

The GRE Analytical Writing Lesson Series

Overview, working routine, and the Learning Log.

ABOUT THESE PROMPTS AND MODEL RESPONSES

All Issue prompts and model paragraphs in this Lesson Series were written for this Lesson Series by Hearn Consulting. They were modeled on the format of the GRE Analytical Writing Issue task but reproduce no released ETS prompts or sample responses.

The publicly released ETS Issue Topic Pool is the recommended source for additional timed practice. This Lesson Series teaches the routine; the official pool is the practice.

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How to use this Lesson Series

Practice works best when you isolate the move, write a paragraph that uses it, and return to full timed essays.

The working routine

Read the task carefully before you plan. Name what the prompt is actually asking you to argue. Take a position you can defend with reasons and concrete examples. Plan the paragraphs before you draft.

Position first. Reasons second. Examples third. Style last.

How each lesson is built

- A short teach-and-model section that names the move and shows it in a paragraph or short response.
- Guided practice — a prompt and a scaffolded outline or paragraph slot.
- Independent practice — a prompt with no scaffolding, plus a self-review checklist.
- A Learning Log step that tells you what to tag and how to fix it on the next attempt.
- Model paragraphs or annotated responses placed at the end of the lesson, not interleaved with the practice.

How to move through it

Work the lessons in order. Start with reading the task (Lesson 1), then build a clear position (Lesson 2), then build paragraphs that carry reasons and examples (Lessons 3 and 4), then add complexity and concession (Lessons 5 and 6), then style and timed execution (Lesson 7), and close with a full timed simulation and revision review (Lesson 8).

REMINDER

A revision pass without a named move is a re-read, not a revision. Name the move first; then make it.

The GRE Analytical Writing task at a glance

Facts about the task. No commentary on speed or timing strategy here — see the Playbook for that.

Task structure

- One Issue task. 30 minutes.
- You are given a short statement of a position. You are asked to take a position on the claim and support it with reasons and examples.
- The task also includes specific directions that shape the response (for example: discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree; address strong arguments on both sides). The directions are part of the task and the response is expected to answer them.
- The response is scored on a 0–6 scale by trained readers, who consider clarity of position, quality of reasoning, use of examples, structure, and language.

What graders look for

- A clear position that is responsive to the specific directions of the task.

- Reasons that develop the position rather than restate it.
- Concrete examples that illustrate the reasoning.
- A response that organizes its paragraphs by purpose, not by free association.
- Sentences that are clear, varied, and controlled — not necessarily ornate.

Common task framings

- Agree or disagree with the claim and explain your reasoning.
- Discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree, addressing the most compelling reasons or examples that could be used to challenge your position.
- Address both the claim and the reasoning on which the claim is based.
- Discuss your views on the policy and explain your reasoning for the position you take.
- Address the most compelling reasons and examples that could be used to challenge your position.

Official baseline and review plan

Start with an official baseline. Improvement comes from how you revise, not how much you write.

What counts as an official baseline

- A timed Issue response written on a prompt from the publicly released ETS Issue Topic Pool.
- ETS POWERPREP scoring guides and sample responses.
- Your scored ETS Analytical Writing score report when you have one.

How this Lesson Series fits with the official baseline

Take an official baseline first. Read your response against the scoring guide. Identify the weakest part — position, reasons, examples, structure, or language. Work the matching lesson here. After each lesson, return to a timed official prompt and check whether the move carries over. The lessons are training; the official prompts are the test.

Recommended review sequence

- 1. Re-read the task. Name what it actually asks you to argue, in your own words.
- 2. Re-read your position. Is it responsive to the specific directions of the task?

- 3. Re-read each body paragraph. Does it develop a single reason and support it with a concrete example?
- 4. Check structure. Could a reader summarize each paragraph in one sentence?
- 5. Check style. Are sentences clear, varied, and controlled?
- 6. Log the miss. Tag the category. Write one useful line. Re-attempt the move on a new prompt within the week.

How the Learning Log works

The categories below are the only ones you will use in this Lesson Series. Use them everywhere.

Position miss categories

- Position unclear — the reader could not state your position in one sentence after reading the response.
- Position non-responsive — the response did not address the specific directions of the task.
- Position fence-sitting — the response refused to take a defensible stance.

Reasoning miss categories

- Reasons restate the position — the body paragraphs did not give new reasoning.
- Reasons unsupported — the paragraph asserted but did not develop.
- Missing concession or qualification — the response did not address the most compelling counter-argument.

Evidence and example miss categories

- No concrete example — the paragraph stayed at the level of generality.
- Example does not fit — the example illustrates a different claim than the one being argued.
- Example overstated — the example carried more weight than it can hold.

Structure miss categories

- Paragraphs not organized by purpose — paragraphs drifted or repeated.
- Opening or closing weak — the first or last paragraph did not orient the reader.

Language and style miss categories

- Sentence-level clarity — sentences were tangled or imprecise.
- Variety — every sentence opened the same way or ran the same length.
- Word choice — words were vague where specifics were needed.

Process miss categories

- No plan before drafting — the response was composed on the fly.
- No revision pass — the response was submitted without re-reading.
- Review routine incomplete — the response was scored but not tagged or revisited.

How to tag a miss

Write three lines: the category, what the miss tells you about how you planned or drafted, and what you will try differently on the next prompt. Specifics beat severity.