

HUNTER COLLEGE READING/WRITING CENTER
Writing Across the Curriculum: The CUNY Proficiency Exam
Approaching Task 2

Overview

Task 2 asks students to compare and/or contrast textual information from a short reading selection with visual information from two graphs. Task 2 does not ask for a compare/contrast essay, nor does it ask for an overarching thesis that connects the various points a student makes. Instead, Task 2 only asks students to write a set of separate compare/contrast responses, relating textual with visual information.

The reading selection is usually three paragraphs long. This reading makes a number of claims about a topic. These claims tend to be one sentence (or even one clause) long. Many of these claims employ numbers, percentages, or ratios, which can be related to numerical data from graphs.

The two graphs, called *Figure 1* and *Figure 2* may be pie charts, bar graphs, or line graphs. The two figures will not be of the same type. Each figure displays numerical data about a topic that is related to the reading – but usually quite different from the topic of the other figure.

Because the figures are about different topics, they cannot be related to each other. Moreover, it is rare for a single claim from the reading to be relatable to both figures. In general, some of the claims from the reading can be related only to Figure 1, while others can be related only to Figure 2.

Students are not only allowed but also are encouraged to annotate the reading and the graphs before beginning to write their response. Some graphs depict percentages, and other graphs depict whole numbers. It is also common for graphs to show numbers on a scale. For example, note that if a bar graph shows numbers “in millions,” then the figure “10” means “10 million” and not “10.”

Some of the claims from the reading will involve exact numbers, percentages, or ratios (for instance, “17 million,” “45%,” “twice as many”). Most of the claims, however, will involve numerical information that is qualified by words that change the value (for instance, “*about* 80 people,” “*approximately* one third,” “*less than* three times,” “*more than* half,” “*nearly* 1 million”). Note that “nearly three times as much” is different from “three times as much.”

Responding to the Prompt

In their response, students are required to discuss ***at least two*** of the claims made by the reading. One of the required discussions must relate a claim from the reading to data from Figure 1, and the other required discussion must relate a different claim from the reading to data from Figure 2.

Each discussion of a claim ought to include the following items:

1. An *accurate* identification of the claim. Students may quote directly from the reading or may paraphrase. In either case, students ought to attribute the claim to the reading.
2. An *accurate* restatement of *relevant* numerical data from the *appropriate* figure. The figure ought to be identified either by number or by description.
3. A brief explanation of how the data from the figure either supports, or contradicts, or partially supports the claim.

A complete discussion includes all the above items. An incomplete discussion either leaves one or more items out, or contains factual inaccuracies about the claims or data, or contains an illogical explanation of whether the figure supports or contradicts the reading.

Important: Even if a relationship between a claim and a figure seems so obvious that an explanation is not necessary, students still need to explain the relationship. It is better to state the obvious than to leave out a necessary part of the discussion.

Two complete discussions, one related to Figure 1 and one related to Figure 2, will earn four points (out of six). Students may, and in fact are encouraged to, discuss additional claims, for which they can earn additional points. Students can also earn additional points by adding to an existing discussion an analysis of some further, more complex, relationship between a claim and a figure.

Important: students will not lose credit for incomplete discussions. Incomplete and inaccurate discussions (beyond the first) are simply discarded without penalty. Therefore, students are encouraged to discuss as many claims as possible in the allotted time in order to maximize their number of complete discussions, and thereby maximize their scores. At the very least, students should try to discuss four claims – two that can relate to Figure 1 and two more that can relate to Figure 2.

Data from a figure will support a claim from the reading if the data

- a) is exactly the same, with no deviation, as an exact number, percentage, or ratio in the claim
- b) can be described by the same qualifying words as in the claim.

So, if the reading says “more than half,” the figure can support it by showing any percentage between 51% and 100% (anything more than 50%). However, if the figure shows exactly 50%, it will contradict the claim since 50% is not more than half. Likewise, if the reading selection says “fewer than 200,” the figure will support it by showing any value between 0 and 199. However, if the figure shows exactly 200, it will contradict since 200 is not fewer than 200.

If a claim has two parts, one of which is supported by the figure and the other of which is contradicted by the figure, the figure will partially support the claim.

In each of the following examples, does the figure support, contradict, or partially support the claims? Why?

- The reading claims that “kids like chocolate twice as much as they like vanilla.” Figure 2 shows that 3000 children say they like chocolate, and 1500 children say they like vanilla.
- The reading says, “three quarters of dog owners don't care whether their dog is purebred or not.” In Figure 2, 80% of dog owners don't care about their dog's pedigree.
- The reading reports that more than half of all people surveyed say *The Cosby Show* was the best sitcom ever, and one quarter say *MASH* was the best. Figure 1 says that 50% of television viewers rate *The Cosby Show* as their favorite sitcom and 25% rate *MASH* as their favorite sitcom.
- About five times more men lift weights than women, according to the reading. 760 men lift weights and 150 women lift weights, according to figure 1.