



Carson-Newman University Doctoral Program Writing Sample

Purpose

This screener is designed to provide evidence of an applicant's readiness for doctoral-level writing and research. It may be used for admission review, conditional admission decisions, or early identification of writing support needs. The screener should be considered one source of evidence and should not be the sole basis for an admission decision.

Candidate Directions

You will complete four (4) short tasks to help the program faculty assess your readiness for doctoral-level writing and research. Write in complete sentences, organize your responses clearly, and use a professional academic tone. Your responses should reflect your own work.

- Use only the materials provided during the screener.
- Do not use AI writing tools, outside editing support, or internet searching in this activity. Submissions will be analyzed using AI detection software.
- You may plan briefly before writing. However, submit only your final responses for scoring.
- Focus on clarity, accuracy, organization, evidence, and careful proofreading.
- Submit as one document with each task labeled as Task 1, Task 2, Task 3, and Task 4.
- Create your submission with 1" borders on all sides, double-spaced, and in Calibri 11 font.
- Name and save the file with your full legal name, for example: John Mark Smith, Jr.

Task 1: Professional Writing Sample

Suggested length: 500 words maximum

Directions: Respond to the prompt below using clear, professional writing. Use a clear introduction, organized body paragraphs, and a concise conclusion.

- Explain why you are pursuing doctoral study at this stage of your professional life.
- Describe the experiences, responsibilities, or academic preparation that have prepared you for doctoral-level work.
- Explain how you will manage the demands of scholarly reading, writing, research, and revision with your personal, professional, and spiritual life.

Task 2: Source-Based Critical Response

Suggested length: 500 words maximum

Read the provided excerpt and then respond to the prompt.

Provided Reading Excerpt

Educational leaders are increasingly expected to make decisions in settings shaped by rapid change, diverse student needs, limited resources, and public accountability. In this environment, professional experience is valuable but insufficient on its own. Leaders also need habits of inquiry: the ability to define a problem carefully, locate credible evidence, interpret findings responsibly, and consider the

ethical consequences of action. A decision may be efficient yet poorly reasoned if it rests on unexamined assumptions. Likewise, a decision may be well-intentioned yet ineffective if it ignores evidence from those most affected by the problem. Doctoral preparation should therefore strengthen both professional judgment and scholarly discipline. The goal is not to replace the wisdom gained through practice but to refine it through research, reflection, and evidence-informed action.

Prompt

- Summarize the main argument of the excerpt in your own words.
- Evaluate the strength of the argument. What does the excerpt do well, and what questions or limitations remain?
- Explain how the ideas could apply to educational leadership, teaching at all levels, higher education administration, or another professional setting.
- Use at least two specific references to the excerpt text. Attribute ideas clearly, even though a formal reference page is not required for this task.

Task 3: Research Readiness Mini-Task

Suggested length: -350 words maximum

Directions: Choose one topic below and complete the research-planning task. This task assesses whether you can move from a broad professional concern to a focused research direction.

- Teacher retention in high-need schools
- Artificial intelligence as an instructional tool
- Sense of belonging among adult or graduate students
- Instructional leadership and student achievement

In your response, include the following:

1. A focused researchable question related to the topic.
2. Three to five search terms or keyword combinations you would use in a scholarly database.
3. Two criteria you would use to decide whether a source is credible and appropriate for doctoral work.
4. A brief explanation of what kind of evidence would help answer the question.

Task 4: Editing and Mechanics Task

Suggested Length: 150 words maximum

Directions: Revise the paragraph below for grammar, mechanics, usage, clarity, punctuation, and professional academic tone. Preserve the original meaning and wording as much as possible.

Doctoral students often enters a program with strong professional experience, however many have not wrote formal academic papers for several years. Because of this, writing support should not be viewed as remediation it should be viewed as part of scholarly development. A student that can recieve feedback, revise carefully, and use evidence responsible is more likely to progress through coursework and the dissertation process. Programs should identify these needs early, this helps faculty provide support before writing problems become serious barriers.