



# Chapter 1

## Understanding the CATW

In order to be successful on the CATW, it is important that you understand what you are being asked to do and how the test is scored. This chapter explains both in depth.

### UNPACKING THE WRITING DIRECTIONS

Below are the writing directions. They are the same for all CATW writing exams.

#### *Writing Directions*

Read the passage above and write an essay responding to the ideas it presents. In your essay, be sure to summarize the passage in your own words, stating the author's most important ideas. Develop your essay by identifying one idea in the passage that you feel is especially significant, and explain its significance. Support your claims with evidence or examples drawn from what you have read, learned in school, and/or personally experienced.

Remember to review your essay and make any changes or corrections that are needed to help your reader follow your thinking. You will have 90 minutes to complete your essay.

The directions ask you to complete five tasks. Below, answer the questions that follow each task.

1. "Read the passage above and write an essay responding to the ideas it presents."
  - a. How many times should you read the passage? How long should you spend reading it?  
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\_\_\_\_\_
  - b. What do you think it means to "respond"?  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. "In your essay, be sure to summarize the passage in your own words, stating the author's most important ideas."
  - a. What does it mean to summarize?  
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\_\_\_\_\_
  - b. How can you tell if an idea the author writes is an important one that deserves to be included in the summary?  
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\_\_\_\_\_
3. "Develop your essay by identifying one idea in the passage that you feel is especially significant, and explain its significance."
  - a. How do you find one significant idea?  
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\_\_\_\_\_
  - b. What does it mean to "develop your essay," and how are you supposed to do this?  
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\_\_\_\_\_
4. "Support your claims with evidence or examples drawn from what you have read, learned in school, and/or personally experienced."
  - a. What are some types of examples you can use to support your claims?  
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\_\_\_\_\_

5. "Remember to review your essay and make any changes or corrections that are needed to help your reader follow your thinking. You will have 90 minutes to complete your essay."

a. What does it mean to review your essay? What are some examples of possible changes or corrections?

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b. How will the grader know that you did or did not review your essay?

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## THE FIVE SCORING CATEGORIES

The CATW graders score your exam in five different categories: Critical Response, Structure, Development, Sentence Structure/Word Choice, and Grammar. Each grader can give you a maximum of 6 points in each category. The first three categories are then doubled and the two graders' final scores are combined. A passing score = 56.

As it's very useful to know where and how you can increase your score, below is a guide to what each category entails. (For a more detailed explanation and a copy of the rubric, see the CUNY Student Handbook.)

Category Name	Explanation from CUNY Student Handbook	What Does This Mean?
1 Critical Response to the Writing Task and Text	This category emphasizes your ability to complete the writing task and to demonstrate understanding of the main ideas in the reading text, using critical analysis, and integrating your own ideas and experiences to respond to the main ideas in the text.	Basically, the grader assesses how well you understand this passage. Also, the grader evaluates whether you completed the tasks from the directions: summarizing, discussing, and responding to significant ideas, and providing examples to support your response. Your <b>argument</b> is crucial in this category. Express your own ideas about the subject matter, rather than simply repeating the author's opinions.
2 Development of Writer's Ideas	In this category you are evaluated on your ability to develop your ideas (e.g., by using summary, narrative, or problem/solution) in a clear and organized way. Your response should include both general statements and specific details and examples. <i>Specific references to the text must be included with these details and examples.</i>	Here, the grader really wants to see that you explain your ideas. Do not assume that your position is an obvious one that the reader would share. Convince the reader through 2-3 body paragraphs with detailed examples! All of this should be done <b>in dialogue with the text</b> . This means that you are constantly integrating ideas from the passage with examples and ideas of your own.

Continued

3 Structure of the Response

This category evaluates your ability to organize ideas into a cohesive essay that supports a central focus, or thesis. The structure of your essay is evaluated for evidence of logical connections between ideas and the use of transitions to convey these connections.

It's very important that you are clear and organized in this development. Your grader will be looking for a central focus or thesis and logical explanation and development of this central focus throughout the essay, in an identifiable introduction paragraph, body paragraphs, and conclusion paragraph.

“Connections” is an important word here. Later in this handbook we will practice using transition words, which will help you make connections between ideas.

4 Language Use: Sentences and Word Choice

This category evaluates the degree to which you demonstrate sentence control and variety in sentence structure. This category also evaluates your ability to use appropriate vocabulary to make your ideas clear.

Mix it up! Variety will help your score in this category. Vary the structure of your sentences, don't use the same word over and over again, and use the correct words!

5 Language Use: Grammar, Usage, Mechanics

This category evaluates your ability to follow the conventions of standard American English language use in terms of grammar and mechanics, so that your meaning is clear.

Your sentences must be clear. For example, subjects and verbs should agree; verb tense should be consistent; correct punctuation is necessary. The stronger your grammar skills, the higher your score will be in this category.

**IN**

you  
you  
ex  
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act

what  
score  
graph  
do to  
at this  
one.”

15 horizontal lines for writing.