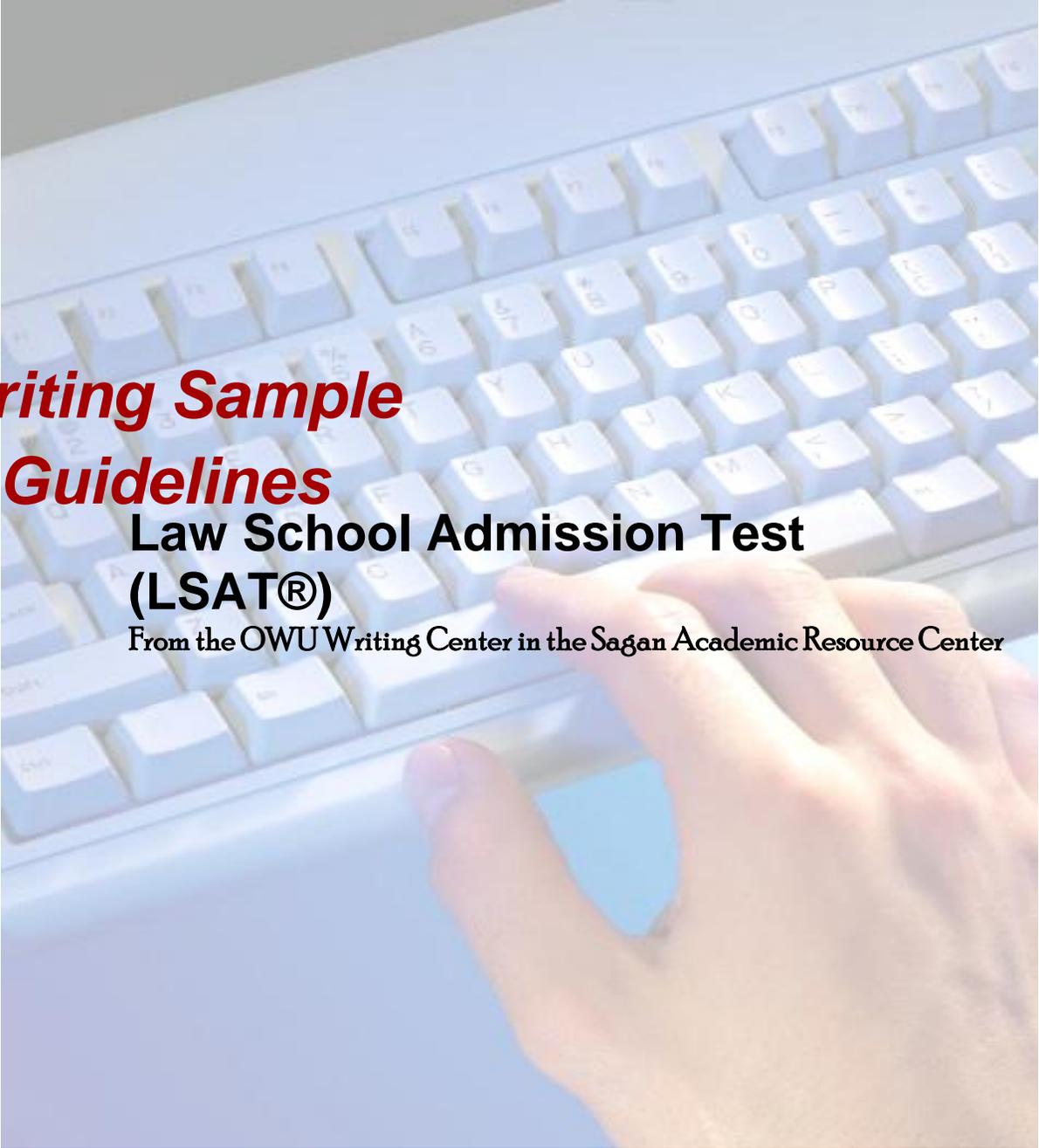


Ohio
Wesleyan
University

Writing Center



Writing Sample

Guidelines

**Law School Admission Test
(LSAT®)**

From the OWU Writing Center in the Sagan Academic Resource Center

The Writing Center

Location: Corns 316

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Law School Admission Test (LSAT®) Writing Sample Guidelines

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Law School Admission Test (LSAT®) Writing Sample Guidelines

Essay at a Glance

The LSAT writing sample is a 35-minute timed essay that asks you to present a well-supported position and demonstrate good reasoning, clarity, organization, language usage, and writing mechanics skills.

How important is the LSAT writing sample?

Although it is not scored, each law school determines how it will use the writing sample, so check with schools you are applying to find out how they use the sample. The Law School Admission Council (LSAC) reports that a 2006 LSAC survey of 157 United States and Canadian law schools showed that almost all law schools use the writing sample as part of their evaluation of applications. In fact, according to LSAC, frivolous or blank responses have resulted in applicants being rejected. The writing sample also serves as a check on other writing submitted as part of the admission process to ensure an honest picture of your own writing skills (LSAC, “The Writing Sample,” <http://www.lsat.org/pdfs/writingsamplepages.pdf>).

How is the LSAT writing sample scored?

The LSAT writing sample is not graded, but is photocopied and sent to law schools with your LSAT score.

Description of Essay Prompts

The essay prompt presents a hypothetical situation, two potential actions, and criteria for deciding which action to take. You choose which action you think is better and support that decision with clear reasons. Both choices are defensible; you are given criteria and facts on which to base your decision. There is no right or wrong answer, and the subject is not controversial. The quality of the response depends on how effectively you argue for your choice and critique the other.

Organization

Space is very limited, so your response should be concise and clear. The number of paragraphs is not as important as the clarity and logic of the response, but a simple, three-part strategy can guide the organization of your analysis:

First Paragraph:

State your choice of action and present the main reasons for your choice.

Second paragraph:

Explain the main problems with the other choice.

Last paragraph:

Restate your choice and the strongest reason for it.

Style Guide/Writing Suggestions

In addition to following the general rules of composition, you should consider a few factors related to this particular writing task:

- **Be aware of time limits.** You have 35 minutes to read the topic, decide what you want to say, plan the response, write it, and proofread it.
- **Be brief.** Most people can fit about 250-300 words in the space provided.
- **Remember that each case presented has strengths and weaknesses.** Neither side is “right” or “correct.” Support your choice and critique the other with clear reasons.
- **State your choice clearly and provide your main reasons for your choice right away:** Example: “The mall location would better meet the shop owner's objectives because it offers high consumer traffic volume, lower leasing costs, and a stronger retail position within a weaker economy.” OR, state the choice and then write a separate sentence for each reason.
- **Learn the directions ahead of time.** The directions never change, so learn them before you go into the test to save reading time.

Sample Essays

Following are examples of successful essays plus prompts and explanations of scores.

[The sample responses below are from the “LSAT Writing Sample--Practice Test” from *Peterson’s Countdown to the LSAT* Website at http://www.west.net/~stewart/lsat/ql_write.htm]

Directions: The scenario presented below describes two choices, either one of which can be supported on the basis of the information given. Your essay should consider both choices and argue for one over the other, based on the two specified criteria and the facts provided. There is no “right” or “wrong” choice: a reasonable argument can be made for either.

Prompt: *"Cutters," a contemporary hair-care studio for men and women owned and operated by Jim and Joan Baxter, has been operating from the same downtown location for several years. However, the Baxters must move their studio when their lease terminates next month. They are considering two possible locations. Write an argument for one of the two following choices. Two considerations should influence your decision:*

- *The Baxters wish to minimize the time and expense involved in starting up business in a new location.*
- *The Baxters seek maximum potential for business growth and for return on their financial investment.*

The Baxters are considering a location on Frye Street where a contemporary-style men's hair salon has recently failed. The Frye Street storefront is only a few blocks away from the Baxters' present location. Although the space would be just large enough to support the Baxters' current operation, they could expand to an adjacent retail space in the same building. While the Baxters' present location is on a busy thoroughfare, Frye Street is a quiet side-street lined with quaint older houses and a few neighborhood stores. Most Frye Street residents are either senior citizens or young couples in their twenties.

- *The Baxters are also considering a location in the new Fashion Place suburban mall, located about three miles from their present location. The space, which is positioned next*

to one of the mall's department stores, is large enough for the Baxters' current as well as potential future needs. The monthly rent is approximately twice that of the Frye Street location. Although parking at the mall is ample, no public transportation is available between the mall and the downtown area.

Sample Response 1 (in favor of the Frye Street location):

The Frye Street location is the better choice for the Baxters. The time and cost of renovating the Frye shop would be minimal, since the store is already set up to accommodate a hair studio. Its close proximity would minimize the time and expense of moving as well as providing for uninterrupted business from current clients. A continued stream of business and a low initial rent would ensure short-term survival as well as making it financially feasible to expand to the adjacent space, thereby achieving long-term growth. Although the prior salon failure on Frye Street might suggest poor growth potential, that failure may have been due to other factors—such as mismanagement or a narrow male-only client base.

The mall space's high-traffic location might seem to provide more long-term profit potential. However, the Baxters may face greater competition in the suburbs from franchise salons. More importantly, the Baxters' primary concern should be with short-term survival, since otherwise they cannot achieve their longer-term profit goals. The additional expense of equipping a new retail space, along with a high initial rent, may jeopardize that survival, especially since it may take considerable time to develop a new clientele.

In sum, Frye is the better location; it would allow for a fast and inexpensive start-up and an uninterrupted flow of business, in turn ensuring both short-term survival and long-term success.

Sample Response 2 (in favor of the Fashion Place Mall location):

The mall location would better meet the Baxters' objectives. The strategic high-traffic position next to a department store offers greater opportunity for long-term growth and profit. While the initial expense to equip the new space might be substantial, renovations at Frye Street to convert that space from a men-only salon may be just as costly and time-consuming. Even if not, the Baxters' primary concern should be with long-term investment return, as additional start-up costs will prove insignificant over time.

Admittedly, the relatively close and quiet Frye Street location might help the Baxters retain current customers, thereby offsetting moving expenses. However, failure of the previous hair studio suggests an insufficient demand among nearby elderly residents for a contemporary hair studio. This factor, along with the location's low visibility, is likely to prevent growth. Although low rent would appear to help the Baxters to meet their objectives, any expansion at Frye would come at greater expense, thereby undermining long-term profit goals; the mall location allows for expansion without additional rent.

In the final analysis, the mall is the better choice; while the relative start-up costs are uncertain, the mall location is more certain to achieve the Baxters' overriding objectives of long-term growth and profit.

Score Explanation for Essay Responses

The following features make both responses effective:

- The first paragraph states the writer’s choice clearly and directly and presents the writer’s reasons for the choice
- The second section acknowledges the potential of the other choice, but quickly focuses on its weaknesses
- The third paragraph clearly restates the writer’s choice and reiterates the strongest reason for it
- Details illustrate and support the writer’s analyses
- Transition signals indicate the three main shifts in the argument (“however,” “in sum,” “admittedly,” “in the final analysis”)
- The writer demonstrates effective language use, expression, and command of standard syntax and diction; few to no errors
- The response is clear, concise and well-argued

Practice Prompts

Below are some topics for you to write about for practice. At first, try writing without time limits. Follow the organization patterns and suggestions above. After you have written an untimed response or two, try writing within the time limits imposed by the test.

For feedback and suggestions for improvement, schedule a meeting with a Writing Center Instructor. You can also evaluate your own essays by comparing them with the successful essays and evaluations above.

[The following prompts are from LSAC’s “The Writing Sample” <http://www.lsac.org/pdfs/writingsamplepages.pdf> .]

Directions: The scenario presented below describes two choices, either one of which can be supported on the basis of the information given. Your essay should consider both choices and argue for one over the other, based on the two specified criteria and the facts provided. There is no “right” or “wrong” choice: a reasonable argument can be made for either.

Denyse Barnes, a young country music singer who has just released her debut CD, is planning a concert tour to promote it. Her agent has presented her with two options: she can tour as the opening act for Downhome, a famous country band that is mounting a national tour this year, or she can be the solo act in a tour in her home region. Using the facts below, write an essay in which you argue for one option over the other based on the following two criteria:

- *Barnes wants to build a large and loyal fan base.*
- *Barnes wants to begin writing new songs for her next CD.*

Downhome is scheduled to perform in over 100 far-flung cities in 8 months, playing in large arenas, including sports stadiums. This ambitious schedule would take Barnes far away from her home recording studio, where she prefers to compose. Downhome’s last concert tour was sold out, and the band’s latest release is a top seller. Many concertgoers at large arenas skip the opening act. But it is possible that Barnes would be invited by Downhome to play a song or two with them.

The solo tour in her home region would book Barnes in 30 cities over a 4-month period, including community theaters and country-and-blues music clubs, a few of which have reputations for launching new talent. These venues have loyal patrons; most shows are inexpensive and are well-attended, even for new talent. Barnes would have a promotion budget for her solo tour, but it would be far smaller than that for Downhome's tour.

Directions: The scenario presented below describes two choices, either one of which can be supported on the basis of the information given. Your essay should consider both choices and argue for one over the other, based on the two specified criteria and the facts provided. There is no “right” or “wrong” choice: a reasonable argument can be made for either.

The City of Ridleyville must decide whether a decommissioned military base now owned by Ridleyville and located on its downtown riverfront should be developed as a business complex or converted to park and open space. Using the facts below, write an essay in which you argue for one option over the other based on the following two criteria:

- *Ridleyville wants to address a growing budget deficit.*
- *Ridleyville wants to increase the amount of parkland and open space in the city, especially in the downtown riverfront area.*

Ridleyville is considering selling the property for development as a business complex. Through tax incentives, the city could potentially preserve a small portion of the property as open space. The business complex would generate substantial tax revenue from the new businesses that would locate there. Before it realizes any of these revenues, Ridleyville would need to pay for a variety of costly infrastructure improvements, and these revenues would be partly offset by ongoing costs for increased municipal services. The city would likely incur greater environmental cleanup costs converting the base to a business complex than converting it to a park.

Ridleyville has no parks on its extensive river frontage, which is otherwise developed, and no parks in its downtown area. Several corporate sponsors are willing to underwrite the cost of converting the property into parkland. These corporations are also willing to contribute towards ongoing operating costs. The park could host revenue-generating events like concerts and the popular “Taste of Ridleyville,” an annual food festival. Fees could be charged for boat launching. These combined revenues could enable the park to pay for itself.

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