



WriteToLearn™ FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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Q: What is WriteToLearn™?

A: WriteToLearn is a complete online tool for building writing skills and developing reading comprehension. Using WriteToLearn, students develop a skill that good readers naturally possess - the ability to summarize what they read. They practice essay writing and summarizing and build both writing and reading comprehension skills across the curriculum.

Q: What research has been conducted on WriteToLearn?

A: Significant research has been conducted examining both the Reading Comprehension and Essay Components of WriteToLearn.

The Reading Comprehension Component has been demonstrated to significantly improve student writing skills. The summaries of students who used the Reading Comprehension Component have been judged to be significantly superior in blind scoring by teachers than those of students who used a standard word processing program. These students also received higher reading and writing scores on the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) test.

Pearson has also conducted extensive research on the reliability and validity of the Essay Component of WriteToLearn. The correlation between the scoring of this component and human graders has been shown to be as high or higher than that between two independent human graders in dozens of studies

with over 200 prompts of every type. The correlation and agreement rates of the scores produced by the Essay Component are better the more expert and reliable the human scores. These scores have been shown to reflect progress in writing skills and knowledge as a result of instruction much more sensitively than human scores.

Q: What are the benefits of using WriteToLearn?

A: **WriteToLearn gives students the opportunity to practice their writing.** The only way to learn to write is to practice with informative feedback. The same goes for reading; the two are inseparable. Learn to read and you learn to write, learn to write and you learn to read. WriteToLearn provides the opportunity for students to practice both of these valuable skills.

WriteToLearn is time efficient allowing teachers to assign many more writing and reading comprehension assignments to students without additional grading time.

WriteToLearn helps you focus your teaching. By observing students and using the Teacher Reports you can discover both individual and class strengths and weaknesses to help guide teaching.

WriteToLearn is flexible and easy to use. Teacher tools allow teachers to set scoring thresholds, manage and evaluate student progress easily, and to adjust the class roster and make assignments.

WriteToLearn tutors students to improve subject knowledge, as well as reading comprehension and writing skills by providing detailed feedback on content.

WriteToLearn allows students to tackle more difficult reading assignments by boosting their understanding and performance through automated evaluation.

Q: For which grade levels is WriteToLearn appropriate?

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

Q: Can I view a demonstration of WriteToLearn?

A: Yes, visit <http://www.writeToLearn.net/Overview.html> to view an animated flash overview or <http://www.writeToLearn.net/Demo.html> for an online demonstration.

Q: What are the technical requirements for using WriteToLearn?

A: **Minimum System Requirements:**

Windows

- Windows 2000, XP
- 128 MB RAM (minimum), 512 MB RAM (recommended)
- Microsoft Internet Explorer 6.0 or higher, Firefox 2.0 or higher
- Javascript enabled
- Flash plug-in 8.0 or higher

Macintosh

- MAC OS 9.2 (minimum), Latest version of OS X (recommended)
- 128 MB RAM (minimum), 512 MB RAM (recommended)

- Safari 1.3.2 or higher, Firefox 2.0 or higher, Microsoft Internet Explorer 5.1 or higher
- Javascript enabled
- Flash plug-in 8.0 or higher
- Full functionality of the following features is available only in Safari 1.3.2 or higher and Firefox 2.0 or higher:
 - Text-to-speech (cookies are required in Safari 4)
 - Roster management
 - The ability to ignore spelling and grammar errors
- The Teacher Comments feature is available only in Safari 1.3.2, Safari 3.0 or higher and Firefox 2.0 or higher

Monitor Resolution

- 800 x 600 (minimum), 1024 x 768 (recommended)

Bandwidth

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

Q: How does WriteToLearn work?

A: WriteToLearn contains a Reading Comprehension Component and an Essay Component. Both components use the Knowledge Analysis Technologies (KAT) engine, a patented technology based on over twenty years of research and development. The KAT engine is based on the mathematical approach known as Latent Semantic Analysis (LSA), which 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 covered by the student's summary. The Essay Component assesses the total content of an 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 essays.

Q: What is the KAT™ engine?

A: 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, 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 way as a human reader.

Q: Does WriteToLearn use keywords in its evaluation?

A: A common misconception is that WriteToLearn scores by recognizing keywords. It does not. If two or more different terms accurately describe a concept, WriteToLearn will recognize either or both and score them equally as well. For example, WriteToLearn measures

“Understanding is very important when you read something you want to know about”

as very similar in meaning to

“Comprehending's essential”

even though there are no literal words in common. Keyword based similarity would find nothing in common between these two sentences.

Q: Are students required to type their responses directly into WriteToLearn?

A: Students may type their responses directly 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.

Q: How long does it take to score a response?

A: Most responses are scored within a few seconds. Keep in mind that a slow or busy Internet connection may delay the response.

Q: What is the Reading Comprehension Component of WriteToLearn?

A: 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 the text, spelling, repetition and inclusion of unimportant information.

Q: How many reading passages are available? What topics or subject areas are covered?

A: 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. In addition, WriteToLearn contains selected high school level reading passages from Prentice Hall's widely adopted titles along with leveled readers from Scott Foresman's Reading Street™ program.

Q: What type of feedback do students receive on their summaries?

A: Students receive feedback on their coverage of each section of the reading. Students also receive feedback on spelling, copying from the text, repetition and inclusion of unimportant information, as well as on the length of their summary. Feedback is displayed in a graphical report that motivates students to continue to improve their summaries.

A sample student report is available at: <http://www.writetolearn.net/WTLStudentScreen3.html>

Q: How does the Essay Component of WriteToLearn recognize a good essay?

A: 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.

Q: How does the Essay Component scoring compare to the way teachers grade writing?

A: 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.

Q: How does the Essay Component score essays with highly unusual writing styles?

A: An essay with a highly unique writing style or unusual construction may receive an advisory message along with a score. If an essay is off-topic, written in a language other than English, too brief or too repetitive, a written refusal to write, or otherwise incomprehensible, a student will receive an advisory that his or her essay can not be scored. These advisory messages ask the student to discuss the essay and all feedback with his or her teacher to ensure an appropriate evaluation of the writing.

Q: What type of feedback do students receive on their essays?

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

A sample student report is available at: <http://www.writetolearn.net/WTLStudentScreen4.html>