

Reading and Writing Center  
Kingsborough Community College

## **Reviewing the CATW Criteria for Writing and Trying Out a Practice Writing-- All in One Lab/Tutoring Session!**

The CUNY Assessment Test in Writing (CATW) closely reflects the type of writing and reading of your ENG 92/93 development English courses. Since the focus of these courses is writing about reading, the CATW does not ask you to engage in anything different or separate from what you are doing in class. If you can write well about your reading, you will most likely do well in your ENG 92/93 class and, as a result, soon find success with the CUNY writing exam.

So let's agree, right from the start, that it's important to practice what it means to write well about your reading. Generally, writing well about your reading means that you do the following:

### **Respond Critically to Your Reading:**

You demonstrate that you understand and appreciate what a particular author is trying to say. In your writing, you successfully paraphrase, or restate, important ideas, and summarize--according to the text! There must be evidence that you, as both a writer and reader, are actually "hearing" this particular author's ideas and grasping his or her perspective.

### **Develop Ideas:**

Besides paraphrasing and summarizing, you show understanding and appreciation of the author's topic by connecting to the topic in a relevant way--i.e. by bringing in information and/or a personal perspective that complements (builds upon) the author's points while sticking to the topic at hand. You are also able to pick out individual and specific ideas and elaborate on them.

So in addition to straight-forward summarizing, you are also interpreting one or two specific ideas. You are saying why it is important for people to recognize and value this (or these) idea(s) as presented by the author. You are also able to the idea(s) from your perspective. Giving examples and support for whatever idea(s) you single out is another important feature of this area--developing ideas!

### **Demonstrate organization and structure:**

This criteria relates to how well you organize and structure your writing. Each paragraph must give the strong impression that it is centered some place. In other words, some "thread" of an idea must be evident throughout the paragraph, holding it together. Paragraphs shouldn't be all of a jumble of ideas. If it is too difficult to say what the paragraph is "really about," chances are that it is trying to do too much, and it is disorganized.

In addition, your whole essay should give a sense of being on a certain topic. One sign of organization and structure is your use of transitions within and between paragraphs. You want to show that you're joining the ideas of one paragraph as you go on to a new one. Paragraphs should be like the rungs of a ladder or the landmarks of a journey--it's clear that, as you write, you have a sense of "where you've been" and "where you're going." Really, it is the essay that is taking the reader some place. Good structure and organization make it easy for the reader to keep track, and enjoy, the interesting and idea-filled trip that you have carefully planned.

## Write clearly and appropriately in English:

This area involves a range of competence in the English language. It means that your sentences are basically clear and correct (although not “perfect” or “error-free”). You choose interesting words, phrases, and expressions. You write with a smooth, interesting tone or voice. And you show you know something about the mechanics of language. For example, you write in complete sentences, use capitalization and punctuation basically correctly, know about verbs and verb forms, as well as nouns, including singulars and plurals.

These are the basics.

## ***Again, the key point is practice! Let’s practice:***

*Read the following brief reading. You will then quickly answer some questions about it and spend at least forty minutes writing in response to the reading.*

### **from “Do We Fear the Things Right Things?” By David G. Myers**

Why do we intuitively fear the wrong things? Why do so many smokers (whose habit shortens their lives, on average, by about five years) fret before flying (which, averaged across people, shortens life by one day)? Why do we fear violent crime more than clogged arteries? Why do we fear terrorism more than [car] accidents--which kill nearly as many per week in just the United States as did terrorism with its 2527 worldwide deaths in all of the 1990s. Even with the horrific scale of 9/11, more Americans in 2001 died of food poisoning (which scares few) than terrorism (which scares many). . . .

In less familiar realms, vivid, memorable images dominate our fears. We can know that unprovoked great white shark attacks have claimed merely 67 lives worldwide since 1876. Yet, after watching *Jaws* and reading vivid accounts of Atlantic coastal shark attacks, we may feel chills when an underwater object brushes our leg. A thousand massively publicized anthrax victims would similarly rivet our attention more than yet another 20,000+ annual U.S. influenza fatalities, or another 30,000+ annual deaths.

As publicized Powerball lottery winners cause us to overestimate the infinitesimal odds of lottery success, so vivid airline casualties cause us to overestimate the infinitesimal odds of a lethal airline ticket. We comprehend Mario Gresso’s winning \$197 million in a Powerball lottery. We do not comprehend the 328 million losing tickets that provided the jackpot. We comprehend the 266 passengers and crew on those four fated flights. We do not comprehend the vast numbers of accident-free flights--16 million consecutive fatality-free takeoffs and landings during one stretch of the 1990s. Dramatic outcomes capture our attention, [but] probabilities we hardly grasp. The result--we overvalue lottery tickets, overestimate flight risk, and underestimate the dangers of driving.

