

## **Introduction to Analytical Writing Assessment (AWA) on the GMAT**

### ✓ **What does this section test?**

Your ability to analyze an argument and convey your perspective clearly and concisely

### ✓ **How is the section structured?**

You will be asked to critique the reasoning behind a given business argument. You need to think from 3 perspectives:

1. Is the argument based on any flawed assumption(s)?
2. Are there any lines of reasoning or examples that question the conclusion?
3. What other information or evidence, if provided, would help to clarify or evaluate the argument better?

### ✓ **What is the duration of this section?**

30 minutes

### ✓ **How will the scoring be?**

You will be scored between 0 and 6 in the AWA section.

**0:** Unscorable. An essay that is totally irrelevant or makes absolutely no sense.

**1:** Fundamentally deficient. An essay that has shows little to no reasoning and has numerous errors in language, grammar, spelling etc.

**2:** Seriously flawed. An essay that shows poor reasoning skills, does not develop ideas, is disorganized and has frequent problems in language, grammar, spelling etc.

**3:** Limited. An essay that shows some level of analysis, but misses most important points, and has some language, grammar and spelling errors.

**4:** Adequate. An acceptable analysis of the argument, but contains a few language, grammar or spelling errors.

**5:** Strong. A well-reasoned, well-organized critique of the argument with only minor writing flaws.

**6:** Outstanding. An excellent, well-articulated analysis that has few or no writing flaws.

### ✓ **Who scores the AWA section?**

This section is scored by both a software that checks for linguistic, semantic and grammatical performance, and a human. The 'human' is usually a teaching assistant or an undergraduate student. If the scores assigned by the human and the software differ by more than 1 point, the essay is passed on for review by another human. If the scores differ by only 1 point, the average of the two is taken.

### ✓ **How important is the AWA section?**

The score you get in AWA will not impact your overall GMAT score. However, this does not mean that you can completely ignore this section. B-schools may use your AWA score to get

an idea about your reasoning ability and writing skill. While you may not need a perfect score of 6 in this section, a score of 3 or less may raise unwelcome questions in the minds of AdCom members. However, you cannot afford to expend too much mental effort right from the AWA section – this will only tire you out by the time you reach Quant. **Thus, your objective is to get a ‘hygiene score’ of 4 or 5 in the AWA, while spending as little mental effort on it as possible.**

✓ **How to tackle AWA on the GMAT?**

Did you know that the GMAC has already published a list of all possible AWA topics that you may encounter on the GMAT?

[DOWNLOAD AWA TOPICS LIST NOW](#)

The best way to tackle the AWA is to browse through this list to get a better idea about how the question stems are worded, identify the patterns, and create your own AWA template. Practice writing 3-4 AWA essays using this template – you can even show this to your friends to get their assessment of your reasoning and writing. On the test, spend about 5-7 minutes understanding the question stem and listing your thoughts. Spend the next 10 minutes putting these into words based on your template. That’s all, done! 😊

✓ **Sample AWA Essay & Analysis**

*"Most companies would agree that as the risk of physical injury occurring on the job increases, the wages paid to employees should also increase. Hence it makes financial sense for employers to make the workplace safer: they could thus reduce their payroll expenses and save money."*

*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.*

This argument states that it makes financial sense for employers to make the workplace safer because lower wages could then be paid to employees. This conclusion is based on the premise that as the risk of physical injury increases, the wages paid to employees should also increase. However, this argument makes several unsupported assumptions. For example, the argument assumes that the costs associated with making the workplace safe do not outweigh the increased payroll expenses due to hazardous conditions.

The first issue to be addressed is whether increased labor costs justify large capital expenditures to improve the work environment. Clearly one could argue that if making the workplace safe would cost an exorbitant amount of money in comparison to leaving the workplace as is and paying slightly increased wages than it would not make sense to improve the work environment. For example, if making the workplace safe would cost \$100 million versus additional payroll expenses of only \$5,000 per year, it would make financial sense to simply pay the increased wages. No business or business owner would pay all that extra money just to save a couple dollars and improve employee health and relations. To consider this, a cost benefit analysis must be made. I also feel that although a cost benefit analysis should be the determining factor with regard to these decisions making financial sense, it may not be the determining factor with regard to making social, moral and ethical sense.

This argument also relies on the idea that companies solely use financial sense in analysing improving the work environment. This is not the case. Companies look at other considerations such as the negative social ramifications of high on-job injuries. For example, Toyota spends large amounts of money improving its environment because while its goal is to be profitable, it also prides itself on high employee morale and an almost perfectly safe work environment. However, Toyota finds that it can do both, as by improving employee health and employee relations they are guaranteed a more motivated staff, and hence a more efficient staff; this guarantees more money for the business as well as more safety for the employees.

Finally one must understand that not all work environments can be made safer. For example, in the case of coal mining, a company only has limited ways of making the work environment safe. While companies may be able to ensure some safety precautions, they may not be able to provide all the safety measures necessary. In other words, a mining company has limited ability to control the air quality within a coal mine and therefore it cannot control the risk of employees getting blacklung. In other words, regardless of the intent of the company, some jobs are simply dangerous in nature.

In conclusion, while at first it may seem to make financial sense to improve the safety of the work environment sometimes it truly does not make financial sense. Furthermore, financial sense may not be the only issue a company faces. Other types of analyses must be made such as the social ramifications of an unsafe work environment and the overall ability of a company to improve that environment (i.e., coal mine). Before any decision is made, all this things must be considered, not simply the reduction of payroll expenses.

*This essay was given a score of 6. However, it is **not perfect**.*