Tips for Passing the WEPT

Before the Test
Assess your weaknesses. Focus on and remedy what you need to work on. For example, if you write fragments, learn to correct them. If you have spelling difficulty, learn to use your dictionary.

Prepare your dictionary: inside the covers, write down words or word forms you often misspell or misuse, noting proper usages (your, you’re; affect, effect; accept, except; etc.).

Do what you need to do to be prepared for the stress of the exam: exercise, eat appropriately before the exam, get good rest, don’t drink too much caffeine.

Study the WEPT Book (found online by typing “the WEPT book” in the SSU search field) to learn the basic purposes, format, and evaluation criteria for the exam.

If you have taken the exam before and not passed, contact the WEPT office and schedule an appointment to discuss your previous exam with a WEPT advisor.

At the Test
Most important: read the prompt carefully. All prompts contain up to four elements:

- A context. You might be asked to write a speech, an article for a local newspaper, a letter to the University president, or any one of several other possibilities. As in “real” writing, the context includes an audience and an occasion. Take the context seriously, writing as well as you can for that context.
- A task. This portion will articulate the kind of writing you should do: description, explanation, argument, definition, agreement or disagreement, discussion, etc. This is the most important part of the prompt.
- Hints at possible things you might discuss. The prompt may suggest a few specific lines of approach or specific elements around which to build your essay. These are suggestions only, meant to guide your thinking and developing.
- Thought-provoking questions. Sometimes the prompts conclude with questions meant to spur your thinking. You do not have to answer all (or any) of the questions—they are offered only as good ones to keep in mind as you develop your response. Stay focused on the basic task.

Remember that the evaluators want to see your brilliance and creativity. Definitely work within the dictates of the context and task, but do make the essay your own, showcasing your own intelligence. Do this in several ways:

- Of course use personal experience or observation, drawing from your life in school, work, home, travel, classes, clubs, childhood, community, family, hobbies, etc.
• Of course use the word “I.”
• Organize the essay logically as your own essay “wants” to be organized; avoid “prepackaged” formulae like the five-paragraph essay.
• Approach the task honestly; there is no “right” answer.
• Use a “natural” educated style, closer to your conversational style or informal writing style than you might think. If a sentence you’ve written seems forced, awkward, or unlike anything anybody might actually say or write, it’s probably a good one to revise. Don’t use “big” words just for the sake of being impressive.
• It’s always OK to provide a “safe” response. But think about impressing your readers by articulating the unexpected, the idiosyncratic, the counterintuitive view, as long as you can support it well. Academics value thoughtful challenges to “accepted” wisdom. Indeed, a common pattern in academic essays is the challenging pattern: “While we typically believe X, my experience (or a close reading or new experiments or deeper thinking) suggests that Y is actually true.”

Definitely plan before you begin writing your actual response. Take ten minutes at least (but no more than fifteen or twenty) to jot down ideas, brainstorm, draw a cluster diagram, make an outline, write down key words, etc.—whatever works for you. You can use the inside cover of the exam booklet for this purpose.

Also before you begin writing, articulate a thesis, a controlling idea or argument which will give shape to your essay. You do need to show the evaluators that you can write an essay which has a point. Use the prompt as you articulate your thesis: the basic elements of the thesis can be found in the task.

Begin, develop, end. While “prepackaged” models like the five-paragraph essay definitely don’t showcase your creativity and brilliance, neither will an essay which has no shape whatsoever.

Remember your thesis as you write, referring to it as appropriate, building transitions between sections that maintain the focus on the thesis, and reasserting the thesis in the conclusion.

If you run out of time, jot down a brief outline of what you would have written if you had more time.

Answer the question fully, richly, and completely. While there is no length requirement on the WEPT, students do fail on account of insufficient development. Longer essays do typically succeed better than shorter ones.

Write as legibly as you can.

Breathe.

Finally, do try to save time to edit and proofread carefully. Reread your essay slowly, focusing on each word as you do so.

After the Test
The test results will be mailed to you in 4-6 weeks after the date you take the test. If you do not pass, call the WEPT office at 664-2058 and ask to discuss your essay with a WEPT advisor.