer pads with answer booklets. These answer booklets were shipped to schools in the same nonsecure testing materials shipment as these Directions.

DET 377 (01-08—4,000) 97-14757

Students must write their final answers in the answer booklets provided by the Department. The scrap paper needed by students for preparation of first drafts is to be provided by the schools.

The Department also provides a separate student identification sheet, which is machine readable on NCS equipment. This sheet contains several grids for recording the required student identification information and the student declaration, which the student must sign.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE TEST

Test Materials

Make sure that sufficient quantities of the following materials needed for administering this test are available.

For each student:

- test booklet
- machine-readable student identification sheet
- answer booklet
- scrap paper
- No. 2 pencil
- pen

For the proctor:

- *Directions for Administering and Scoring*
- test booklet (for demonstration purposes)
- machine-readable student identification sheet, answer booklet, and scrap paper (for demonstration purposes)
- extra student identification sheets, answer booklets and/or essay paper, scrap paper, pens, and No. 2 pencils

Detailed Directions for Administering the Test

Before the test session begins, write on the board a sample of the information students will need in order to complete the student identification sheets. This information includes the following: the student's name, date of birth, sex, grade, the name and city or P.O. address of the school (the student's **home** school for summer school students), the name of the school district (the student's **home** school district for summer school students), the testing date, and a teacher or class name. Students must use a **No. 2 pencil** to provide the information requested on the student identification sheet and a pen to write the final answers in the answer booklet.

After the desks are cleared of books and papers, distribute a student identification sheet, an answer booklet, and scrap paper to each student.[1] When the students are ready to begin the test, say:

> On your desk, you should have a student identification sheet, an answer booklet, and scrap paper. (*Show*) First take the student identification sheet, but do not write on it until I tell you what to do. When you write on the student identification sheet, use pencil. Do *NOT* use ink. Print clearly and legibly.
>
> In the box in the upper left side of your student identification sheet, print the name of this school, the city (or P.O. address) and State, the name of the school district, today's date, and the name of your teacher (or class). (Summer school students should provide this information for their **home** school.) I have written a sample on the board for you. (*Pause*)
>
> Next, in the grid of boxes labeled "Your Name," print your name, last name first. (*Pause*) In the column under each box of this grid, darken the circle that contains the same letter that you have written in the box. Then darken the blank circles directly under any blank boxes that are left in your name grid. (*Pause*)
>
> Now, in the grid of boxes labeled "Birthdate," write in the last two digits of the year in which you were born. Then darken the circle for the month in which you were born, and in the column below each of the two boxes, darken the circle that has the same number as the digit you wrote in the box. (*Pause*)
>
> In the box labeled "Sex," darken the appropriate circle, and in the box labeled "Grade," darken the circle for the grade, 11 or 12, that you are in now. (Summer school students who have successfully completed Grade 11 should darken the circle for Grade 12.)

[1] If enough answer booklets are not available, students who do not have an answer booklet must use essay paper supplied by the school. On each sheet of essay paper, these students should write their name and the name of their school (home school) and identify the part of the test being answered. These students should complete all of the student identification sheet.

If enough student identification sheets are not available, students who do not have student identification sheets should provide, on a sheet of paper supplied by the school, information similar to that which is requested on the student identification sheet. These students should sign their names on these sheets after the student declaration has been read to them from a student identification sheet.

If the school district wants students to fill in the grid for the student's local identification number, give the appropriate directions to the students at this time. Then say:

> Next, read the statement printed in the box labeled "Student Declaration." (*Pause*) After you have read this declaration, please sign your name. Your papers cannot be accepted if you do not sign the declaration. (*Pause*) Leave the student identification sheet on the corner of your desk.
>
> Now take the answer booklet. Please use ink to fill in the heading on the first page and your name on each of the other pages. (*Show*)
>
> During the test, if you find that you need more than the four sheets in your answer booklet, please raise your hand.[2]
>
> Use the scrap paper to prepare the first drafts of your answers. Then write your final answer in the answer booklet. Do you have any questions?

After all questions concerning the answer booklets have been answered, distribute the test booklets, face up, one to each student, and say:

> Look at the cover of your test booklet. Check to be sure that the title of this test and today's date and time are on the cover. If you do not have the correct test booklet, please raise your hand. (*Pause*)

When you are sure that all students have the correct test booklet, say:

> Read the directions to yourself. Do not open the booklet until I tell you to do so. (*Pause*) Do you understand the directions, especially the seven steps you are to take in preparing your answers for each part of the test? (*Pause*)

After all questions concerning the directions have been answered, say:

> Remember to write your first draft for each part of the test on scrap paper. You may use pencil for this, but you must use pen to write your final answer in the answer booklet. You may answer the three parts of the test in any order you wish, but make sure that you answer *all* three parts.
>
> You will be allowed as much time as you need to finish the test. When you have finished, close your test booklet and place it on the top of your answer booklet and scrap paper. Do you have any questions?

After any questions have been answered, say:

> Now turn the page and begin work.

Collect all student identification sheets.

No one, *under any circumstances*, may interpret or explain test questions to students, nor may anyone review or comment on the answer paper of a student while a test is in progress. In response to inquiries by students concerning the meaning or interpretation of test questions, proctors should advise students to use their own best judgment.

As students finish the test, they should turn in their the test booklet and answer booklet separately. Students should then be allowed to leave the testing room. However, no student should be permitted to leave the testing room before the Uniform Statewide Admission Deadline.

For detailed instructions that must be followed to ensure that students do not use communications devices while taking this test, see Appendix C of this booklet.

NOTE: No one, *under any circumstances*, including the student, may alter the student's responses on the test once the student has handed in his or her test materials. Teachers and administrators who engage in inappropriate conduct with respect to administering and scoring State examinations may be subject to disciplinary actions in accordance with Sections 3020 and 3020-a of Education Law or to action against their certification pursuant to Part 83 of the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education.

[2] If a student needs more paper than is available in the answer booklet for writing the final answer to any part of the test, give the student an extra answer booklet. If there are no extra answer booklets available, the student may use essay paper supplied by the school. On each sheet of essay paper, the student should write his or her name, the name and city or P.O. address of the school (home school), and should identify the part being answered.

RATING OF THE TEST

Organizing the Rating and Recording Process

Before the answer papers can be read and rated, each school must set up a procedure for collecting, arranging, and processing the answer papers and for maintaining records of the test results. The procedure used in a particular school should be designed to accomplish the following: (1) produce a reliable score for each student, (2) facilitate maintenance of accurate records of each student's score, and (3) expedite the return to the Department of the required test materials. Appendix B provides a suggested procedure for managing the mechanics of the rating process and a sample format of a rating sheet for recording scores on the parts of the test.

Complete the rating as soon as possible after the test administration, but only after teachers have had sufficient time to become familiar with the rating method, which is described on the next page. Each of the three pieces of writing produced by the student must be rated by a different teacher. The mean (average) of these three part scores is the student's final score. This procedure helps to ensure a high degree of objectivity and reliability in the rating, since a score on any one part of this test cannot be considered as reliable a score as the mean of the scores on the three parts of the test.

If a student's mean (average) score is in the 60%–70% range, or if there are wide discrepancies among the scores for a student's three pieces of writing, the student's responses may need to be rated again. These additional ratings will further increase the reliability of that student's test score. For schools that wish to expend the extra effort, the reliability of the rating of the Regents Competency Test can be increased by having additional ratings given to the responses of all students who take the test.

Detailed Directions for Rating the Answer Papers

In rating the students' responses, follow the procedure outlined below.

1. Familiarize yourself with the system your school is using for processing the answer papers and recording the test scores.
2. Have a test booklet on hand. Carefully read the task for the part you will be rating. Note exactly what is required. Then write your own response to the task.
3. Carefully review the criteria established for an exemplary response to the task and for a zero paper. These criteria are given in the rating guide provided for the test.
4. Discuss with other raters the task and the criteria. (It would be helpful to rate a set of student responses as a training exercise.) When you are sure that you clearly understand the task and the rating criteria, you are ready to begin rating the students' responses.
5. Keep in mind that the criteria reflect the characteristics of a 100% response.
6. For each part of the test that you rate, read each student's response quickly, keeping in mind the task and the criteria for an exemplary response. *You should need no more than two minutes to read a student's response.*
7. Using intervals of 5, decide what percent of an exemplary response the student's response represents. For example, is it 100%? 90%? 80%? 75%? 70%? 65%? 50%? 40%? 25%? 0%?
8. Record the percentage score in the appropriate place on a separate rating sheet. (A sample rating sheet is provided on page 9.) *Do not record the score on the student's answer paper.*

You should read and rate the students' responses quickly once you have internalized the task and the criteria established for an exemplary response. You should not spend time agonizing over a student's response. However, you should not read the responses superficially. Some responses may require a second reading to determine the appropriate score. After reading and rating a number of responses, you will find it helpful to stop and review the task and the criteria before continuing with the rating.

Recording Students' Final Scores

A student's final score on the Regents Competency Test in Writing is the average of the percentage scores given for the student's answers to each of the three parts of the test. For each student, the scores for the three parts of the test and the mean (average) score must be recorded and gridded in the appropriate spaces on the student identification sheet. The final score obtained by each student should be recorded on the student's permanent record.

When the teacher rating is completed, test scores must be considered final and must be entered onto students' permanent records.

Principals and other administrative staff in a school or district do not have the authority to set aside the scores arrived at by the teachers and rescore student test papers or to change any scores assigned through the procedures described in these directions and in the scoring materials provided by the Department. Any principal or administrator found to have done so, except in the circumstances described below, will be in violation of Department policy regarding the scoring of State examinations. Teachers and administrators who violate Department policy with respect to scoring State examinations may be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with Sections 3020 and 3020-a of Education Law or to action against their certification pursuant to Part 83 of the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education.

On rare occasions, an administrator may learn that an isolated error occurred in a final score for a student or in recording students' scores in their permanent records. For example, the final score may have been based on an incorrect summing of the student's raw scores for parts of the test or from a misreading of the conversion chart. When such errors involve no more than five students' final scores on any test and when such errors are detected within four months of the test date, the principal may arrange for the corrected score to be recorded in the student's permanent record. However, in all such instances, the principal must advise the Office of State Assessment in writing that the student's score has been corrected. The written notification to the Department must be signed by the principal or superintendent and must include the names of the students whose scores have been corrected, the name of the examination, the students' original and corrected scores, and a brief explanation of the nature of the scoring error that was corrected.

If an administrator has substantial reason to believe that the teachers rating this test have failed to accurately score more than five student answer papers, the administrator must first obtain permission in writing from the Office of State Assessment before arranging for or permitting a rescoring of student papers. The written request to the Office of State Assessment must come from the superintendent of a public school district or the chief administrative officer of a nonpublic or charter school and must include the examination title, date of administration, and number of students whose papers would be subject to such rescoring. This request must also include a statement explaining why the administrator believes that the teachers failed to rate appropriately and, thus, why he or she believes rescoring the examination papers is necessary. As part of this submission, the school administrator must make clear his or her understanding that such extraordinary rerating may be carried out only accordance with the scoring guidelines presented above and fully utilizing the scoring materials for this test provided by the Department.

The Department sometimes finds it necessary to notify schools of a revision to the scoring key and rating guide for an examination. Should this occur after the scoring is completed, the principal is authorized to have appropriate members of the scoring committee review students' responses only to the specific question(s) referenced in the notification and to adjust students' final examination scores when appropriate. Only in such circumstances, the school is not required to notify or obtain approval from the Department to correct students' final examination scores.

Schools are not to submit the answer papers written by students to the Department for validation of scoring. A random sampling of schools will receive instructions to submit their scored RCT in Writing answer papers to the Department for rerating. The remainder of schools must keep the answer papers and the student identification sheets on file for one year in accordance with the standard procedures for the safeguarding of all other such examinations.

APPENDIX A

Modifications for Students with Disabilities

At times, the task given for Part I – Business Letter or Part III – Composition may refer to a product or situation that may not be suitable for a student with a particular disability. In such cases, the principal may authorize an appropriate modification to the given task.

1. For a student to be eligible for a modification, the school district's Committee on Special Education must have identified the student as having a disability.
2. To determine if a modification will be necessary, the student's teacher may obtain a copy of a test booklet one hour before the scheduled starting time for the administration of the Regents Competency Test in Writing.
3. If, in the teacher's judgment, the product or situation mentioned in the task for the Business Letter or the Composition would not be suitable for a student with a particular disability, the teacher may ask the principal for authorization to modify the task by changing the product or situation to one that would be more appropriate for such a student. For example, if the Business Letter referred to a musical recording, the principal could authorize a hearing-impaired student to substitute a book in its place. At the start of the test administration, the student should be informed of the product or situation that is to be substituted for the one referred to in the test booklet.
4. Any modification made must be authorized by the principal. In addition, a report of the modification should accompany the student's answer papers.

APPENDIX B

Suggested Rating Procedure

The following procedure is recommended for managing the mechanics of the rating process:

1. Designate one person as the coordinator for the rating process.
2. Set aside one room as a central rating room for collecting, sorting, circulating, and storing answer papers and for preparing and maintaining records.
3. After the test is administered, have the proctors put the gridded student identification sheets and the answer papers in separate bundles, keeping the three parts of the test for each student together, and then deliver the two bundles to the central rating room.
4. Compile each of the two groups of materials (the gridded student identification sheets and the answer papers) into schoolwide sequences using whatever order is most convenient. However, be sure to use the same order for each of the two groups.
5. Keeping the answer papers in order, separate them into bundles for distribution to the raters. Each of the three parts of the test must be rated by a different teacher. Therefore, to help expedite the rating process, each bundle should contain one-third of the total number of papers a teacher will be expected to rate. (For example, if a teacher will be rating 114 papers, each bundle should contain 38 papers.)
6. Prepare three rating sheets for each bundle. (A sample rating sheet is provided on page 9.) Enter the student names for the answer papers in that bundle on one rating sheet. The two other rating sheets for that bundle may be photocopied from this completed rating sheet. Then designate one rating sheet for Part I, another for Part II, and the third for Part III. Attach the three rating sheets to the top of the bundle.
7. Distribute the bundles of answer papers to the teachers who will be rating them first. Each teacher will be responsible for rating a designated number of papers and will rate only one part of the test. Thus, three teachers will share in the rating of each student's test paper, each teacher scoring a different part. As much as possible, avoid giving a teacher bundles of answer papers written mostly by students from that teacher's own classes.
8. Have the teachers record the scores on the appropriate rating sheet. **No scores or corrections should be indicated on the answer papers.** When rating the answer papers, the teachers should follow the "Detailed Directions for Rating the Answer Papers" given on page 5. These detailed directions also appear on the rating guide provided for the test.
9. Have the teacher return each bundle of answer papers to the central rating room as soon as the teacher has finished rating the designated part of the test for that bundle of answer papers. The rating coordinator should detach from the bundle the rating sheet completed by the teacher and have those scores recorded and gridded in the appropriate spaces on the student identification sheet. The bundle should then be forwarded to another teacher for the rating of another part. This process should be repeated until all three parts of each answer paper have been rated.
10. After all three part scores are recorded and gridded, determine the mean (average) score for each student. This mean score should be rounded to the nearest whole number and then recorded and gridded in the appropriate spaces on the student's identification sheet. (If a mean score ends in a decimal that is .5 or higher, it should be rounded up to the next larger whole number. If a mean score ends in a decimal that is less than .5, it should be rounded down to the next lower whole number. For example, 68.50 rounded to the nearest whole number is 69 while 68.49 rounded to the nearest whole number is 68.) Check the gridding of the scores to make sure that the circles darkened in the grid have the same numbers as the digits recorded in the corresponding boxes.

REGENTS COMPETENCY TEST IN WRITING – RATING SHEET

Date of Test _____

Check one:

Part I: **Letter** _____ **Rater's Name** _____

Part II: **Report** _____ **School** _____

Part III: **Composition** _____ **Date** _____

Student's Name	Percentage Score	
	Male	Female

APPENDIX C

Use of Communications Devices

At the beginning of each test administration, proctors must read the following statement to all students taking secondary-level State examinations:

You may **not** use any communications device while taking a State examination, either in the room where the test is being administered or while on a supervised break (such as a restroom visit). Such devices include, but are not limited to, cellular telephones, pagers, CD and audiocassette players, radios, MP3 players, Personal Digital Assistants, video devices, and associated headphones, headsets, microphones, or earplugs.

If your cell phone rings or vibrates, you may not look at or answer it. You may not send, receive, or look at text messages. If your pager beeps or vibrates, you may not look at it. You must therefore turn these and other such devices **OFF right now and secure them underneath your desk** [or in the location specified by the principal]. You must not turn such devices back on until you have completed your examination, handed it in, and left the examination room. Your examination will be invalidated and no score will be calculated for you if you use any such device or related communications technology for any reason under any circumstances, or if you wear headphones while in the testing room.

For Principals and Proctors:

Any student observed to be using any communications device while taking a State examination must be directed to turn it off and put the device away immediately. In order to allow for all possible outcomes of procedural due process, the student should be allowed to complete the examination.

The incident must be reported promptly to the school principal. If the principal determines that the student was using a communications device during the test administration, the student's test must be invalidated; no score may be calculated for that student.

The incident must be reported in writing to the Office of State Assessment, as is the case for all testing irregularities, misadministrations, or other violations of State testing policy and procedures.

Note: Some students with disabilities may use certain recording/playback devices **ONLY IF** this accommodation is specifically required as a provision of the student's Individualized Education Program or Section 504 Accommodation Plan. If not, the general policy on communications devices as provided above is in effect, and the school may not allow the use of any such equipment.