

WriteToLearn Product Information

What is WriteToLearn?

WriteToLearn is an online tool for building writing skills and developing reading comprehension. With WriteToLearn, students practice essay writing and summarization skills, and their efforts are measured by a scoring engine that evaluates the meaning of text, not just grammatical correctness or spelling. Students receive immediate, specific feedback on their work, and teachers can easily assess student efforts individually or as a class.

For which grade levels is WriteToLearn appropriate?

WriteToLearn includes writing and reading comprehension activities that are appropriate for students in grades 4-12.

What are the benefits to using WriteToLearn?

The main benefit of WriteToLearn is that it gives students the opportunity to practice their writing with informative feedback. Additionally, WriteToLearn is time efficient, allowing teachers to assign many more writing and reading comprehension assignments to students without adding additional grading time. WriteToLearn also helps teachers focus instruction by observing students and by using the teacher reports in order to discover individual and class strengths and weaknesses.

How does WriteToLearn meet the individual needs of students?

Flexibility within WriteToLearn allows teachers the ability to adjust scoring thresholds to meet the learning goals of their classes and to choose grade appropriate prompts and reading selections.

WriteToLearn also provides text-to-speech capabilities with added dictionary and spot word translation so students can have hundreds of reading passages read aloud.

How many reading passages are available within WriteToLearn?

What topics or subject areas are covered?

WriteToLearn includes over 500 reading passages. These reading passages cover subject areas ranging from language arts to history to science and social studies. Selected reading passages are from Prentice Hall's Science Explorer and World Studies textbooks.

Are students required to type their responses directly into WriteToLearn?

Students may type their responses into WriteToLearn if they choose; however, many students choose to compose their responses in a word-processing program and then copy and paste them into the WriteToLearn interface.

Where can I view a demonstration of WriteToLearn?

To view a free demonstration of WriteToLearn, go to www.writetolearn.net.

How Does WriteToLearn Work?

How does WriteToLearn work?

WriteToLearn contains a reading comprehension component and an essay component. Both components use the Knowledge Analysis Technologies (KAT) engine. The KAT engine provides a sophisticated computer analysis of text.

The reading comprehension component assesses the total content of a summary as well as the correlation between the summary content and that of the original reading passage. It compares the student's entire summary to each section of the assigned reading and returns feedback indicating how well the information in each section has been conveyed by the student's summary.

The essay component assesses the total content of the essay as well as the correlation between the essay's content and that of training essays previously scored by expert human readers. The essay component assigns a score to each essay based in part on the similarity of the content of the essay to that of the training essay.

What is the KAT engine?

The KAT engine evaluates the meaning of text by examining whole passages. The KAT engine is based on Pearson's unique implementation of Latent Semantic Analysis (LSA), an approach that infers semantic similarity of words and passages by analyzing large bodies of relevant text. LSA can then understand the meaning of text in much the same ways as a human reader.

How long does it take WriteToLearn to score a response?

Most responses are scored within a few seconds. A slow or busy internet connection may delay scoring.

What is the reading comprehension component of WriteToLearn?

Students summarize reading passages in their own words and the reading comprehension component of WriteToLearn automatically compares the student's writing to the reading passage. The reading comprehension component compares the student's writing to each of the sections of the text and provides immediate feedback about the content coverage of the summary on a section-by-section basis. Additional feedback on the more mechanical aspects of writing includes copying from text, spelling, repetition, and inclusion of unimportant information.

What type of feedback do students receive on their summaries?

Students receive feedback on their coverage of each section of the reading. Students also receive feedback on spelling, copying from text, repetition, and inclusion of unimportant information, as well as on the length of their summary. Feedback is displayed in a graphical report.

How does the essay component of WriteToLearn recognize a good essay?

The essay component, using the KAT engine, assesses the content of an essay, as well as more mechanical aspects of writing. When a student submits an essay for scoring, the system immediately measures the meaning of the essay. It then compares the essay to the training essays, looking for similarities and assigns a holistic score in part by placing the essay in a category with the most similar training essays. Analytic scoring occurs in much the same way. For each trait the system assesses that trait in the student essay, compares it to the training essays, and then categorizes the trait in question.

What type of feedback do students receive on their essays?

Students receive a variety of feedback on their essays, including a holistic score and analytic scores on different writing traits. Students also receive feedback on spelling, grammar, and repetition, as well as length of their essays.

How does the essay component scoring compare to the way teachers grade writing?

The essay component's approach mirrors the way that teachers grade essays. For example, when teachers evaluate a student's essay, they look for characteristics that identify an essay as an A or C paper. Their expectations are likely based on their previous experience as a grader and on criteria for the assignment in question. In other words, teachers search for a match between the essay itself and the criteria for a particular grade or score. The essay component is trained to mimic this process.

WriteToLearn Technical Requirements

What are the technical requirements for WriteToLearn?

The minimum system requirements for using WriteToLearn are:

Windows

- Windows XP or newer
- 512 MB RAM (minimum)
- Microsoft Internet Explorer 6.0 or higher, Firefox 3.0 or higher
- JavaScript enabled
- Flash plug-in 9.0 or higher

Macintosh

- OS X 10.4 or newer
- 512 MB RAM (minimum)
- Safari 3.0 or higher, Firefox 3.0 or higher (cookies are required in Safari 4 for the text-to-speech feature)
- JavaScript enabled
- Flash plug-in 9.0 or higher

Monitor Resolution

- 1024 x 768 (minimum)

Bandwidth

- 512 Kb/sec (minimum) if using the text-to-speech feature and 256 Kb/sec (minimum) otherwise

2010-2011 State Writing Assessment

Will all public schools have to administer the state writing assessment during the 2010-2011 school year?

Yes. All public schools will be required to administer the state writing assessment during the 2010-2011 school year.

What grade levels are required to participate in the state writing assessment?

Students in grades 5, 7, & 10 will be required to use the WriteToLearn assessment.

How often does the State require students to be assessed each year using WriteToLearn?

With the program WriteToLearn, students must respond at a minimum to one teacher-selected prompt one time during each of the three separate testing windows. Testing windows will be open in the fall, winter, and spring. Teachers may choose to use the WriteToLearn program more frequently.

Will students need to use WriteToLearn during specific testing windows?

Yes. Students will need to use the WriteToLearn program three times a year, once each during a fall, winter, and spring testing window.

What is the timeline for the state writing assessment?

Testing coordinator and teacher trainings for the state writing assessment will be held in early September. The fall assessment window will be open from October 1 to November 30, 2010. The winter assessment window will be open from December 1, 2010 to February 28, 2011. The spring assessment window will be open from March 1 to May 31, 2011.

How is WriteToLearn different from the previous state writing assessment?

The previous state writing assessment consisted of a yearly summative assessment administered in February of each school year. Students in grades 5, 7, & 10 were allowed approximately 50 minutes to craft a rough-draft response. Students were scored on a four-point scale with one being the lowest and four being the highest. Teachers received feedback on student scores in late April or early May.

With the WriteToLearn program, students will be required to respond to a teacher-selected prompt three times a year (fall, winter, and spring), providing for formative assessment of student writing. Students will not be timed while crafting their responses and they will be provided with almost instant feedback after they submit their response. Students will have the opportunity to revise their responses.

How is WriteToLearn similar to the previous state writing assessment?

Similar to the old writing assessment, students in grades 5, 7, & 10 will participate. Additionally, students will be receive feedback on the same six writing traits, including ideas, organization, conventions, sentence fluency, word choice, and voice.

How will students be evaluated?

Students will be evaluated by participation only. The State will not collect individual student scores, nor will the State compare school scores. The State will only monitor compliance through student participation. If a student responds to an essay prompt once during each of the testing windows, state requirements have been met.

When will teachers have to administer the state writing assessment?

Teachers have the flexibility to decide when they will administer the state writing during each of the three separate assessment windows.

How will parents be notified of student scores?

At the school district's discretion, student performance within the WriteToLearn program can be reported to parents through the variety of reporting tools within the program. Since the State will not be collecting students' scores, additional parent reports will not be provided by the Department of Education.

Classroom Questions

How can WriteToLearn assist teachers with classroom instruction?

Teacher tools within WriteToLearn allow teachers to access student reports. These reports allow teachers to view a class's performance and progress on a single screen and to drill down to individual student results or see entire student portfolio. In addition to this student data, teachers are provided with curriculum guides that supplement the program.

How will elementary school students' typing abilities affect their participation in the state writing assessment?

Students' use of WriteToLearn should not be affected by their typing abilities. South Dakota Educational Technology Standards (5.CT.1.2) for 5th graders indicate "5th graders will key 15 words per minute using touch typing techniques from hard copy or typing program." Since the WriteToLearn program is not timed, elementary school students should be able to key in responses to prompts at their own pace.

Will students be timed while participating in the state writing assessment?

No. Students will not be timed while using the WriteToLearn program.

Are students able to revise their responses for the state writing assessment?

Yes. Students are able to revise their responses in the WriteToLearn program. Teachers are responsible for determining the number of attempts students may have to revise their responses to a specific prompt.

What writing traits are scored by the WriteToLearn program?

WriteToLearn scores student responses on each of the six traits of writing, including ideas, organization, conventions, sentence fluency, word choice, and voice.

How does WriteToLearn allow students to participate in the writing process?

At the teacher's discretion, students still have the ability to organize their thoughts with various instructional tools, such as graphic organizers. Some teachers may decide to have students enter their initial responses into the WriteToLearn program only after organizing their thoughts on paper. After students' first responses are scored, students still have the opportunity to learn about and make appropriate revisions.

Is spelling scored within WriteToLearn? How is that score affected by a spell checker?

It is the responsibility of each classroom teacher to determine if students will be allowed to use a spell-checker in a word-processing program in order to copy/paste into WriteToLearn. The WriteToLearn program does score spelling, but also provides a spell-checker for students to use during the revision process. Teachers do have the ability to turn this feature on and off within the program.

Many schools have busy computer labs, and it is difficult to schedule class time to use the lab. How can schools with already busy computer labs accommodate even more online testing?

The Department of Education recognizes that scheduling time in a computer lab can be difficult. Consequently, the testing windows for the WriteToLearn program have been expanded in order to allow more time to complete the assessment and increase flexibility in scheduling.

Additionally, since students are not required to complete their responses within a specific amount of time, teachers can schedule longer or shorter computer lab times as necessary.

Is the WriteToLearn program available to schools all year?

Yes. Schools are able to use the WriteToLearn program throughout the school year. Student licenses for the program are available July 1, 2010-June 30, 2011.

What is the cost to school districts to use the WriteToLearn program?

There is no cost to school districts to use the WriteToLearn program for the state writing assessment. The Department of Education will purchase student licenses for all students in grades 5, 7, &10. These students are free to use the program throughout the entire school year.

School districts do have the option to purchase off-grade student licenses at state rate for students in grades, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11, &12. These licenses are priced at \$10 per student, with a 50 license minimum order. Schools interested in purchasing off-grade licenses should contact Pearson directly to purchase these licenses.

What accommodations can be made for ELL or special education students with the state writing assessment?

Since the Department of Education will not be collecting student scores, a wide variety of accommodations can be made for ELL and special education students to ensure participation in the state writing assessment. Such accommodations include, but are not limited to extended time for writing, the use of screen readers, and adjusted scoring thresholds within the WriteToLearn program. More detailed information about accommodations can be found in the Directions for Administration of the state writing assessment.