

Overview:

Freshman Writing and Caltech's Online Writing Assessment for Freshmen & Transfers (WAFT)

Freshman Writing at Caltech

Writing is a critical ability. Your Caltech education in writing begins with two required freshman humanities courses (literature, philosophy, or history) that include a substantial amount of composition. To determine whether a student might need a preliminary writing class (En1a, En1b, EN2, or another suitable composition class) before enrolling in a freshman humanities course we ask students to compose an argumentative essay for evaluation.

How does the writing assessment (WAFT) work?

If you are new to Caltech in fall 2002, we would like you to participate in a writing assessment on line, in June 2002. You will write an argumentative essay over a three-day period on an assigned topic. The writing assignment will be posted on Friday June 7, and the essay will be due on Monday June 10. On Tuesday, June 4, you can download a reading on which the writing assignment is based.

The online process is designed to help you produce a suitable sample of your writing, with the writing process and composing tools that you normally use. You will have several days to read and think about a topic, followed by several days for planning, drafting, and revising an essay. After submission, the essays are evaluated by writing and humanities instructors (not by machines). **WAFT** is not a test. It does not, in any way, affect your admission status or financial aid, and it is not part of your permanent academic record.

We recognize that circumstances or scheduling conflicts may prevent a small number of students from doing so. Any students unable to participate in the June **WAFT** must take an impromptu makeup writing assessment during orientation week (no advance registration is required for the makeup assessment).

Information for students whose primary language is not English

All new students, including students whose primary language is not English, must take the writing assessment. When you register for the **WAFT**, you will be asked if English is your first language, and if not, whether you speak and write English as fluently as you speak and write your first language.

When essays are evaluated, those that show second-language difficulties will be reviewed by instructors with expertise in English as a Second Language (ESL). They will recommend an appropriate expository writing class or a writing class specifically designed for bilingual students.

Requirements for participation (student status & skills, hardware & software)

Student status & skills

You must

- be an undergraduate entering Caltech this fall, and
- know how to
 - use a web browser,
 - write an essay using word-processing software,
 - save an essay as “Text Only” or plain text, and
 - copy the “Text Only” or plain text that you produce with your word-processor and paste it into an online form.

Hardware & software

You will need access to a computer (PC or Macintosh) with

- internet access (via modem, cable modem, ADSL, etc.),
- word processing software (e.g., Microsoft Word, Word Perfect, etc.),
- an email account that you can access from the time you register until two days after you submit your essay, and
- a web browser (e.g., **Netscape™** 3.1 or higher, **Microsoft™ Internet Explorer** 3.0 or higher)

Checking the version number of your browser:

Netscape™

From the Menu bar at the top of your browser, Click 'Help' -> “About Netscape” or “About Communicator”

Microsoft™Internet Explorer

From the Menu bar at the top of your browser window, Click “Help” —> “About Internet Explorer”

The “About” page will show the version of your browser.

You can download a recent version of Netscape by following this link:

<http://home.netscape.com/computing/download/index.html?cp=hophb2>

You can download a recent version of Internet Explorer by following this link:

<http://www.microsoft.com/windows/ie/downloads/default.asp>

NOTE: downloading a browser may take several hours, depending on the speed of your modem and Internet connection.

Procedures: Registration, Schedule, Detailed instructions

Please print this entire page before you start to register

Registration

You must register for the **WAFT** in advance, on line, at <https://caltech.imoat.net/stdnt/StudentLogin.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2fstdnt%2fStudentHome.aspx>

The registration period ends on Monday June 3 at 5 p.m., PDT. Please visit this site before the deadline, to ensure that your browser is compatible with the **WAFT**.

Schedule

Here is a schedule for the **WAFT**, followed by a description of each event. All times are Pacific Daylight Time (PDT)

Event	Date
1. Registration deadline	Monday, June 3, 5 p.m. PDT
2. Reading posted on Web (WAFT begins)	Tuesday, June 4, 9 a.m. PDT
Writing assignment posted on web (students can begin writing the essay)	Friday June 7 at 9 a.m. PDT
Deadline for returning essays via Web (WAFT ends)	Monday June 10 at 9 a.m. PDT

Detailed instructions & guidelines1. **Register for the WAFT**

Before Monday, June 3, at 5 p.m. PDT, you should **register** on line for the WAFT and receive a username and password that you will use later to access the reading and the writing assignment. Go to:

<https://caltech.imoat.net/stdnt/StudentLogin.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2fstdnt%2fStudentHome.aspx>

- Login by entering your Caltech ID number in both the “Login” and “Password” boxes.
- Change your password when prompted. Write down your new password and keep it in a safe place. Your username will remain as your Caltech ID number.
- Enter an email address.

- Under “Edit Biographical Information,” enter a telephone number at which you can be reached during the exam period.

2. ***Download the reading***

On **Tuesday, June 4, at 9 a.m. PDT** the reading will be posted.

Log on to WAFT to download and print the reading. You will have three days to consider this reading before you access a writing assignment about it. We encourage you to use whatever active reading techniques you normally use to enhance your understanding (e.g., underline, jot notes in margins, highlight phrases, etc.). No additional research is expected or necessary. Do not discuss the reading with other people.

3. ***Download the writing assignment and begin writing***

On **Friday, June 7, at 9 a.m. PDT**, the writing assignment will be posted.

Log on to WAFT to download the writing assignment. Print the assignment and begin writing. We suggest that you take about 3-4 hours to compose the essay, using the flexible three-day time period in which to write. (See **Guidelines for Writing Process**)

NOTE: You should NOT discuss the reading or the assignment or your writing with anyone. You will be asked to verify that you received no help and did not consult any outside sources while writing your essay.

4. ***Submit your essay on line***

By **Monday, June 10, at 9 a.m. PDT**, the essay is due.

Log on to **WAFT** to submit your writing. Insert a copy of your essay into a WAFT online form by cutting and pasting the text from your word processor (in “Text Only” or plain text format).

NOTE: Be sure that you know how to copy, cut, and paste text **BEFORE** you do the **WAFT**.

Guidelines & restrictions

1. Do not discuss the reading, writing assignment, or your essay with anyone.
2. You are strongly discouraged from consulting any outside sources except the reading(s) that you download from this site. Use your time planning, writing, and revising rather than further researching the topic. The assignment is designed so that you can write a substantial and appropriate essay without any additional resources. (If you do consult any outside printed or online sources, you must acknowledge in your essay each time you use an outside source of information. In addition, you must either paraphrase the information in your own words or enclose the language of the outside source in quotation marks. You may use any standard reference style for acknowledging sources.)
3. Plan to spend about three to four hours to produce your writing essay. Give yourself time to plan the essay, to write it, to revise it for content and style, and to edit it for grammar, spelling, and mechanics.
4. Read the question carefully and review the readings. Identify what the question is asking you to do. Failure to address the question specifically will result in a significantly lower score.
5. Your finished essay should contain between 500 and 1200 words. Long essays do not necessarily receive higher scores than short ones. Be concise, but write enough to answer the question fully, with appropriate evidence, examples, and details.
6. Use ordinary words that accurately express your meaning. Sometimes you may need to use rare or fairly technical terms, but you should do so only when those words are necessary.
7. We encourage you to compose your essay on a computer. You may use a dictionary, spell-checker, and writing handbook, but these tools should not substitute for your own careful reviewing and proofreading. You may also consult a thesaurus and grammar-checker, but we discourage their use, because a thesaurus may lead you to substitute synonyms inappropriately and grammar-checkers are often unreliable.
8. Because you will be submitting your essay in “Text Only” or plain text format, do not use **bold** or *italic* fonts, special characters, or underlining. Indicate underlining or *italics* by enclosing the words in a pair of double asterisks (e.g., ****Brave New World,**** by Aldous Huxley).

Honor code

Once you access the readings for the essay you should not discuss the subject matter with anyone. Furthermore, you may not receive any assistance from anyone in planning, writing, revising, or editing your essay. When you submit your essay you will be required to key in the following statement:

I hereby affirm that I did not discuss the reading or question for this essay with anyone. Furthermore, I affirm that no person helped me in planning, writing, revising, or editing this essay. I also affirm that, if I consulted any outside materials after looking at the reading or essay topic, I have cited the source of each external item of information or opinion.

WAFT participants are bound by the Caltech honor code, which enjoins any member of the Caltech community from taking unfair advantage of another. Plagiarism and unauthorized consultation on your essay are breaches of the honor code.

Suggestions for writing an effective essay

As you write the essay, consider your audience, your purpose, and the criteria that will be used in evaluating your essay:

- Imagine the audience to be an informed, intelligent reader at the college level, who is not an expert in the topic of your paper.
- Your purpose will be to write a thoughtful, interesting, and well-reasoned essay that would persuade a reader to respect (if not adopt) your point of view and conclusions.
- Evaluation will be based on these factors:
 - **Focus**
Your essay should be developed around a clear central thesis or argument, integrating your own views with material from the reading provided. (Note that any use of outside sources of information, printed or online, could potentially undermine the essay by shifting its focus. We strongly discourage use of outside sources, except, perhaps, to passing references to works you already have read.)
 - **Structure**
Your essay should be clearly organized in a way that elaborates on and supports your central thesis. Individual paragraphs should be cohesive, and your reader should be able to follow the smooth and logical progression of your ideas from one paragraph to the next.
 - **Evidence/Analysis**
You should support your claims with well-chosen details, examples, and logical conclusions from the reading, your experience, and knowledge of the topic. Explain how these details, examples, and conclusions support your points. Summarize, paraphrase, or briefly quote from the text, as you deem appropriate.
 - **Style**
Your word choices and sentence structures should enhance the clarity and argumentative effectiveness of your essay. Essays using ordinary, unpretentious language will receive higher scores than verbose or lofty essays. Your writing should also adhere to the standard contemporary conventions for grammar, spelling, and usage.