



GMAT AWA

Analytical Writing Assessment



Outline of AWA

The Analytical Writing Assessment Section of GMAT requires you to analyze the reasoning behind a given argument and write a critique of that argument. Your ability to think critically and to communicate your ideas through an essay in English is measured.

It consists of one 30-minute writing task — Analysis of an Argument. The arguments on the test include topics of general interest related to business, or a variety of other subjects. Specific knowledge of the essay topic is not necessary; only your capacity to write analytically is assessed.





Availability of features on the software

The computer-delivered test will use a basic word processor containing following functionalities:

- Insert text
- Delete text
- Cut-and-paste
- Undo or redo the previous action
- No spell checker or grammar checker



Score Description

The reported score ranges from 0 to 6 in half-point increments

You are assessed on your critical thinking skills:

- ✓ Your response must be insightful with in-depth analysis of complex ideas
- ✓ You must develop and support main points with logically compelling reasons and/or highly persuasive examples.
- ✓ Your response must be well focused and well organized.
- ✓ You must use sentence variety and precise vocabulary to convey meaning effectively.
- ✓ You must demonstrate superior facility with sentence structure and language usage.
- ✓ You may have minor errors that do not interfere with meaning.

The Argument Task



Introduction

- The "Analyze an Argument" task assesses your ability to **understand, analyze and evaluate arguments** according to specific instructions and to convey your evaluation clearly in your writing.
- Each topic consists of a brief passage in which **the author makes a case** for some course of action or interpretation of events **by presenting claims backed by reasons and evidence**.
- Your task is to discuss the **logical soundness of the author's case** by critically examining the line of reasoning and the use of evidence.

Pay special attention to:

- what is offered as evidence, support or proof
- what is explicitly stated, claimed or concluded
- what is assumed or supposed, perhaps without justification or proof
- what is not stated, but necessarily follows from or underlies what is stated

Introduction

In addition, you should consider the **structure of the argument** — the way in which these elements are linked together to form a line of reasoning – and consider whether the movement from each step to the next is logically sound.

Look for **transition words and phrases** that suggest the author is attempting to make a logical connection (e.g., however, thus, therefore, evidently, hence, in conclusion).

Remembering what you are **NOT** being asked to do:

- You are not being asked to discuss whether the statements in the argument are true or accurate.
- You are not being asked to agree or disagree with the position stated.
- You are not being asked to express your own views on the subject being discussed

Introduction

Use **well-developed illustrations and examples**. Don't simply list examples. These can be both real-life scenarios as well as hypothetical situations. Develop your thoughts. Use your erasable note-board to organize your thoughts.

Make your response read like a logical discussion and not a sermon. Your essay response should be coherent, with **full sentences, logical transitions,** and appropriately introduced and developed examples.

AWA essays are scored by a combination of trained and approved **human raters and a machine algorithm**. If there is a disparity between the algorithm score and the human score, the score will be reviewed by an additional human rater, and it may be adjusted.

Instructions

Every AWA argument in GMAT is followed by this paragraph:

Discuss how well reasoned you find this argument. In your discussion be sure to analyze the line of reasoning and the use of evidence in the argument.

For example, you may need to consider what questionable assumptions underlie the thinking and what alternative explanations / counterexamples might weaken the conclusion.

You can also discuss what sort of evidence would strengthen or refute the argument, what changes in the argument would make it more logically sound, and what, if anything, would help you better evaluate its conclusion.

STRATEGY

How to plan the argument task? (Planning time: 3-5 minutes)

- ✓ Read the given topic meticulously
- ✓ Find 3 distinct flaws
- ✓ Don't be lured to think of more than 3 flaws due to time constraints



Approach



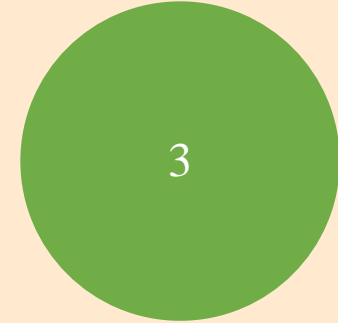
Find a conclusion drawn by the author

- The first reason used by the author to support his conclusion
- The Second reason used by the author to support his conclusion
- The third reason used by the author to support his conclusion



Weaken the reasons given by the author

- Flaw in the first reason used by the author
- Flaw in the second reason used by the author
- Flaw in the third reason used by the author



Suggest some reasons which could have validated the reasons

- In lieu of suggested reasons, weaken the Conclusion drawn by the author

How to find flaws in the argument?



Keyword/ Situation	Example	Flaw in reasoning
<p>Percent (when only the percentage is given and not the absolute number)</p>	<p>-Waiters report that only about 2 percent of the customers have complained, and that customers who want refills typically ask for ‘more tea.’</p> <p>-In a recent citywide poll, 15 percent more residents said that they watch television programs about the visual arts than was the case in a poll conducted five years ago.</p>	<p>Percentages are tricky – when the absolute numbers are not given. Consider this statement – the price of Car A increased by 50% while the price of Car B increased only by 10%. This statement makes it sound as if Car A has become very expensive. But the price of Car A could have increased to \$ 15000 from \$10000 while price of Car B could have become \$22000 from \$20000.</p> <p>Similarly, 2% customers can mean 2 customers if total customers are 100 or it can even mean 2000 if the total customers are 100000 – and the significance of the 2% will be different in each case.</p>

Keyword/ Situation	Example	Flaw in reasoning
<p>After X was done, Y happened/ Since X happened, Y should be done/ Since X happened, Y happened (one of the most common situations that appear in Arguments.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -After opening the new swimming pool early last summer, Take Heart saw a 12 percent increase in the use of the center by its members. -Farmers who switched from synthetic to organic farming last year have seen their crop yields decline. -Since a competing lower-priced newspaper, The Bugle, was started five years ago, The Mercury’s circulation has declined by 10,000 readers. -Since our company started manufacturing and marketing a deluxe air filter six months ago, sales of our economy filter—and company profits—have decreased significantly. 	<p>It is not necessary that Y happened because of X! There can be other reasons for Y happening. There may not be a direct co- relation between X and Y.</p>

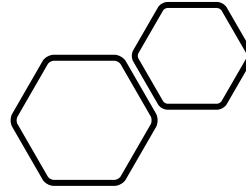
Keyword/Situation	Example	Flaw in reasoning
<p>Most/many/few/a lot , etc. (not concrete data)</p>	<p>In response to petitions from the many farmers and rural landowners throughout our region, the legislature has spent valuable time and effort enacting severe laws to deter motorists from picking fruit off the trees, trampling through the fields, and stealing samples of foliage.</p>	<p>“Many” is what % of total farmers and rural landowners of that region?</p>
<p>Proven method/ surest way/ ensure/ guarantee (without supporting data)</p>	<p>The surest way for architects and builders to prove that they have met the minimum requirements established by these codes is to construct buildings by using the same materials and methods that are currently allowed.</p>	<p>No data to support this claim.</p>

Keyword/ Situation	Example	Flaw in reasoning
Studies reveal..../ research shows....	Studies suggest that an average coffee drinker’s consumption of coffee increases with age, from age 10 through age 60.	Question the authenticity of the studies, research, etc. Was the sample representative? When was it carried out – is it still relevant?
Conclusions drawn without data	We believe that improved customer service is the best way for us to differentiate ourselves from competitors and attract new customers. We can offer our customers better service by reducing waiting time in teller lines from an average of six minutes to an average of three. By opening for business at 8:30 instead of 9:00, and by remaining open for an additional hour beyond our current closing time, we will be better able to accommodate the busy schedules of our customers. These changes will enhance our bank’s image as the most customer- friendly bank in town and give us the edge over our competition.	-No data to support that these are the things that their customers want. -No data to support that their competitors don’t offer these same things.

Keyword/Situation	Example	Flaw in reasoning
<p>People's choices /preference/ intelligence/competence, etc. cannot be treated as permanent/fixed.</p>	<p>On average, middle-aged consumers devote 39 percent of their retail expenditure to department store products and services, while for younger consumers the average is only 25 percent. Since the number of middle-aged people will increase dramatically within the next decade, department stores can expect retail sales to increase significantly during that period. Furthermore, to take advantage of the trend, these stores should begin to replace some of those products intended to attract the younger consumer with products intended to attract the middle-aged consumer.</p>	<p>There is no guarantee that in 10 years' time people's preference will not change.</p>

Keyword/Situation	Example	Flaw in reasoning
Responded to survey/ replied to questionnaire / participated in poll, etc.	Improved communications between employees and management was consistently ranked as the issue of highest importance by the employees who responded to the survey.	Unless there is data about what % of people responded to the survey, this data is inconclusive. If survey was done among 1000 people and only 10 people responded, then no conclusion can be drawn based on the result of that survey.

Keyword/Situation	Example	Flaw in reasoning
Reported / filed complaint / did not complain	Our research indicates that over the past six years no incidents of employee theft have been reported within 10 of the companies that have been our clients.	There are probably thefts that were not reported. We cannot assume that all the thefts were reported.
Wrong comparison (only similar things can be compared)	In color film processing, the cost of a 3-by-5-inch print fell from 50 cents for five-day service in 1970 to 20 cents for one-day service in 1984.	50 cents for 5-day period means 10 cents per day (in 1970), which is less than 20 cents per day (in 1984). So, the price did not fall – it actually increased.
Improper conclusion	People who use the artificial sweetener aspartame are better off consuming sugar, since aspartame can actually contribute to weight gain rather than weight loss.	Some people may use artificial sweeteners for reasons other than weight-loss (diabetes, allergies, etc.) These people will not be “better off” by using sugar.



Exercise 01

Conclusion	
Evidence	
Flaws	

A recent study shows that people living on the continent of North America suffer 9 times more chronic fatigue and 31 times more chronic depression than do people living on the continent of Asia. Interestingly, Asians, on average, eat 20 grams of soy per day, whereas North Americans eat virtually none. It turns out that soy contains phytochemicals called Isoflavones, which have been found to possess disease-preventing properties. Thus, North Americans should consider eating soy on a regular basis as a way of preventing fatigue and depression.

Sample Response for Exercise 1

The author argues that people living in North America suffer from depression and fatigue at higher rates than people living in Asia on the basis of their soy intake. The author's rhetoric presumptuously concludes that increasing soy intake amongst those living in North America will lessen the likelihood of suffering from chronic fatigue and depression without considering any external factors, including the fact that the people suffering from these conditions live on two different continents. The flaw in this argument is that it assumes that the two continents are equal with the exception of their soy intake.

First, the argument readily assumes that those living in North America suffer from chronic fatigue and depression because of their lack of soy intake. The author fails to mention any external factors, such as differences in the continent's labor structures or other issues that are common in North America compared to Asia. The author's argument would be stronger if he posed similar examples of external factors that affect both of the continents.

Sample Response for Exercise 1

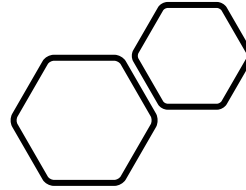
Second, the argument claims that soy contains isoflavones, which possess disease-preventing properties. By increasing isoflavone intake, the severity of fatigue and depression can be greatly reduced. However, by making this claim that isoflavones can reduce chronic issues, the author poses the question of whether or not western medicine is just as, if not more, effective in treating these similar issues.

Additionally, the author assumes that soy is the only food product that contains isoflavones; however, isoflavones can be found in other food products regularly consumed by North Americans, such as legumes and tofu. The author fails to consider all other products that contain the ingredient responsible for lessening chronic symptoms, thus weakening their argument.

Sample Response for Exercise 1

The author's argument would be further substantiated if the author mentioned the impact of medicine coupled with increased intake of isoflavone, as well as other sources of food with isoflavones; however, author's failure of highlighting above mentioned details creates a flawed perspective on the effects of soy consumption.

In conclusion, the argument is unsound for the above-mentioned reasons and is therefore unconvincing. The author's argument would be stronger if they mentioned particular similarities between the two continents, as well as other sources of isoflavones that can reduce the rate of North Americans suffering from chronic fatigue and depression.



Exercise 02

Conclusion	
Evidence	
Flaws	

In order to save a considerable amount of money, Rockingham's century-old town hall should be torn down and replaced by the larger and more energy-efficient building that some citizens have proposed. The old town hall is too small to comfortably accommodate the number of people who are employed by the town. In addition, it is very costly to heat the old hall in winter and cool it in summer. The new, larger building would be more energy efficient, costing less per square foot to heat and cool than the old hall. Furthermore, it would be possible to rent out some of the space in the new building, thereby generating income for the town of Rockingham.

Sample Response for Exercise 2

In the passage, the author argues that the century-old Rockingham's town hall be torn down and a new larger town hall be built in its place and that this will save considerable amount of money for the town. This is based on multiple premises. Firstly, the author argues that heating or cooling per square foot of the new town hall will be considerably cheaper. Secondly, because the new town hall will be much larger, it will be possible to rent out some space in the new town hall to outsiders, thus making more money for the town. However, on deeper analysis, it becomes apparent that there are certain aspects that have not been taken into consideration, leading to a number of questionable assumptions and logical flaws.

One such flaw is that there is no indication of the total cost of heating or cooling the new building. We only know that the cost of cooling or heating per square foot of the new building is less than that of the old town hall. However, as we do not have the comparison between the total sizes of the old town hall and the new building, we cannot assume that the total cost of cooling or heating will also be less. It might be the case, owing to the fact that the new town hall will be considerably bigger in size, the total cost of cooling and heating in fact turns out to be much larger. To strengthen the argument, the author should compare the total size of the old town hall and the new building and the cost of heating or cooling per square foot of both the old town hall and the new building.

Sample Response for Exercise 2

Moreover, the author's argument is incorrectly based on the assumption that money can only be saved by taking into consideration the cost of heating or cooling the town hall. There are multiple other factors which comes in when we find the total cost of running and maintaining a town hall. Some of the other considerations could be having restrooms, vending machines, and running water. As the new town hall would be much larger in size than the old town hall, the costs of these other factors could be much larger for the new town hall. We cannot just base the conclusion that the new town hall will cost less money by comparing only one factor. To overcome this flaw, the argument should mention and take into account the other factors which influence the total cost of running and maintaining a town hall.

The author also wrongly assumes that the town hall would definitely find people who would want to rent parts of the new town hall. This assumption is unfounded because we do not know whether this will be case. It might be the case that town hall does not meet the criteria of local businesses or offices who rent out space. The town hall might not be located where businesses have offices. We are also not sure whether the rent that the town hall could get would be enough to justify building a bigger town hall; it might be that the rents are too low. **Same paragraph continues...**

Sample Response for Exercise 2

To render this argument more valid, the author should demonstrate that, by way of presenting data from a survey, that people or businesses are indeed interested in renting out from the new town hall and that the rents they are prepared to pay are at market rates and that the rents would be enough to justify the extra space.

After closer examination of the passage presented, it becomes apparent that there are several logical flaws. The recommendations in the essay show how the argument may be strengthened and made more logically sound.



Template for an Argument task

**Total Writing Time
(23–25 minutes)**

INTRODUCTION

Restate the argument and point out the flaws. Now, state the outline of the critique, which you will discuss in detail in the next paragraphs.

The argument claims that ...(restate)

Stated in this way, the argument:

- a) manipulates facts and conveys a distorted view of the situation
- b) reveals examples of leap of faith, poor reasoning and ill-defined terminology
- c) fails to mention several key factors, on the basis of which it could be evaluated

The conclusion of the argument relies on assumptions for which there is no clear evidence. Hence, the argument is weak/unconvincing and has several flaws.

BODY / FLAWS

SECOND PARAGRAPH: FIRST FLAW

State your first critique of the argument and support your view with an example.

Firstly/To begin with, the argument readily assumes that... / This statement is a stretch... /For example... / Clearly...

THIRD PARAGRAPH: SECOND FLAW

State your first critique of the argument and support your view with an example.

Secondly/Furthermore, the argument claims that....

This is again a very weak and unsupported claim as the argument does not demonstrate...

To illustrate... / In fact, it is not at all clear...

FOURTH PARAGRAPH: THIRD FLAW

Pose a few questions for the argument. The absence of information in the argument to answer your questions weaken it further.

Finally... Without convincing answers to these questions, one is left with the impression that the claim is more of a wishful thinking rather than substantive evidence.

RECOMMENDATION and CONCLUSION

FIFTH PARAGRAPH: RECOMMENDATION

State information that you feel would strengthen the existing argument but is currently absent.

The argument could have been much clearer if it explicitly stated that...

If the argument had provided evidence that.....then the argument would have been a lot more convincing.

SIXTH PARAGRAPH: CONCLUSION

State that the argument is flawed because of the above reasons and which reasons could have strengthened the argument.

In conclusion, the argument is flawed for the above-mentioned reasons and is therefore unconvincing. It could be considerably strengthened if the author clearly mentioned all the relevant facts....

In order to assess the merits of a certain situation/decision, it is essential to have full knowledge of all contributing factors. In this particular case....

Without this information, the argument remains unsubstantiated and open to debate..

Revise and Refine (2–3 minutes)

- ✓ Look out typos, spelling, or missed words
- ✓ Click on submit button in time, don't wait till the last second.



Writing Assignment

The following appeared as part of an article in a trade magazine: “During a recent trial period in which government inspections at selected meat-processing plants were more frequent, the amount of bacteria in samples of processed chicken decreased by 50 percent on average from the previous year’s level. If the government were to institute more frequent inspections, the incidence of stomach and intestinal infections throughout the country could thus be cut in half. In the meantime, consumers of Excel Meats should be safe from infection because Excel’s main processing plant has shown more improvement in eliminating bacterial contamination than any other plant cited in the government report.”

Discuss how well reasoned you find this argument. In your discussion be sure to analyze the line of reasoning and the use of evidence in the argument. For example, you may need to consider what questionable assumptions underlie the thinking and what alternative explanations or counterexamples might weaken the conclusion. You can also discuss what sort of evidence would strengthen or refute the argument, what changes in the argument would make it more logically sound, and what, if anything, would help you better evaluate its conclusion.



Style of Writing

Style of Writing

- ✓ Write in a formal style.
- ✓ Write as an impersonal writer.
- ✓ You cannot write whether you agree or disagree.
- ✓ You act as a critic who analyses the gaps in the line of reference.
- ✓ The essay should neither be too long nor too short. 450-550 words will be enough.
- ✓ The shift from one paragraph to another should be smooth.
- ✓ Be politically correct: What seems funny to you may be offensive to someone else. Jokes about religion, sports, political figures, and women may come across as tasteless and should be avoided at all costs.
- ✓ Avoid spelling mistakes.
- ✓ If you are not very confident of your writing skills, stick to short and simple sentences.

Rules for Formal Writing

- ✓ **Vocabulary:** You must use the right vocabulary. It need not be complex or flowery. It needs to be lucid and contextually appropriate.
- ✓ **Punctuation:** You must use appropriate punctuation: comma, dashes and hyphens, exclamation marks, full stop, question mark, colon, semi-colon.
- ✓ **Structure:** You must write in sentences. Never write in Bullet points.
- ✓ **Grammar:** Follow the conventions that you learn in Sentence Correction.
- ✓ **The impersonal writer:** It is rare that you would be expected to write in the first person singular (using the word "I"). You should aim to write impersonally.
- ✓ **Passive Voice:** Use passive voice only when the goal is to present a set of arguments in an unbiased way. In most cases, use Active Voice.

Style Conventions

- ✓ Numbers below one hundred are usually written in full.
- ✓ Numbers above one hundred may be presented by digits.
- ✓ Dates are usually given in the conventional combinations of numbered day, named month and numbered year. Punctuation is not required: 11 April 2012.
- ✓ References to centuries are spelt out, without capitals: twentieth century.
- ✓ Decades may be referred to by name or number. The numbered form is not followed by an apostrophe: 1990s.

Style Conventions

- ✓ **Typing and spelling** : All work for submission should be spell-checked and proofread again.
- ✓ **Abbreviations & contractions** : Abbreviations are not used in formal English. They give the impression of a style that is chatty and too informal. "e.g.", "i.e.", "etc.", "can't", "I'm".
- ✓ **Capitals**: proper nouns, names of civic holidays, geographical names, public thoroughfares, important events, trade names, journal titles, the first letter (only) of book titles.
- ✓ Your writing should be **formal and not chatty**. Use appropriate conjunctions and linking words. Instead of "also" or "besides", use "furthermore" or "in addition to". "However" is better than "But".

Tone Conventions

- ✓ **Avoid clichés** : These are overused and thus lack originality. Example: "at the touch of a button" and "at their fingertips".
- ✓ **Avoid "journalese"**: Make sure that you have not written work in an exaggerated or sensational style.
- ✓ **Avoid jargon**: Use the jargon of your subject area with accuracy, and constraint. Take special care with terms that have specialized meanings in your subject area.
- ✓ **Avoid redundancy**: Contains unnecessary words and is considered grammatically wrong. Example: surrounded on all sides, revert back, postpone until later etc.
- ✓ **Avoid filler words**: They pad up a sentence without adding meaning. Example: actually, basically, I mean, you know etc.
- ✓ **Avoid double negatives**: They are grammatically wrong and convey a distorted meaning. Example: nobody had no idea, unless you don't do this etc.

Writing one essay every week right from the beginning of your GMAT preparation is more than enough.

E-mail your essays to your mentors for correction

It usually does not make much difference whether you attempt AWA first or keep it for the end. However, use the approach that has worked for you in the mocks.

