

SCREENING JOB APPLICANTS WHERE WRITING ABILITY IS IMPORTANT: A STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Human Resources (HR) staff involved in employment decisions often specify written communication skills as an important factor in the hiring process. HR screening personnel must be effectively used to ensure that only the best candidates successfully complete initial screening. Judgments are often based on applicant-supplied written materials yet examples of cover letters and resume preparation assistance utilizing today's available technology can result in an initial screening decision, which is a guess rather than scientifically based as applicants' materials appear similar. This paper presents ground-breaking, highly significant statistical evidence ($p < .001$) based on six years of data ($n = 781$) to ascertain which job applicants write better than others. Additionally, minor modification of the employer's application form provides the discriminating screening data.

Introduction, Method, Analysis, and Findings

Many managers and educators have ascribed as a truism the relationship between reading and writing, yet only four published works since 1980 were found, all non-statistical. The idea if you read more you should write better than those who do not read appears plausible, but can it be statistically substantiated? An English composition professor collected course grades and the title of the last book read from 781 students in freshman English composition over a six-year period. Students were grouped into two categories: Non-Readers - could not recall the name of the most recently read work; Readers - most recently read work was for pleasure or as an assignment. Table 1 presents data for 524 student Readers and 257 Non-Readers. A Chi-Square of 35.3988 (5df, $p < .001$) was calculated to ascertain any difference in the grades of readers and non-readers.

Table 1

Comparison of readers' grades with those of non-readers

Frequency of grades of students in English composition who are readers versus non-readers

Observed number of grades

	A	B	C	D	F	W	Total
Readers	61	153	170	35	34	71	524
Non-Readers	6	58	104	34	26	29	257
Total	67	211	274	69	60	100	781

Establishing this highly significant relationship between reading and the ability to write well suggests the inclusion of questions in the job application form to specify final grades in English composition and the title of the last book read. Thus, applicants with apparently similar cover letters and resumes can be scientifically screened. Students who are non-readers probably do not write well and those non-readers who have earned grades of A in English composition are an anomaly and should not be invited for a personal interview if writing ability is an important component in the employment decision.