



Basics-of-Writing (BOW) Exam Study Guide

The College of Media & Communication's BOW exam consists of 50 questions. Unlike the previous GSP (grammar, spelling, punctuation) exam, it aims to assess and improve your writing skills in a holistic fashion rather than focusing on isolated rules and words.

To pass, you need to answer correctly 35 out of 50 questions. The exam questions are randomly selected from “pools” that address specific writing issues. For example, the “pool” on sentence errors includes 12 questions, but you will get only four randomly selected ones.

The question pools and the random selection of questions mean you will practically never get the same exam twice. If you have to retake the BOW, you might see only a few of the questions you got the first time, along with many different ones.

The possible answers are also randomized. In other words, if your friend takes the exam and then tells you the answer to Question 15 is B, that's unlikely to help you. Your Question 15 may or may not be the same as the one your friend got. Even if it happens to be the same (though chances are small—statistically speaking), the correct answer may or may not be B.

The good news is that the questions in each “pool” are designed to be of the same type and address the same issues. This makes preparing easy. Focus on the categories of questions and don't worry about the specifics of the individual questions. The recommended textbook to prepare is *[Working with Words: A Handbook for Media Writers and Editors](#)*, along with the accompanying [exercise book](#). You could also try various free online resources, such as interactive quizzes and exercises; to find them, use the question topics as search keywords.

If you are confident in your writing abilities, this study guide (a) tells you what to expect and (b) offers links to online resources that can provide a refresher on individual topics. This study guide is NOT a replacement for reading the textbook and completing the work in the accompanying exercise book.



The BOW intends to assess the following:

- Your discernment of grammatically correct and incorrect sentences (Questions 1-4)
 - **How to Prepare.** Review and quiz yourself on sentence fragments + comma-splice and run-on sentences.
- Your skill in avoiding misplaced modifiers and unclear antecedents (Questions 5-7)
 - **How to Prepare.** Review and quiz yourself on modifier placement.
- Your ability to make the parts of the sentence agree (Questions 8-13)
 - **How to Prepare.** Review and quiz yourself on subject-verb agreement and antecedent-pronoun agreement.
- Your discernment and proper use of frequently confused words, which often escape spellcheck (Questions 14-23)
 - **How to Prepare.** Review and quiz yourself on frequently confused words.
- Your understanding of how and when to use commas, apostrophes, colons, and semicolons (Questions 24-30)
 - **How to Prepare.** Review and quiz yourself on punctuation.
- Your verb prowess, including tense sequence and ability to distinguish between transitive and intransitive verbs (Questions 31-36)
 - **How to Prepare.** Review and quiz yourself on tense sequence + verbs and verbals.
- Your recognition of restrictive and non-restrictive clauses, such as when to use "which" vs. "that" (Questions 37-40)
 - **How to Prepare.** Review and quiz yourself on clauses.
- Your ability to distinguish between adjectives and adverbs as well as form compound modifiers (Questions 41-45)
 - **How to Prepare.** Review and quiz yourself on adjectives + adverbs + compound modifiers.
- Your mastery of brevity and clarity in writing, which includes recognition of needless words (Questions 46-50)
 - **How to Prepare.** Review and quiz yourself on plague words and phrases + concise sentences.