



Educator's Guide to the
ACT® Writing Test



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Introduction

Writing has always been and will continue to be one of the essential skills for college readiness and success. Since its inception, the ACT® program has included a multiple-choice format English Test to measure students' understanding of the skills necessary for effective writing. Beginning in February 2005, students taking the ACT also had the option of adding a 30-minute direct writing test to their examination. In this publication, you will obtain an overview of the ACT Writing Test, be introduced to how student essays are scored, learn how you can use results from the Writing Test to help your students improve their writing, and discover ways to integrate preparation for the Writing Test into your Language Arts curriculum. As a writing teacher, you are your students' best resource for understanding how to perform to the best of their ability on the ACT Writing Test. This guide was designed for you.

Part I Overview of the ACT Writing Test

The Place of the Writing Test in the ACT

The principle underlying the development of the ACT derives from the work of E. F. Lindquist (1901–1978). Lindquist, a pioneer in educational measurement and a cofounder of ACT, devoted much of his professional life to demonstrating that the best way to gauge students' readiness for college is to measure as directly as possible their mastery of the knowledge and skills required for success in college studies. The tests of educational development in the ACT measure a broad range of educationally significant knowledge and skills. The tests emphasize such proficiencies as reasoning, analysis, problem-solving, and integration of information from various sources, as well as the application of these proficiencies to the kinds of tasks that college students are expected to perform.

The English and Writing tests in the ACT battery are intended to complement one another and together provide a comprehensive assessment of students' writing proficiency. The English Test is a 45-minute multiple-choice test that measures students' understanding of the conventions of standard written English (punctuation, grammar and usage, and sentence structure) and of rhetorical skills (strategy, organization, and style). The Writing Test is a 30-minute essay test with a single prompt question. It is designed to evaluate student ability to make and articulate judgments, develop and sustain a position, organize and present ideas logically, and communicate clearly in



original writing. The combined result from both tests will provide information about students' ability to make revising and editing decisions in a multiple-choice setting and their ability to produce a direct writing sample.

Educators should note that ACT offers the Writing Test as an *optional* component of the ACT. Students should determine whether or not to take the Writing Test based on the requirements or recommendations of the colleges to which they plan to apply. College decisions about the Writing Test are found at www.actstudent.org. The Composite score and subscores for the multiple-choice sections of the test are not affected by the Writing Test. Instead, when students take the ACT Plus Writing, they receive two additional scores: a Combined English/Writing score and a subscore for the Writing Test. Examples of reports and a guide to interpreting and using scores from these two tests are included in Part III of this guide.

Development of the ACT Writing Test

The Writing Test is an achievement test designed to measure students' writing proficiency. It was developed to reflect the type of writing found in rigorous high school writing curricula and expected of students entering first-year college composition courses.

In developing the Writing Test, ACT examined secondary and postsecondary writing practice, instruction, and assessment across the nation. ACT reviewed:

- direct writing assessments used by postsecondary institutions to make admissions and course placement decisions
- state writing content standards for grades 9–12
- literature published over the past thirty years on direct writing assessments and on the teaching of composition at the postsecondary level
- results of the 2002–2003 ACT National Curriculum Survey®

ACT also created an ACT National Writing Test Advisory Panel whose members include some of the foremost national experts on writing instruction, writing assessment, and ESL and developmental writing. Drawing upon our research on writing instruction and assessment, and using the panelists' expertise and experience, ACT drafted a list of descriptors of what students should be able to do to succeed in first-year college writing courses. From this list, ACT and the Advisory Panel developed detailed specifications for the Writing Test such as the type of writing to be elicited, the writing prompt format, and the scoring criteria to be used in the rubric. Extensive field-testing with student papers contributed to further



refinement of prompt specifications and clarification of score point descriptors for the rubric.

Specific writing prompts administered during testing are developed with the assistance of external prompt writers who are recruited on the basis of their expertise and to reflect the diversity of the populations served by the ACT. ACT prompt writers are male and female educators from both high schools and colleges, and they represent a variety of geographical regions, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and educational philosophies.

All potential writing prompts are reviewed for accessibility of concepts and language, appropriateness, and fairness by content experts and teachers at postsecondary institutions and high schools, and by persons sensitive to issues of test fairness. Prompts found to be accessible, proper in form, and fair to all examinees are field-tested on a population equivalent to the ACT examinee population. After field-testing, statistical indices are compiled on the difficulty and other technical characteristics of each prompt. Only prompts that perform acceptably in field-testing become eligible for use in test administrations.

Features of the Writing Test

Scoring Rubric

The Six-Point Holistic Rubric for the Writing Test was developed around five scoring criteria. Essays are evaluated on the evidence they demonstrate of student ability to:

1. Make and articulate judgments by:
 - Taking a position on the issue.
 - Demonstrating the ability to grasp the complexity of the issue by considering implications or complications.
2. Develop a position by:
 - Presenting support or evidence using specific details.
 - Using logical reasoning that shows the writer's ability to distinguish between assertions and evidence and to make inferences based on support and evidence.
3. Sustain a position by focusing on the topic throughout the writing.
4. Organize and present ideas in a logical way by:
 - Logically grouping and sequencing ideas.
 - Using transitional devices to identify logical connections and tie ideas together.
5. Communicate clearly by:
 - Using language effectively.
 - Observing the conventions of standard written English.

Essays are scored holistically—that is, on the basis of the overall impression created by all the elements of the writing.



Prompt Format

The Writing Test consists of one writing prompt that briefly states an issue and describes two points of view on that issue. Students are asked to write in response to a question about their position on the issue described in the writing prompt. In doing so, students may adopt one or the other of the perspectives described in the prompt, or they may present a different point of view on the issue. Students' essay scores are not affected by the point of view they take on the issue. Prompts are designed to be appropriate for response in a 30-minute timed test and to reflect students' interests and experiences.

Scoring the Writing Test

Each operational essay written for the Writing Test is scored by two trained readers, each of whom give it a rating from 1 (low) to 6 (high). The sum of those ratings is a student's Writing Test subscore (2–12). Writing Test readers are trained by reading examples of papers at each score point and by scoring many practice papers. They are given detailed feedback on the accuracy and consistency of their scores during practice. After training, all readers are required to pass a qualifying test rating selected essays. In addition, throughout scoring, readers must continue to perform satisfactorily on compulsory tests measuring the accuracy of their scores. During scoring, a difference of more than one point on any essay is evaluated by a third trained reader to resolve the discrepancy. This method is designed to be as objective and impartial as possible and to ensure all examinees' papers are read and scored using the same application of the scoring rubric.

Score Reporting

Two scores are reported for students who take both the English and Writing Tests in the same administration: a Combined English/Writing score on a scale of 1–36 and a Writing Test subscore on a scale of 2–12. The English Test contributes two-thirds and the Writing Test contributes one-third toward the Combined English/Writing score. The Combined English/Writing score and the Writing Test subscore are reported **in addition to** the scores and subscores on the ACT multiple-choice tests taken in the same administration and the Composite score for those tests. A student's scores on the Writing Test have no effect on his or her score on any other ACT test. Similarly, if a student chooses not to take the Writing Test, the absence of Writing Test scores has no effect on her or his score on any other ACT test.

In addition to reporting numerical scores, the score report includes comments about the essay for students who take both the English and Writing Tests. One reader of each essay assigns comments appropriate for the writing skills demonstrated in the essay. The number of comments for each essay range between one and four, and may include positive and/or constructive comments about the student's writing. This specific, individual feedback on each student essay is designed to help students learn to better assess their own writing skills and to recognize strengths in their writing as well as areas upon which to focus for improvement. Comments are assigned to an essay after it has been scored. The full text of the readers' comments are included on the Student Report, and the comment codes are included on the High School and College Reports. The full text of all readers' comments also is available on ACT's website at www.act.org/aap/writing/sample/comments.html.



ACT Plus Writing Essay Comments

Essay Comments, derived from the Scoring Rubric, are selected by ACT readers to help student writers understand the strengths and weaknesses of their essays.

The Comments appear in their entirety on the Student Report. The code numbers for the selected Comments are listed on the High School and College Reports. Complete text for each Comment Code appears below.

No Writing Results

01. The pages submitted for the Writing Test could not be scored. No score is possible if the pages were left blank or were marked void at the test center, or if the essay is illegible, is not written in English, or does not respond to the prompt. In any of these cases, no Combined English/Writing score or Writing subscore can be reported.
02. A Combined English/Writing score and Writing subscore can be reported only when there is a valid English score. Because there were no responses to any items on the multiple-choice English Test, no Combined English/Writing or Writing subscore can be reported.

Make and Articulate Judgments

20. Your essay responded to the prompt by taking a position on the issue.
21. Your essay responded to the prompt by taking a clear position on the issue.
22. Your essay acknowledged counterarguments on the issue but did not discuss them.
23. Your essay showed recognition of the complexity of the issue by addressing counterarguments.
24. Your essay showed recognition of the complexity of the issue by partially evaluating its implications.
25. Your essay addressed the complexity of the issue by fully responding to counterarguments.
26. Your essay addressed the complexity of the issue by evaluating its implications.

Develop Ideas

30. Your essay provided very little writing about your ideas. Try to write more about the topic.
31. The ideas in your essay needed to be more fully explained and supported with more details.
32. Your essay used some specific details, reasons, and examples, but it needed more of them.

33. Your essay adequately supported general statements with specific reasons, examples, and details.
34. General statements in your essay were well supported with specific reasons, examples, and details.
35. Your essay effectively supported general statements with specific reasons, examples, and details.

Sustain Focus

40. Your writing did not maintain a focus on the issue. Try to plan your essay before you write.
41. Your essay focused on the general topic rather than on the specific issue in the prompt.
42. Your essay maintained focus on the specific issue in the prompt.

Organize and Present Ideas

50. Your essay lacked organization. Try to plan and arrange your ideas logically.
51. Your essay was not clearly organized. Try to plan and arrange your ideas logically.
52. Your essay showed basic organizational structure, but the ideas needed to be more clearly connected.
53. The organization of your essay was adequate, but the rigid structure seemed to limit discussion.
54. Your essay was well organized, making it easy to understand logical relationships among ideas.
55. The logical sequence of ideas in your essay fit its persuasive purpose well.

Communicate Clearly

60. Grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors made your essay difficult to understand.
61. Grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors were distracting. Proofread your writing.
62. Using correct grammar and more varied sentence structures would improve your essay.
63. Using more varied sentence structures would make your essay clearer and more engaging.
64. Using more sentence variety and precise word choice would make your essay clearer and more engaging.
65. Some varied sentence structures and precise word choice added clarity and interest to your writing.
66. Your essay showed a good command of language by using varied sentences and precise word choice.



Example Prompt

Educators debate extending high school to five years because of increasing demands on students from employers and colleges to participate in extracurricular activities and community service in addition to having high grades. Some educators support extending high school to five years because they think students need more time to achieve all that is expected of them. Other educators do not support extending high school to five years because they think students would lose interest in school and attendance would drop in the fifth year. In your opinion, should high school be extended to five years?

In your essay, take a position on this question. You may write about either one of the two points of view given, or you may present a different point of view on this question. Use specific reasons and examples to support your position.

Example Essays with Scoring Explanations

Score Point 1

In this essay I am writing about that school should be extended for five year. I think that school should be extended for five year because it will help you how you are educate. The school for five year will help you a lot when you are doing something. The school for five year could help you in most everything that you are doing. I think that if you go to school for five years you could learn a lot of skills. School could help you out of most anything that you want to do in this world. School could teach you how to be educator. By going to school is a good thing because if you go to school it could help have experience in everything that you are doing. To have experience you to do that thing you do best and how well you do at it. I think that school could teach you how to have experience in everything you are doing. I know that to go to school you have to choice to go to school because nobody can make you go to school. I know that school are not for everyone but I think that every children should go to school because if you don't go to school you will not be educate. I know that when you have an education it is a good thing. School is a place where you could learn a lot of different that you don't know. I know that I learn a lot of thing I didn't know but I know them. By going to school you make new friends, and you see a lot of different people like people that is not from the United States. At school you do classwork and do all type of assignment your teacher told you to do. I believe that every students should want to be educator because you need education in this world. School shouldn't be a place where students fights. I think that every students should like going to school.



Scoring Explanation* (Score = 1)

This essay shows little skill in responding to the writing task. While the writer takes a position on the issue in the beginning of the essay (*I think that school should be extended for five year because it will help you how you are educate*), the rest of the discussion does not convey reasons to support that position. Instead, the writer minimally develops many different ideas about school in general, repeating ideas rather than explaining them (*School is a place where you could learn a lot of different that you don't know. I know that I learn a lot of thing I didn't know but I know them*). At times, statements supporting claims are not understandable (*By going to school is a good thing because if you go to school it could help have experience in everything that you are doing. To have experience you to do that thing you do best and how well you do at it*). There is no discernable organization to the essay other than a minimal introductory statement: ideas are not logically grouped, no transitions are used, and no conclusion is offered. Sentence structure and word choice are consistently simple, with sentences repeatedly beginning with “I think” or “I know.” Language usage errors are frequently distracting and contribute to difficulty understanding some portions of the essay.

**Please note: the comments reported to students on the Student Score Report are brief comments on the strengths and weaknesses of their writing. The explanations included here for the example papers are more detailed and are similar to those used in training readers to score the ACT Writing Test.*

Score Point 2

I believe high school is a great time for students to decide what they want for there future. Some need more time than others so I believe one more year of high school added is a good idea for some students. One more year of school will take stress off of many students because they won't have to cram packed schedules. This extra year will also give students more time to participate in sports, fine arts, or any type of clubs they're interested in.

I also believe that one more year of high school is unnecessary for some if they have already been accepted to colleges and know what they want to do with their future. I think if one more year of school is offered it should depend on your grades and what all you have done with the past four years that decides if you have to go another year. I believe you shouldn't have to if you have made A's and B's all four years, because you are ready to go on. This is just my view on things, I hope I have been of some assistance to your decision.

Scoring Explanation (Score = 2)

This essay demonstrates a weak response to the task. The writer takes a position on the issue with a qualification, thus showing a little recognition of multiple positions (*Some need more time than others so I believe one more year of high school added is a good idea for some students. . . . I also believe that one more year of high school is unnecessary for some if they have already been accepted to colleges and know what they want to do with their future*). The essay is thinly developed, with very little explanation to support each position (*One more year of school will take stress off of many students because they won't have to cram packed schedules. This extra year will also give students more time to participate in sports, fine arts, or any type of*



clubs. . . I believe you shouldn't have to if you have made A's and B's all four years, because you are ready to go on). Some organization is evident, as ideas related to each position are grouped in different parts of the essay, and a transition is used a few times. The introduction and conclusion are discernable but minimal statements without any development. Language use is sometimes simple and repetitive (*I also believe. . . I think. . . I believe*), with a little variety in sentence structure. Errors are sometimes distracting, but otherwise do not affect understanding.

Score Point 3

Educators debate extending high school to five years because of increasing demands on students from employers and colleges to participate in extracurricular activities and community service in addition to having high grades. Some educators support extending high school to five years because they think students need more time to achieve all that is expected of them. Other educators do not support extending high school to five years because they think students would lose interest in school and attendance would drop in the fifth year. Both sides have strong points, but I agree with the educators who say that their shouldn't be an extension to high school adding a fifth year.

I agree that high school should not be made up of a fifth year because I agree with those people who say that students would lose interest. Some adolescence are already losing interest in school and an increasing number of students are becoming dropouts. Being an high school student myself, it is hard and some students don't realize their full potential and think it is easier to give up than to succeed. I think adding an extra year to high school would increase the

number of dropouts a year, create very serious attendance dilemmas, and cause student's interest in school to decline.

I also feel that there should not be another year to high school because I just feel that it should be a job of the instructors at an high school to prepare us, high school students, for college within those four years of high school. I feel that creating another year to high school would decrease the teacher's interest and they would do a poor job and wait until the fifth year to make up for their mistakes. The teacher should have the need to do their best to prepare us for college and careers within the four years of high school.

I just think that five years is too long and students would get bored with school. Their drive would definitely decline. Students would lose interest and attendance would drop. The students would become dropouts.

Educators should not extend high school with a fifth year to fully prepare students for college.

Scoring Explanation (Score = 3)

This essay shows some understanding of the writing task. The writer takes a position on the issue (*Both sides have strong points, but I agree with the educators who say that their shouldn't be an extension to high school adding a fifth year*) and offers some context for discussion by repeating the prompt as an introduction. By providing the prompt as part of the essay, the writer acknowledges a counterargument but does not discuss it at all. Two main ideas are developed to support the writer's position (*. . . I agree with those people who say that students would lose interest. . . . I also feel that there should not be another year to high school because I just feel that it should be a job of the instructors at an high school to prepare us, high school*



students, for college within those four years of high school), with the first idea repeated twice in separate parts of the discussion (*I just think that five years is too long and students would get bored with school*). Discussion of each idea is limited to general statements never illustrated by specific reasons, examples, or details (*I feel that creating yet another year to high school would decrease the teacher's interest and they would do a poor job and wait until the fifth year to make up for their mistakes*), but the essay does maintain focus on the specific issue in the prompt. Organization is simple and clear but provides no evidence that ideas in the essay are logically sequenced within the discussion. Simple transitions connect the paragraphs (*I agree . . . I also feel . . . I just think . . .*) without making meaningful connections between ideas. The introduction and conclusion are clearly discernible as intentional frames for the discussion, but are underdeveloped—either because the language is merely repeated from the prompt or because the writer did not extend summation past a single conclusive statement. Language use shows some sentence variety (*Some adolescence are already loosing interest in school and an increasing number of students are becoming dropouts*) and appropriate word choice (*potential, succeed, attendance*). Some errors distract but do not impede understanding.

Score Point 4

There is often debate about education. Despite those who oppose the proposition, I think that extending high school to five years would have a positive effect on our nation. In addition to having an extra year to try more extracurricular activities and community service opportunities, it would allow people that cannot pay for a college education to further their education and have a chance to

land a better job. The extra year would certainly help high school students to achieve all that is expected of them.

Many high schoolers don't have time for extracurricular activities or community service. Adding a year to high school would help high schoolers in finding an activity or sport that is right for them. This would help students a lot. High schoolers in extracurricular activities have been proven to do better in school, partly because of pass-to-play rules. Extracurricular activities also help high schoolers make friends, who encourage teens to come to school and help make school more fun. Friends also help teens feel better about themselves. If out-of-school activities can help high schoolers so much, we should let them have more opportunities to get involved in them.

Another reason for extending the high school education is for people that can't afford to go to college right out of high school. Further education would help these people to get a leg up on competition when they apply for a job. A better job means better pay, so college may not just be a dream for these people. Also, another year would allow high achievers to do even better, seperating them from others. This would make it easier for colleges when it comes to selecting students for admission. It allows hard workers to appeal to colleges even if they are not rich.

Overall, a fifth year of high school would give us a better educated society. Employers would be less likely to hire someone with only four years of high school than someone with five years, thus increasing competition and driving student to stand out from the crowd. High schoolers that are serious about their future will have the opportunity to show this to colleges and employers. Extending high school is the right thing to do.



Scoring Explanation (Score = 4)

This essay offers an adequate response to the writing task. The writer offers a thin context for the discussion (*There is often debate about education*), takes a position on the issue (*I think that extending high school to five years would have a positive effect on our nation. . . . The extra year would certainly help high school students to achieve all that is expected of them*), and shows recognition of complexity by acknowledging counterargument (*Despite those who oppose the proposition . . .*). While the essay does not provide any response to counterargument, the development of ideas in support of the writer's position is adequate. The essay has two general ideas (*Adding a year to high school would help high schoolers in finding an activity or sport that is right for them. This would help students a lot. . . . Another reason for extending the high school education is for people that can't afford to go to college right out of high school*) that are developed with some specific reason and detail; the writer describes three examples to support the first idea that activities help students, and then discusses how an additional school year would benefit two different kinds of students (those who must take jobs after high school and those high achievers who may try for college scholarships) as explanation for the second idea that extending school would help people who can't afford to pay for college right out of high school. Organization is clear, with a somewhat developed introduction and conclusion and obvious transitions throughout the essay, both within and between paragraphs. Some logical sequencing of ideas is evident, as the writer first discusses how the extra year would help students during high school and next discusses how the extension will benefit students' activities after high school. Additional sequencing of ideas is discernable in the third paragraph as the writer explains how high achievers would benefit from more time in school

(*Also, another year would allow high achievers to do even better, separating them from others. This would make it easier for colleges when it comes to selecting students for admission. It allows hard workers to appeal to colleges even if they are not rich*). Language use shows some sentence variety and appropriate word choice (*proposition, encourage, opportunities, competition*). Errors do not impede understanding.

Score Point 5

The expectations of colleges are relative to the length of one's high school experience. Extending high school to five years, as some educators propose doing in order to reduce the pressure experienced by college-bound students, will in fact increase the pressure put on high schoolers, because colleges will expect even more. It is illogical to believe that college expectations will stay the same while high schools are granting their students a sort of extension.

When these expectations rise, it will not be impossible for dropout rates to skyrocket. Some students who do not plan to attend college may find five years of high school too long to wait before joining the work force, and leave school early, along with those who normally would not finish even a four year high school. The extended pressure would also set the stage for talented and intelligent students to "burn out" and lose sight of their goals, resulting in sad ends for high school careers that were promising before the extension year "improvement" was adopted. There may even be parents who disagree strongly and will remove their children from school. All of these factors would affect school attendance rates in a derogatory manner, which in turn hurts



funding, which in turn hurts every part of the system—especially the students.

Teaching, too, will suffer under this proposed extension. Already in this state there are teacher shortages in the public school system. In private schools, most teachers are working without a “free period” for six or seven classes. Yes, there are more and more teachers available each year, but they would not be enough to compensate for such an increased demand as a fifth year of high school would require. The caliber of teachers in the classrooms would inevitably decrease as schools scrape the bottom of the barrel in order to fill their quota. Undermining the quality of teaching hardly seems something that will better prepare students for high achievement, no matter how long they spend in the classroom.

I believe that extending high school to five years would not be a wise decision. Colleges will add more requirements to their already lengthy list of demands, high schoolers will be more apt to drop out, and teachers would be difficult to find, especially exemplary ones. Anyone of these factors should be enough to deter any high school from attempting this educational suicide, no matter how well-meaning the action would be.

Scoring Explanation (Score = 5)

This essay demonstrates competent skill in responding to the writing task. The writer offers context for the discussion and takes a position in the opening paragraph (*The expectations of colleges are relative to the length of one’s high school experience. Extending high school to five years, as some educators propose doing in order to reduce the pressure experienced by college-bound students, will in fact increase the pressure put on high schoolers, because colleges will expect even more*). The essay shows

recognition of complexity by anticipating and responding to counterargument to the writer’s position (*Yes, there are more and more teachers available each year, but they would not be enough to compensate for such an increased demand as a fifth year of high school would require*). The essay elaborates ideas through specific reasons, examples, and details (*Some students who do not plan to attend college may find five years of high school too long to wait before joining the work force, and leave school early, along with those who normally would not finish even a four year high school. . . . In private schools, most teachers are working without a “free period” for six or seven classes*). Moreover, development is logical, with each general claim not only supported with examples but also with discussion that leads to a more specific and critical conclusion (*When these expectations rise, it will not be impossible for dropout rates to skyrocket. . . . All of these factors would affect school attendance rates in a derogatory manner, which in turn hurts funding, which in turn hurts every part of the system—especially the students*). Organization of the essay is clear, with transitions both within and between paragraphs at times integrated within the discussion (*When these expectations rise . . . The extended pressure would also set the stage for . . . Anyone of these factors should be enough . . .*). The introduction and conclusion are clear and generally well developed, with the introduction developing the critical basis for the essay (*The expectations of colleges are relative to the length of one’s high school experience. . . . It is illogical to believe that college expectations will stay the same while high schools are granting their students a sort of extension*). Language is competent, with a variety of sentence constructions used and word choice that is both varied and precise (*relative, illogical, skyrocket, set the stage, inevitably*). The few errors are not distracting.



Score Point 6

When studying Maslow, Deming, and Taylor, one thing is clear: needs lead to motivation. If there is a need and a desire to learn, then the subject will be motivated enough to do so. Although educators debate whether to add a fifth year to the high school education, it is clear to see that school should not be extended another year; longevity is not the incorrect variable in the equation, motivation is.

Studies indicate that more and more American students are entering college with minimal requirements or are not attending college at all. Trends in test scores show students don't know what they should know. Meanwhile that malignant fad continues to rock our nation: the high school dropout. Yet who is to say that thirteen instead of twelve years of education will make a difference?

How many times as a student have you blamed a bad grade on an unfair test? Or as a parent how many times have you heard complaints from your teenager about the insufficient qualifications, and underdeveloped teaching techniques of his or her teacher as an explanation for a bad grade? Students have armed themselves with excuses for their academic performances that place the blame far from their own poor efforts. If students had motivation and a desire to learn instead of excuses, the duration of schooling could actually be cut down a couple of years instead of extended as some educators propose.

The problem in our school system is the way students approach their own education. I can attest that often students do work just for the grade and not to retain knowledge. Is that any way to learn? Perhaps that is why the United States is one of the nations with

the highest illiteracy rates. Although at times schools may be responsible for decisions not in the students' best interest (for example, the football coach teaching Geometry because the school could not afford to look for a better qualified employee), it's important to note that more often my fellow students and I may not care enough to put any effort into our own education, thus depriving ourselves of knowledge and a future.

While educators debate adding a year to high school, the real issue lies untouched and students' apathy remains unchallenged. Whether they spend twelve, thirteen, or thirty years in the educational system, nothing is more important than motivation in order for students to achieve all that is expected of them.

Scoring Explanation (Score = 6)

This essay shows a clear understanding of the writing task and demonstrates effective skill in responding to the prompt. The writer takes a position and offers a critical context for discussing the issue (*When studying Maslow, Deming, and Taylor, one thing is clear: needs lead to motivation. If there is a need and a desire to learn, then the subject will be motivated enough to do so. Although educators debate whether to add a fifth year to the high school education, it is clear to see that school should not be extended another year . . .*). The essay addresses complexity by fully responding to several counterarguments to the writer's position (*Studies indicate that more and more American students are entering college with minimal requirements or are not attending college at all. . . . Yet who is to say that thirteen instead of twelve years of education will make a difference? . . . Although at times schools may be responsible for decisions not in the students' best interest [for example, the football coach teaching Geometry because*



the school could not afford to look for a better qualified employee], it's important to note that more often my fellow students and I may not care enough to put any effort into our own education, thus depriving ourselves of knowledge and a future). Development of ideas is logical and specific; the writer's concise style and critical insight result in an essay that convincingly supports the main ideas as well as implies connection to further issues (*The problem in our school system is the way students approach their own education. I can attest that often students do work just for the grade and not to retain knowledge. Is that any way to learn? Perhaps that is why the United States is one of the nations with the highest illiteracy rates).* Organization of the essay is clear, deriving from the writer's purpose. From the beginning to the end, ideas proceed with logical sequencing to explore student motivation with sharp focus. The introduction and conclusion are clear and effective, emphasizing the need to revise the issue in order to account for lack of student motivation. The essay demonstrates a good command of language, using a variety of sentence constructions as well as varied and precise word choice (*longevity, insufficient qualifications, underdeveloped teaching techniques, duration of schooling).* There are few errors to distract the reader.



Part II

Scoring the ACT Writing Test

This section has been divided into two parts. The first part (pp. 15–35) will introduce you to the rubric and writing prompt, and show you an anchor set of six scored essay papers. The anchor set includes one paper at each of the six score points on the rubric. Each scored essay paper includes a score explanation, describing how the qualities of writing in the essay correspond to the Six-Point Holistic Rubric.

The second part of this section (pp. 36–49) provides a practice set of six papers for you to read and score on your own after you have studied the anchor set. A Scoring Key (pp. 50–52) for the practice papers, including a score explanation for each one, follows the practice set at the end.

The following sample essays have been compiled in order to offer you an opportunity to become familiar with the ACT Writing Test and how it is scored. Although the assortment of essays and discussions about scoring included here resemble training for readers of the operational ACT Writing Test, these materials are not designed to qualify you to rate essays or to qualify you to train others to rate essays. The materials lack the depth and rigor necessary to do so. Instead, these materials are designed to introduce you to the ACT Writing Test and to help you understand the meaning of the scoring criteria in the Six-Point Holistic Rubric.

The Scoring Rubric

The Six-Point Holistic Rubric for the ACT Writing Test was developed around five scoring criteria. The rubric evaluates essays on the evidence they demonstrate of student ability to:

- **Make judgments** – The Writing Test prompt asks writers to express an opinion about an issue. This requires students to evaluate the issue, decide their position, and articulate that judgment in their essay. This is different from other writing tasks which might only ask students to write a definition or a description. The rubric considers how well writers indicate an understanding of the task and how clearly writers articulate their position. An additional aspect of this criterion is recognition of the complexity of the issue. When making judgments about their position, students should appreciate that there are multiple valid perspectives on the issue, that each perspective has its own complications, and that choosing any one perspective over the others has implications.

The rubric considers whether writers demonstrate recognition of complexity by acknowledging more than their own perspective and to what extent writers engage with the complexity by discussing complications and/or implications, or responding to counterarguments to their position.

- **Develop a position** – The rubric considers how well writers explain their position through support and logical reasoning. It evaluates whether discussion moves between general statements and specific reasons, examples, and details. Also, the rubric assesses whether the essay demonstrates an ability to distinguish between assertions and evidence and to



make inferences based on support and evidence.

- **Maintain focus** – The rubric considers not only whether writers stay focused on the topic throughout the essay, but also whether writers focus their essay on the specific issue in the prompt or a more general topic from the prompt. Focusing on the specific issue in the prompt requires writers to identify and discuss the controversial aspect of the issue. For example, the prompt on page 19 asks writers to take a position on an issue concerning library subscriptions. The specific issue is whether libraries should spend limited funding on non-academic popular magazines. Students who focus discussion around these details demonstrate understanding of the controversy. Essays that focus on a more general topic suggested by the prompt, such as discussing why some magazines are interesting to students while others are not, do not demonstrate understanding of the controversy and therefore do not provide as critical a focus.
- **Organize ideas** – The rubric considers to what extent writers organize and present ideas in a logical way. This includes assessing whether ideas are logically grouped together and whether these groups are sequenced within the essay in such a way that each group of ideas builds on another. It also includes evaluating to what extent writers use transitional devices to make logical connections between ideas and to tie ideas together, and how well transitions are integrated into the essay. The presentation and effect of an introduction and conclusion for the discussion also contribute to the organization of ideas.
- **Communicate clearly** – The rubric assesses how effectively writers use written language. It considers the variety of

sentence structures employed and their effect, and it evaluates the effectiveness of word choice. A writer's command of language is evaluated by how much it enhances the expression of the writer's ideas. The rubric also considers how well writers observe the conventions of standard written English such as subject-verb agreement, pronoun-antecedent agreement, capitalization, spelling, and punctuation. If errors are present, assessment is made in relation to the **effect** of any error—whether it proves distracting or impedes understanding. Since the Writing Test is timed with limited opportunity for proofreading, the rubric allows for some language use error at every score point.

Close reading of the rubric reveals that each criterion is evaluated at each score point, with the expectation of the level of skill increasing for most criteria each time the score point increases.

Using the Scoring Rubric

The Six-Point Holistic Rubric for the Writing Test contains writing descriptors for each of the six levels on the scale. When you read an essay, you should compare the writing in the essay against the rubric's descriptors to understand what score best fits the essay.

Note that the rubric states, "Papers at each level exhibit **all** or **most** of the characteristics described at each score point." Not every paper will fit easily within the descriptors of a single score point. Sometimes writers will have particular strengths or weaknesses in their writing that are not consistent with the rest of their ability. This can result in an essay sharing descriptors with more than one score point. Since the Writing Test rubric is a holistic rubric—one that considers the total impression of a piece of writing rather than evaluating each trait separately—essays are



assigned the score point which best describes most of its characteristics.

When scoring essays with a holistic rubric, readers take note of what is done well and what errors are made—but only in terms of the resulting effect of those characteristics on the entire essay. This is very different from many classrooms where student writing is expected to correctly demonstrate each skill covered in the curriculum. Many teachers grade classroom work analytically, assessing each aspect of a student’s writing and giving it an independent score. This type of scoring isolates various components of writing and is helpful when working with students who are learning or trying to improve skills. Since the ACT Writing Test is designed to measure overall writing ability, such meticulous evaluation of individual skills is not desired so much as assessment of the effectiveness of a piece of writing as a whole.

Some essays written for the ACT Writing Test may display some characteristics teachers do not often see in classroom writing assignments that provide students with more extensive opportunities for revising and editing their work. This does not mean that these essays necessarily earn a low score. For example, an essay may not use paragraph breaks, offering one long, uninterrupted block of writing. Lack of paragraphing in an essay can indicate a lack of organization of ideas, characteristic of a low-scoring essay. Yet the essay that lacks paragraph breaks may still demonstrate logical sequencing of ideas and integrated transitions, characteristics of a high-scoring essay. In this case, the lack of paragraphs would be a little distracting to a reader, but would not otherwise affect the essay—and

therefore would not affect the essay’s score. An essay without paragraphs could receive a high score if the rest of its characteristics fit the descriptors of that score point. No single scoring feature should prevent an essay from being placed at a score point where most of that essay’s characteristics fall.



Six-Point Holistic Rubric for the ACT Writing Test

Papers at each level exhibit all or most of the characteristics described at each score point.

Score = 6 Essays within this score range demonstrate effective skill in responding to the task.

The essay shows a clear understanding of the task. The essay takes a position on the issue and may offer a critical context for discussion. The essay addresses complexity by examining different perspectives on the issue, or by evaluating the implications and/or complications of the issue, or by fully responding to counterarguments to the writer's position. Development of ideas is ample, specific, and logical. Most ideas are fully elaborated. A clear focus on the specific issue in the prompt is maintained. The organization of the essay is clear: the organization may be somewhat predictable or it may grow from the writer's purpose. Ideas are logically sequenced. Most transitions reflect the writer's logic and are usually integrated into the essay. The introduction and conclusion are effective, clear, and well developed. The essay shows a good command of language. Sentences are varied and word choice is varied and precise. There are few, if any, errors to distract the reader.

Score = 5 Essays within this score range demonstrate competent skill in responding to the task.

The essay shows a clear understanding of the task. The essay takes a position on the issue and may offer a broad context for discussion. The essay shows recognition of complexity by partially evaluating the implications and/or complications of the issue, or by responding to counterarguments to the writer's position. Development of ideas is specific and logical. Most ideas are elaborated, with clear movement between general statements and specific reasons, examples, and details. Focus on the specific issue in the prompt is maintained. The organization of the essay is clear, although it may be predictable. Ideas are logically sequenced, although simple and obvious transitions may be used. The introduction and conclusion are clear and generally well developed. Language is competent. Sentences are somewhat varied and word choice is sometimes varied and precise. There may be a few errors, but they are rarely distracting.

Score = 4 Essays within this score range demonstrate adequate skill in responding to the task.

The essay shows an understanding of the task. The essay takes a position on the issue and may offer some context for discussion. The essay may show some recognition of complexity by providing some response to counterarguments to the writer's position. Development of ideas is adequate, with some movement between general statements and specific reasons, examples, and details. Focus on the specific issue in the prompt is maintained throughout most of the essay. The organization of the essay is apparent but predictable. Some evidence of logical sequencing of ideas is apparent, although most transitions are simple and obvious. The introduction and conclusion are clear and somewhat developed. Language is adequate, with some sentence variety and appropriate word choice. There may be some distracting errors, but they do not impede understanding.

Score = 3 Essays within this score range demonstrate some developing skill in responding to the task.

The essay shows some understanding of the task. The essay takes a position on the issue but does not offer a context for discussion. The essay may acknowledge a counterargument to the writer's position, but its development is brief or unclear. Development of ideas is limited and may be repetitious, with little, if any, movement between general statements and specific reasons, examples, and details. Focus on the general topic is maintained, but focus on the specific issue in the prompt may not be maintained. The organization of the essay is simple. Ideas are logically grouped within parts of the essay, but there is little or no evidence of logical sequencing of ideas. Transitions, if used, are simple and obvious. An introduction and conclusion are clearly discernible but underdeveloped. Language shows a basic control. Sentences show a little variety and word choice is appropriate. Errors may be distracting and may occasionally impede understanding.

Score = 2 Essays within this score range demonstrate inconsistent or weak skill in responding to the task.

The essay shows a weak understanding of the task. The essay may not take a position on the issue, or the essay may take a position but fail to convey reasons to support that position, or the essay may take a position but fail to maintain a stance. There is little or no recognition of a counterargument to the writer's position. The essay is thinly developed. If examples are given, they are general and may not be clearly relevant. The essay may include extensive repetition of the writer's ideas or of ideas in the prompt. Focus on the general topic is maintained, but focus on the specific issue in the prompt may not be maintained. There is some indication of an organizational structure, and some logical grouping of ideas within parts of the essay is apparent. Transitions, if used, are simple and obvious, and they may be inappropriate or misleading. An introduction and conclusion are discernible but minimal. Sentence structure and word choice are usually simple. Errors may be frequently distracting and may sometimes impede understanding.

Score = 1 Essays within this score range show little or no skill in responding to the task.

The essay shows little or no understanding of the task. If the essay takes a position, it fails to convey reasons to support that position. The essay is minimally developed. The essay may include excessive repetition of the writer's ideas or of ideas in the prompt. Focus on the general topic is usually maintained, but focus on the specific issue in the prompt may not be maintained. There is little or no evidence of an organizational structure or of the logical grouping of ideas. Transitions are rarely used. If present, an introduction and conclusion are minimal. Sentence structure and word choice are simple. Errors may be frequently distracting and may significantly impede understanding.

No Score = 0 Blank, Off-Topic, Illegible, Not in English, or Void.



Anchor Set

This anchor set includes one paper at each of the six score points on the rubric. Each scored essay includes a score explanation, describing how the qualities of writing in the essay correspond to one of the score points on the Six-Point Holistic Rubric.

Anchor papers should be considered an extension of the rubric. Anchor papers illustrate the scoring characteristics at each score point. For example, descriptors at score point 4 in the rubric indicate that, in papers at this level, “Language is adequate, with some sentence variety and appropriate word choice.” In order for readers to score correctly, they must understand what “adequate” language is, how much variety qualifies as “some sentence variety,” and what word choice is considered “appropriate.” What you consider adequate language in your classroom may not be the same as the language written in the score point 4 anchor paper. For the purposes of reading and assessing essays written for the ACT Writing Test, readers must suspend their own definition of what they consider “adequate” and use the definition illustrated by the score point 4 anchor paper.

Readers who score operational essays for the ACT Writing Test are given anchor sets that contain multiple papers at each score point in order to refine their understanding of such definitions in the rubric. This anchor set includes one paper at each score point and is designed only to help you understand the process of scoring and how an anchor is used. You should not expect to have a refined understanding of all descriptors in the rubric after studying this anchor set.

The essays in the anchor set have been written on the following prompt:

Anchor Set Example Prompt

Many high school libraries use some of their limited funding to subscribe to popular magazines with articles that are interesting to students. Despite limited funding, some educators support this practice because they think having these magazines available encourages students to read. Other educators think school libraries should not use limited funds to subscribe to these magazines because they may not be related to academic subjects. In your opinion, should high school libraries use some of their limited funding to subscribe to popular magazines?

In your essay, take a position on this question. You may write about either one of the two points of view given, or you may present a different point of view on this question. Use specific reasons and examples to support your position.



Anchor Paper A

Score = 1

Begin WRITING TEST here.

The funding should be used to buy magazines. Some magazines are only for entertainment but some talk about politics and the world. Even the more popular magazine for kids will be chosen, its still the best thing to do. Students like to read about what tells them what movie stars lives are like.

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Anchor Paper A

Score Point 1

Scoring Explanation

This essay shows little engagement with the prompt task. The writer does take a clear position (*The funding should be used to buy magazines*) but little is developed in support of that position. Two ideas are offered (*Some magazines are only for entertainment but some talk about politics and the world* and *Students like to read about what tells them what movie stars lives are like*). Both ideas are left unexplored and unexplained. No organization is evident. Where transitions are used (*even, still*) the language is most unclear. No introduction or conclusion is present unless the statement of position is considered an introduction. Language in the essay begins clear but later becomes hard to understand. Errors partly contribute to this difficulty, but some of it is due to illogical sequencing.



Anchor Paper B

Score = 2

Begin WRITING TEST here.

Popular magazines would be a good thing, it would pull students into the library and encourage them to read. Some articles in magazines have nothing to do with school, but it still encourages them to read. More. Reading is education, no matter if its talking about academics or not.

Many of the subjects in the magazine are school related. If an article is about a girl from another country talking about how she lives, that's school related because it has to do with geography. If its an article about some part of the body, then it has to do with science.

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Anchor Paper B

Score Point 2

Scoring Explanation

Essays that earn a score of 2 demonstrate either weak or inconsistent skill in responding to the issue. In this essay, the writer takes a clear position (*Popular magazines would be a good thing*) and offers specific reasons (*it would pull students into the library and encourage them to read* and *Many of the subjects in the magazine are school related*) but development of these reasons is thin. The writer does attempt to explain the second claim with examples (*If an article is about a girl from another country . . . that's . . . geography. If it's . . . the body, then . . . science*), but much more is needed. The second paragraph might be understood to be responding to a counterargument from the prompt that the magazines aren't related to academic subjects. If so, it is a faint reference that should be clearer. The essay indicates organizational structure by separating the two ideas into two separate paragraphs. However, there is no discernable introduction or conclusion. Language use in the essay contains a variety of errors that distract the reader, including a run-on sentence, disagreements of subject and verb, and several misspellings.



Anchor Paper C

Score = 3

Begin WRITING TEST here.

I feel that schools should not subscribe to popular magazines. Sometimes the magazine articles are misleading and don't tell the truth. And some students may not know between right and wrong. I get Seventeen magazine every month. There are some subjects in the articles that I feel should not be allowed, or maybe edited. I've had put in College Searches which are helpful, but other articles have ~~boys~~^{girls} talking about things that are not right. Not everybody should be reading them. Why should schools subscribe to magazines that have articles that are not right. These articles could make teenagers spend too much time thinking about things that are misleading or not right or a waste of time. Teenagers are sometimes too young to read some of the articles that the popular magazines have.

Also, popular magazines will not help students to be encouraged to read. Popular magazines have short articles that are based on opinion and

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gossip and they are filled with quizzes and advertisements and how to lose weight. The advertisements show skinny girls and the articles about losing weight are not good. They are bad for teenagers to see and to read. And the other articles are a waste of time too because they are full of gossip and mostly pictures. If school libraries really want to help students, they need to subscribe to magazines that are academic, like Time and National Geographic.

There is no reason to subscribe to any other kind of popular magazines. If schools libraries did, they would find that popular magazines give students something to do instead of the research they should use the library for. It would be a great expense for hanging out to just look at magazines with their funds. School libraries should not subscribe to popular magazines, especially when funding is limited.



Anchor Paper C

Score Point 3

Scoring Explanation

Essays that earn a score point of 3 show developing skill in responding to the task. This essay takes a clear position but does not provide any context for the discussion. A counterargument taken from the prompt is vaguely referenced and refuted (*popular magazines will not help students to be encouraged to read*), but further clarification is needed to explain why short, gossipy articles are of no use in encouraging students to read. The essay contains limited movement between general statements and specific examples (*The have put in college searches which are helpful*). Focus on the specific issue of the prompt wavers because of the somewhat vague discussion the writer gives on the general, negative aspects of popular magazines (*These articles could make teenagers spend too much time thinking about things that are misleading or not right or a waist of time*). All the ideas would benefit from more development. This writer's ideas are grouped logically throughout the essay. There is only a single use of a transition (*Also*). The opening and closing sentences clearly signal an introduction and conclusion, but they lack development. The language usage in this essay demonstrates basic control. Sentences are somewhat varied in length and structure, and words are used correctly. Errors are at times distracting.



Anchor Paper D

Score = 4

Begin WRITING TEST here.

High school libraries have a very limited fund. The big question is how do they spend the fund. Some people think only the magazines that are about academics should be bought, but others point out that if students are interested in what is being read, they will read more, learn more and like school more. This second group is exactly right.

First, anytime someone reads, their learning. Studies show that students who read thirty minutes a day in their free time perform better than those who don't. Students are not going to want to pick up Shakespeare in their study hall, they're going to pick up "Seventeen". If you want them to get in that thirty minutes, you have to give them something they will actually open and look at. Remember it's not what we're reading, it's just the reading that counts.

Also, popular magazines can help students learn about current events. ~~It is~~ It's important to keep up with information that hasn't had time to get in the textbooks yet. Many popular magazines contain articles about new health discoveries, wars and events in other

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countries, and can even provide resources for research papers. This is important for our education.

Most importantly, popular magazines offer a break from the stress of schoolwork. After hours of listening to lectures and taking tests, people need to relax by reading something fun. If there is nothing fun to read, a bad attitude could develop toward libraries and school. This could hurt students much more than it would "hurt" us to read about movie stars and new music during study hall.

In conclusion, for students' mental health, knowledge and love of reading, popular magazines should stay in our library. While some people may want to debate ~~it~~ the issue, the right decision is clear. Interesting magazines are important for students in lots of ^{ways.} ~~ways.~~



Anchor Paper D

Score Point 4

Scoring Explanation

Essays that earn a score of 4 demonstrate adequate skill in responding to the task. This essay takes a position on the issue presented in the prompt, but first offers a context for the discussion, and recognizes two different perspectives. The essay offers three ideas to support the writer's position (*anytime someone reads, their learning; popular magazines can help students learn about current events; and popular magazines offer a break*) with adequate development of each. The writer moves ably between general statements and some specific details (*Shakespeare . . . "Seventeen" . . . health discoveries, wars . . . hours listening to lectures and taking tests*) and maintains focus throughout the discussion. The essay is clearly organized around a simple but predictable 5-paragraph framework. While the transitions are simple and obvious (*First, Also, Most importantly, In conclusion*), they are at least effective in moving the reader through the essay. The introduction and conclusion are clear and somewhat developed, with the introduction offering much necessary information to set up the discussion. The conclusion makes very clear the writer's position and reasoning. Language is adequate, with a variety of sentence constructions and correct word usage. Language errors—mostly spelling—are somewhat distracting.



Anchor Paper E

Score = 5

Begin WRITING TEST here.

High school libraries have a ~~dilemma~~ dilemma on their hands. Should they buy popular magazines as well as academic books and publications? In a perfect world, our school library would be able to offer everything that's possible and appropriate. But with budget limits throughout the school system, the administration must be sure they're making the best choices of books and magazines, so magazines like "Teen People" and "YM" should not be paid for instead of educational books and publications.

The purpose of school, and school libraries, is learning. Supporters of popular magazines argue that there is something to be learned from any reading material, but I believe some kinds of learning are more important to students' futures than other kinds. If the school library has to choose between teaching teenage girls about the achievements of Harriet Tubman and letting them read about their favorite movie star, I know which one I would vote for.

Furthermore, one of the school library's most important functions is offering students the learning resources they might not be able to find or afford on their own. Everybody would agree the school library should have Internet access for the people who don't have a computer at home.

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Shouldn't the library also offer full sets of encyclopedia, hard cover books and high quality magazines like "National Geographic" to students who can't buy all these materials, especially when they may only need them for one paper all year? On the other hand, anybody can spend \$3.99 at the drugstore to find out about Justin Timberlake's love life if they want to. The school library shouldn't have to finance that. If you're in study hall and you have an urgent celebrity trivia question that just can't wait, you can always use the Internet, at no extra cost to the school.

Reading for pleasure is a great thing, and one of my personal favorite leisure activities, but magazines just for entertainment shouldn't be a priority for school libraries. Learning is the reason for school, and should ~~be~~ be first in mind as this decision is made. When funding is so limited, the school library must always put learning materials first.



Anchor Paper E

Score Point 5

Scoring Explanation

This essay shows a clear understanding of the task. The writer takes a position (*“Teen People” and “YM” should not be paid for instead of educational books and publications*) after establishing a broad context for discussion (*In a perfect world, our school library would be able to offer everything that’s possible and appropriate. But with budget limits throughout the school system, the administration must be sure they’re making the best choices*). The essay shows recognition of complexity by responding succinctly to counterarguments to the writer’s position (*Supporters of popular magazines argue that there is something to be learned from any reading material, but I believe some kinds of learning are more important to students futures than other kinds*). Development of the discussion is specific, with clear movement between claims and the details that explain and support them. Development is also logical, assisted by strong, integrated transitions and carefully sequenced ideas. The introduction and conclusion are both clear and generally well developed, offering needed context and added emphasis to clarify the argument. Language is highly competent and engaging, with a lot of sentence variety and some word precision (*urgent celebrity trivia question*). Errors are minimally distracting.



Anchor Paper F

Score = 6

WRITING TEST

High schools nowadays are struggling to draw the line between what is "educational" and what is not. School programs are cut based on how much educational content they're perceived to have. Now the administration is trying to purge libraries of popular magazines because they contain non-academic subjects. It's important that the library buy dictionaries and encyclopedias, but education purists need to be reminded that if you separate "academic" from "non-academic" too strictly, you separate school from the real world it's supposed to prepare us for.

Educators are the ones who tell us we should spend more time reading. The only way to build the reading comprehension and vocabulary skills so important for getting into and through college is to practice, and that means reading things other than school assignments. No one ever gained reading proficiency from daily struggles through their Chemistry or History textbooks. We read these because we have to, but we would continue reading — even during precious homework-free moments — if we had something interesting to turn to. The magazines that teenagers enjoy reading are the ones that cover our interests and address our concerns, like "Seventeen" or "Teen People". These are the magazines that some would banish from the library.



It's true that not every page in youth magazines is an intellectual challenge. Many pages show models selling zit cream, or contain "dream date" quizzes. But the critics of popular magazines should take a closer look at them. These same magazines have articles on suicide prevention, the spread of AIDS among teens, and college comparisons — subjects that the adult oriented news media doesn't cover.

Even the frivolous features have something to teach the reader who wants to learn. All those "Great Looks Cheap" may be a first step toward becoming a smarter consumer. The silly quiz may open up questions about the nature of "scientific proof" or lead to more self-knowledge.

Learning is where you find it, and students may find it in places administrators and librarians might not think to look. Learning can be found in popular magazines as well as approved academic texts. There should be ~~more~~ room in the school library for both.



Anchor Paper F

Score Point 6

Scoring Explanation

Essays that earn a score point of 6 demonstrate a clear understanding and effective performance of the persuasive task. The writer takes a clear position, develops it throughout the essay, and states it directly in the conclusion (*Learning can be found in popular magazines as well as approved academic texts*). This position is placed in a wider context without disrupting the essay's focus (*High schools nowadays are struggling to draw the line between what is "educational" and what is not. School programs are cut based on how much educational content they're perceived to have*).

The essay addresses complexity by anticipating counterarguments to the writer's position (*It's true that not every page in youth magazines is an intellectual challenge . . . even the frivolous features have something to teach the reader who wants to learn*) and fully responding to those counterarguments by showing specifically where they are weak (*These same magazines have articles on suicide prevention, the spread of AIDS among teens, and college comparisons—subjects that the adult oriented news media doesn't cover*).

The writer's ideas may not be developed evenly over all the paragraphs, but their development is succinct and logical. The essay elaborates general statements (*Even the frivolous features have something to teach the reader who wants to learn*) by moving to more specific details and examples (*All those "Great Looks Cheap" may be a first step toward becoming a smarter consumer*).

The organization of the essay is clear and the logical sequence of ideas grows out of the writer's intent to persuade. Transitions help the essay flow smoothly from one paragraph to the next (*It's true that not every page in youth magazines is an intellectual challenge . . . even the frivolous features have something to teach the reader who wants to learn*). The introduction is clear and especially well developed, connecting the writer's position to a strong critical claim (*if you separate "academic" from "non-academic" too strictly, you separate school from the real world it's supposed to prepare us for*).

This essay shows a good command of language. Word choice is precise and persuasive (*purge the libraries* and *frivolous features*). Facility with words and sentence structure enables the writer to maintain a light, amused tone (*The silly quiz may open up questions about the nature of "scientific proof" or lead to more self-knowledge*). There are few errors in this essay, and they scarcely distract the reader.



Practice Set

This practice set of six papers is for you to read and score on your own after you have studied the scoring criteria, rubric, and anchor set of papers. Read each paper. Then, compare it against the descriptors in the rubric and the anchor papers for each score point. Finally, assign the paper the score that most accurately describes its writing characteristics. A Scoring Key for all the practice papers, including a score explanation for each one, follows the essays.

The purpose of the practice set is to provide an opportunity for you to work with the rubric in relation to student writing. This group of papers is not intended to train you to read and score essays. Actual readers undergo extensive training which includes as many as five practice sets of 10–15 papers each plus qualifying test sets and compulsory recalibration sets.



Begin WRITING TEST here.

High school libraries use some of their funding to subscribe to popular magazines with articles that are interesting to students. Some educators support this because they think magazines encourage students to read. Other educators think libraries should not subscribe to magazines because they are not related to academic subjects. Many kids today do not like to read. They find that reading is boring and a waste of time. I think that high school libraries should supply students with magazines that students enjoy reading.

First, many students hate reading material which is forced upon us. This reading becomes boring. Most students only read when they have to. If a student reads something unfavorable, he or she may not really focus on what they are reading, therefore it is not as good an education as if he or she enjoyed what they were reading.

Many male students enjoy reading sports magazines. Often these magazines are written on a high level of reading. This may not be an academic subject, but the reader is

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enjoying what he or she is reading and it is on a high reading level therefore, he or she is learning as well as being entertained by the same material. just because the material was not academic doesn't mean that nothing can be gained from it.

Also, high school libraries could also put in other things besides magazines that students enjoy reading that is at a high level of reading, so again students will be learning while they are being entertained.

In conclusion, I think that high school libraries should supply students with magazines that they enjoy reading so that they will read and learn.



Begin WRITING TEST here.

This is what I think about schools buying popular magazines for the librarys.

If it doesn't have pornography, violence, or drugs, it should be okay, I don't have a problem with magazines that are not related to academics. What could be wrong with magazines? There's nothing wrong with magazines!

They have exciting stuff in them and funny stuff in them and every one likes that. I sold magazines for school when I was in middle school, we made alot of money for my school. They were good magazines.

Everyone liked them a lot. You can see why I think they are okay. There is to much violence and drugs and pornography on TV but magazines are okay for schools.

I think everyone agrees with me that there is nothing wrong with them. When you go to the doctor and dentist every one has a magazine to read so you can see, everyone does have magazines.

That's my opinion about popular magazines in schools. They are a good thing for raising money and there is nothing wrong with them in librarys.



Paper I

Begin WRITING TEST here.

I believe that the school librarians should subscribe to popular magazines that kids like, even though they aren't related to academic subjects. Sports magazines, car magazines, teen magazines are all educational.

It's very smart to order magazines because it also gets students into the library and from there who knows we could read a book or two. That would be good.

Limiting funds would not be a bad thing because there are a lot of junk magazines out there that have no education, and are not even readable, all they have is pictures, which does no good.

I think there is probably one thing wrong with getting popular magazines for students to read, because they probably have a lot of violence and students shouldn't be reading too much violence because it gets all into their heads and makes them do crazy things. Parents don't want that either. They don't want magazines that have violence

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That makes these kids go crazy at home or school. Some magazines aren't right for students.



Begin WRITING TEST here.

High schools should most definitely include popular magazines in their libraries. It doesn't matter if they are related to academic subjects or not because the most important thing is that the students are spending some of their time reading. When we read, increase our reading comprehension and build better vocabulary. And if students are interested in the subject matter, they will want to continue reading more.

For example, some students would never voluntarily choose to pick up a copy of National Geographic or Discovery. They wouldn't enjoy the articles because they would seem too much like their classes. But if libraries subscribed to magazines kids could relate to, like Teen, Ebony, Jet, etc., I believe students would read more, and might even pick up a good magazine now and then.

Another reason that schools should consider popular magazines is because they can help students with a respite from academic stress. After spending an hour

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researching a term paper, its a good thing to be able to relax and read something light. This can keep kids from burning out. If they are not reading, they will goof off and cause trouble to let off steam. Nobody can stay in school every day all week without a few minutes to relax.

To conclude, subscribing to popular magazines would be a good benefit for all students. For one, it would give students a choice to reward themselves after a long session in the library doing academic work. More importantly, it would encourage teens to read more, thereby increasing their all important reading skills.



Begin WRITING TEST here.

Our schools are in crisis. Funds have been slashed for music, art, and extracurricular programs. School libraries are no exception. Educators must make difficult choices about how to spend limited amounts of money in the most judicious way possible. One debate focuses on library materials. Some argue that a portion of the funding should be used to purchase popular magazines, since this will encourage students to read more. Others believe that those funds should only be used for magazines that relate to academic subjects. I believe that tough times call for tough decisions. Even though popular magazines serve a purpose, school libraries need to concentrate on providing periodicals that contribute to students' academic performance.

Like most students at my school, I plan on attending college and will be competing with my counterparts for scholarships. This means that my academic performance must be stellar. Because I take a full load of classes, I have little time for research. When I do get a free period, I need to accomplish as much as possible during that time. It is important to me that my school library has a large

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collection of scientific journals and news magazines that provide up-to-date information about contemporary issues or in-depth discussions about cultural events. Today's popular magazines simply take up valuable space that could be put to better use. Adventure Magazine may have an amusing article or two, but give me Smithsonian any day!

I do not mean to imply that I never read the popular press. I do. Although my most important goal is to succeed academically, I have my share of interest about film stars, and "what's hot." To paraphrase Oprah, "Yes, I do care about global warming, but I also care about how to keep my nails looking their best. I enjoy many popular magazines; I ~~just~~ just don't think they should be a priority for our school library, when funding is so tight.

Additionally, I believe that the educators who argue for having popular magazines in the library, have their point. Regardless of subject matter, reading is beneficial. If having such magazines would encourage students who otherwise don't read to do so, then I might agree that they would be of some value.

Unfortunately, I doubt that it will. Those who want to read them can find them at numerous locations. Those who don't will be no more likely to pick up a copy of People magazine in the school library than in the checkout line at the grocery.

Perhaps some day our economy will recover and more money will be allocated to education

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than to armaments. Then our school libraries will have the luxury of subscribing to every periodical they want... popular magazines as well as more academic ones. Until then we must make the tough decisions. If we must tighten our belts, I vote to keep the meat and potatoes and skip dessert.



Begin WRITING TEST here.

Because of limited funding, educators are currently debating whether they should provide students with popular magazines or whether they should reserve library space for periodicals that are related to academic subjects. I believe that it's important to provide popular literature in the form of magazines to high school students. Although at first glance one might assume that it is important for a school to provide exclusively educational materials, it is essential that we consider the larger picture before making a decision.

First of all, when students are given materials they are interested in, they are more likely to read. It's not the content of the material but the amount of reading that you do that makes a difference. The more you read, the more valuable language skills such as writing and vocabulary improve. Better language skills can mean not only better performance in

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college and in a job, these better language skills make the difference between acceptance and rejection when applying for college or when being interviewed for a job.

Secondly, many students do not enjoy school because they are not interested in the subject matter. Although popular magazines won't necessarily make them like their English lit class any better, it may help them tolerate the school environment more, or help them develop a fondness for libraries which could give them a lifelong enjoyment of reading for pleasure. It could also keep some students from dropping out of school.

In addition, articles in popular magazines may inspire some students in their career selections. For example, reading an article about how foods high in vitamins A and C can improve your skin might inspire you to become a nutritionist. Taking a personality quiz in Teen Magazine might make someone decide to study Psychology or Education due to a new found interest in how humans think and act. Reading popular magazines could even inspire you to be a journalist, photographer,

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or graphic designer.

In conclusion, although magazines that focus on academic areas are very important, and need to be included in school

libraries, popular magazines should also be available for students. These magazines can help improve language skills, promote a life long love of reading for pleasure, and can even inspire some students to select a career path.



Scoring Key

Practice Papers G–L

Paper G

Score Point = 3

This essay demonstrates developing writing skill. The writer takes a clear position (*I think that high school libraries should supply students with magazines that students enjoy reading*). The writer provides a context to introduce the discussion, although most of it is a repetition of the prompt. The writer addresses a counterargument in the third paragraph, but does not provide enough context to clearly present the writer's intention (*Just because the material was not academic doesn't mean that nothing can be gained from it*). Two ideas are developed in the essay, but their explanations are limited and remain very general. A third idea is offered but it is undeveloped and repetitive (*libraries could also put in other things besides magazines that students enjoy reading . . . students will be learning while they are being entertained*). The organization is simple and somewhat clear; introductory material, the three ideas, and a short conclusion are grouped appropriately. The essay unsuccessfully attempts logical sequencing; the transition (*therefore*) causes grammatical errors both times it is used. The introduction and conclusion are appropriate but the conclusion is underdeveloped. Language use shows basic control, although the writer overuses simple sentence structure and sometimes loses clarity in longer sentence constructions. Few errors impede understanding.

Paper H

Score Point = 1

Scoring Explanation

Essays which earn a score point of 1 are often undeveloped, and this essay is a good example. The essay takes a position on the issue (*I don't have a problem with magazines that are not related to academics*) but achieves little else. Development of ideas is repetitive (*What could be wrong with magazines? There's nothing wrong with magazines!*) The essay loses focus when the writer, in an attempt to develop a few more ideas, discusses magazine selling (*I sold magazines for school . . . we made alot of money*) and the general availability of magazines (*When you go to the doctor and dentist every one has a magazine*) which lack connection to the topic. This essay also demonstrates an inability to organize ideas; instead each undeveloped idea is stated in a few short sentences which have little relation to each other and are not logically sequenced (*There is to much violence and drugs and pornography on TV but magazines are okay for schools*). The opening phrase and the last paragraph serve as an introduction and conclusion but they are minimal and contribute little toward the formation of an organized, coherent essay. The essay includes some distracting errors, but they do not impede understanding.

Paper I

Score Point = 2

Scoring Explanation

This essay demonstrates weak skill. Although the writer takes a clear position in the first paragraph (*I believe that school libraries should subscribe to popular magazines that kids like*), by the third paragraph the writer's stance waivers (*Limiting funds would not be a*



bad thing because there are a lot of junk magazines). By the end of the paper, the writer has moved completely to the other side of the argument (*popular magazines . . . probably have a lot of violence and students shouldn't be reading too much violence because it gets all into their heads and makes them do crazy things*). The essay is thinly developed. Although there are several ideas presented on both sides of the issue, none are explained. The writer's use of paragraphs does indicate an awareness of organizational structure, but the sequence of paragraphs could be modified with little effect on the development of the essay. There is a weak attempt to include some transitional words (*because*), but logical sequencing of ideas is poor. Language control is weak at the sentence level. Errors are distracting, but they do not impede understanding.

Paper J

Score Point = 4

Scoring Explanation

This essay takes a clear position on the prompt issue (*High schools should most definitely include popular magazines in their libraries*) and maintains its focus throughout the essay. The writer gives the reader some explanation of why this idea is controversial and responds briefly to the opposition (*It doesn't matter if they are related to academic subjects or not because the most important thing is that the students are spending some of their time reading. . . . And if students are interested in the subject matter, they will want to continue reading more*). The development of ideas is adequate and balanced, and there is some movement between general statements and more specific details (*they can help students with a respite from academic stress. After spending an hour researching a term paper, its a good thing to be able to relax and read something light*).

This essay's organization, though simple, is easy to follow. Ideas are sequenced logically, and there are obvious transitions marking each paragraph (*For example, Another reason, In conclusion*). The introduction is clear and shows some development. The conclusion is slightly less developed but functions adequately to restate the essay's main points, and ends the discussion with a decisive statement.

The essay demonstrates an adequate command of language. Though a few of the sentences are awkward (*It doesn't matter if they are related to academic subjects or not because the most important thing is that the students are spending some of their time reading*), they do show some variety in length and structure. Word choice is appropriate and in some instances specific (*a respite from academic stress, all-important reading skills*). There are a few errors, but none that impede understanding.

Paper K

Score Point = 6

Scoring Explanation

Essays that earn a score of 6 demonstrate clear understanding and effective skill in responding to the task. This essay focuses on a clear position (*school libraries need to concentrate on providing periodicals that contribute to students' academic performance*), while setting the issue in a wider context (*Educators must make difficult choices about how to spend limited amounts of money in the most judicious way possible*). The essay addresses the complexity of the issue by anticipating counterarguments to the writer's position (*Regardless of subject matter, reading is beneficial*) and refuting them thoroughly (*Those who want to read them can find them at numerous locations. Those who don't will be no more likely to pick up a copy of People magazine in the school*).



library than in the checkout line at the grocery).

The writer's ideas are amply and logically developed. Each paragraph shows general ideas (*I do not mean to imply that I never read the popular press*) refined by the use of specifics (*To paraphrase Oprah, "Yes, I do care about global warming, but I also care about how to keep my nails looking their best."*).

The organization of the essay is clear. The writer's ideas are logically sequenced and transitions are well integrated (*Although my most important goal is to succeed academically, I have my share of interest about film stars, and "what's hot"*). The introduction is well developed and introduces the theme of a budget crisis for schools, which is carried throughout the essay. The conclusion may not be as developed as some of the other paragraphs, but it effectively restates this theme to make the essay a satisfying whole.

The writer demonstrates a good command of language. Sentences are varied in length and structure so that the essay reads smoothly. Word choice is precise and persuasive (*Funds have been slashed . . . , my academic performance must be stellar*). The metaphor at the end sums up the argument (*If we must tighten our belts, I vote to keep the meat and potatoes and skip dessert*). There are few, if any, language usage errors in this essay.

Paper L

Score Point = 5

Scoring Explanation

This essay takes a clear position (*I believe that it's important to provide popular literature in the form of magazines to high school students*), provides a context for the discussion (*Because of limited funding, educators are currently debating whether*

they should provide students with popular magazines or whether they should reserve library space), and focuses the discussion on a more critical plane (*it is essential that we consider the larger picture*)—all in the opening paragraph. The writer acknowledges a counterargument immediately (*Although at first glance one might assume that it is important for a school to provide exclusively educational materials*) and then goes on to incorporate a response to the counterargument within the development of other ideas (*It's not the content of the material but the amount of reading that you do that makes a difference*).

There is logical development of ideas in this essay, especially within each paragraph. Each idea is explained through a combination of general statements and specific examples. The writer maintains good critical focus on discussing how popular magazines can affect students in relation to "the larger picture." (*Taking a personality quiz in Teen Magazine might make someone decide to study Psychology . . . due to a new found interest in how humans think and act*). However, while the essay elaborates most ideas, it does not explain a few (*It could keep also some students from dropping out of school*). Obvious transitions do a lot of the work of sequencing between paragraphs in this essay (*First of all, Secondly, In addition, In conclusion*), although a general logic exists in the overall order of ideas presented. The introduction and conclusion are clear and generally well developed, though the introduction is more effective than the conclusion, which merely reiterates main points rather than moving the argument forward. Language skill is competent. The sentences are varied and word choice is precise, albeit unsophisticated.



Part III

Using Results from the ACT Writing Test

Two scores are reported for the optional ACT Writing Test: a Combined English/Writing score on a scale of 1–36 and a Writing Test subscore on a scale of 2–12. The two scores are reported in addition to the scores and subscores on the multiple-choice tests in the ACT taken in the same administration and the Composite score for those tests. ACT also provides the student with some comments about their performance on the Writing Test. If a student doesn't respond to any items in the English Test, no Writing score or comments are reported.

Scores and Comments

Combined English/Writing Score

This score is created by using a formula that weights the English Test score as two-thirds and the Writing Test score as one-third to form the combined score. The table on page 54 provides the conversions.

Writing Test Subscore

The Writing Test subscore ranges from 2–12 and is the sum of the two raters' scores for an essay. Two trained readers give the essay a rating of 1 (low) to 6 (high). The sum of those ratings is a student's Writing Test subscore. Thus, if an essay receives a 6, both readers gave the essay a score of 3. If the essay receives a score of 7, one reader assigned a score of 3 and the other assigned a score of 4.

The best resource for understanding the meaning of the Writing Test subscore is the

scoring rubric, which describes performance at each score point. The Scoring Rubric for the Writing Test is included on page 18 of this publication. It is easier to use information from the rubric for papers with scores of 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12, because these are scores for students who received the same score from both readers (e.g., two scores of 4 are reported as a final score of 8). However, some papers may have a combination of strengths and weaknesses that means they are best scored as a split score (e.g., 3 and 4). If papers receive these “split” scores, that means they have some characteristics of the descriptors at the two adjacent score points.

If you are working with students to help them improve their writing in order to achieve a better score on the ACT Writing Test, you might advise writers to read the descriptors in the rubric for the score point above their score and help them to understand the expectations presented at those score points. You may also wish to share papers with them from this publication. Students also have several resources available to help them interpret and use their Writing Test scores. You may wish to ensure they are aware of these resources: ACT's free publication *Preparing for the ACT*, and ACT Online Prep™ and *The Real ACT Test Prep Guide*, which are available for purchase. They can also visit the ACT website, www.actstudent.org.

Comments on the Writing Test

Another resource for you and for students can be found in the comments that ACT provides for each essay. These comments, clearly derived from the rubric, are selected by readers to help writers better understand the strengths and weaknesses of their essays. These comments will appear in their entirety on the Student Report for the ACT (see sample Student Report, page 55) for those students who take the Writing Test. The numbers (“comment codes”) for the



Combined English/Writing Scale Scores

English Test Score	Writing Test Subscore										
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
2	2	3	4	5	6	6	7	8	9	10	11
3	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
4	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
5	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	12	13
6	5	6	7	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
7	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
8	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
9	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	13	14	15	16
10	8	9	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
11	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
12	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
13	10	11	12	13	14	14	15	16	17	18	19
14	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
15	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
16	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	20	21
17	13	14	15	16	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
18	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
19	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
20	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	21	22	23	24
21	16	17	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
22	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
23	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
24	18	19	20	21	22	23	23	24	25	26	27
25	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
26	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
27	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	28	29
28	21	22	23	24	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
29	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
30	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32
31	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	30	31	32
32	24	25	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33
33	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34
34	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35
35	26	27	28	29	30	31	31	32	33	34	35
36	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36

Calculating the Combined English/Writing Scale Score

Complete these steps to calculate the Combined English/Writing Test score. To receive scores, the English and Writing Tests must be part of the same administration.

1. Locate the examinee's scale score for the English Test in the left column ("English Test Score").
2. Locate the examinee's Writing Test subscore at the top of the table.
3. Follow the English Test score row across and the Writing Test subscore column down until the two meet.
4. The Combined score is found where the row and column meet. For example, if an English Test score were 19 and a Writing Test subscore were 8, the Combined English/Writing Test scale score would be 20.



comments selected will be listed in the High School and College Reports (see sample highlighted reports, page 56) for each student. Teachers can use the codes to look up the comments assigned to each student's essay at www.act.org/aap/writing/sample/comments.html. There, all the comments are published, organized by scoring feature (i.e., all organization comments are together, all development

comments, etc.). You can use this document to identify an individual student's writing strengths and weaknesses in the essay. It may be helpful to have students keep these comments in mind as they review previous writing they have done or as they compose their next writing assignment. You may also want to use the entire text of the comments as an additional way to instruct your students about the expectations on the Writing Test.

Sample Student Report

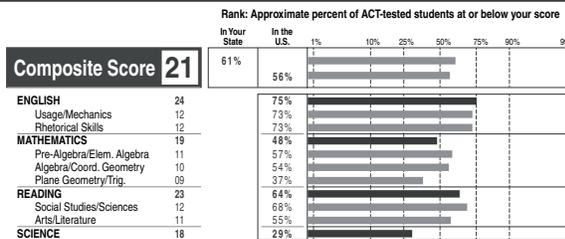
The ACT® Plus Writing Student Report

10060210-000000001

STUDENT'S NAME: ANN C TAYLOR SSNACT ID: XXX-XX-2006
 HIGH SCHOOL NAME: WHEAT RIDGE SR HIGH SCHOOL TEST DATE & TYPE: APR 2007 NATIONAL
 HIGH SCHOOL CODE: 067-890



Your ACT Scores



- ACT® test scores and the Composite score range from 1 to 36; subscores range from 1 to 18.
- Your Composite score is the average of your scores on the four subject area tests. Subscores do not necessarily add up to your score for a subject area test.
- Your ranks tell you the approximate percentages of recent high school graduates in the U.S. and your state who took the ACT and received scores that are the same as or lower than yours. A rank of 70, for example, means that 70% of students received scores that are the same as or lower than your score.
- Your test scores are only estimates, not precise measures, of your educational development. You will find more information about interpreting your scores in the booklet you received with this report and at www.actstudent.org.

COMBINED ENGLISH/Writing 25
 Writing (score range 2 to 12) 10

The Combined English/Writing score ranges from 1 to 36 and is a combined measure of the Writing and English tests. The Writing score ranges from 2 to 12. Your ranks for these two scores are based on recent ACT-tested students who took the Writing test.

COMMENTS ON YOUR ESSAY: YOUR ESSAY SHOWED RECOGNITION OF THE COMPLEXITY OF THE ISSUE BY PARTIALLY EVALUATING ITS IMPLICATIONS. GENERAL STATEMENTS IN YOUR ESSAY WERE WELL SUPPORTED WITH SPECIFIC REASONS, EXAMPLES, AND DETAILS. SOME VARIED SENTENCE STRUCTURES AND PRECISE WORD CHOICE ADDED CLARITY AND INTEREST TO YOUR WRITING.



Looking for more information about your individual strengths and test preparation? Go to www.actstudent.org.

Areas highlighted in red contain the Writing Test scores and comments

Your College Planning

Your scores from this test date are being reported to the colleges shown below. College planning information is provided for the first four choices you listed when you registered or tested. (Fifth and sixth choices, if any, appear just above your first choice.) To view additional college planning information or to send additional reports, visit www.actstudent.org.

College Name and Code	9521	What is the profile of enrolled 1st-year students at this college?			Is the program of study you prefer offered?	What are the approximate annual tuition and fees?		What percent of 1st-year students receive financial aid based on:	
		High School Class Rank	ACT Composite Score	High School Grade Point Average		In-state	Out-of-state	Need?	Merit?
UNIVERSITY OF OMEGA OMEGA CO 800/498-6068 www.omega.edu		Majority in top 50%	Middle 50% between 18-24	2.76	Yes: 4-Yr. Degree	\$5,600	\$12,000	67%	20%
ALPHA UNIVERSITY UNIVERSITY CENTER 1A 319/337-1000 www.alpha.edu	9059	Majority in top 25%	Middle 50% between 21-26	3.12	Yes: 4-Yr. Degree	\$9,000	\$15,000	85%	27%
BETA COMMUNITY COLLEGE CLARKSTON CO 800/498-6481 www.betacc.edu	8866	Majority in top 75%	Middle 50% between 16-21	2.49	Yes: Program Avail	\$4,000	\$4,000	58%	18%
MAGNA COLLEGE PLAINVIEW OH 800/525-8926 www.magna.edu	8905	Majority in top 50%	Middle 50% between 21-26	2.71	Yes: 4-Yr. Degree	\$8,500	\$16,000	90%	35%

Your Information Your Class Rank: TOP 25% Your Composite Score: 21 Your High School GPA: 3.29 Your Selected Major: BUSINESS & MGMT. GEN

Check with colleges for recent changes in information. A dash (—) indicates information was not provided or could not be calculated. *Comprehensive fee including room and board. © 2006 by ACT, Inc. All rights reserved.



Text of Essays

The text for the essays will not be returned to students, but high schools and colleges may participate in an optional service that allows online access to the essays if students reported their scores to that high school or college. Information about participating in this optional Essay View is available on our website (www.act.org).

The actual text of student essays may be used in a variety of ways. Teachers may want to read all the essays for students in a particular class (if all or most took the Writing Test) and make their own observations about the performance of their students. Essays may also be used in individual tutorial sessions with students. Allowing students to score their own essays with the six-point rubric or asking them to rewrite or revise their essays can help them learn where and how to improve their writing. College composition teachers may wish to use the actual text of the essays written for the ACT Writing Test as a part of their placement program for beginning college writing courses.

Norms for the ACT Writing Test

The norms shown in the next column are based on the scores obtained by ACT-tested students on national test dates during February 2005–June 2006. Students who take both the English Test and the optional Writing Test receive two scores: a Combined English/Writing score and a Writing subscore. The numbers reported in the table include the *cumulative percent* of students with scores at or below a given score.

ACT Writing Test Norms

Score	Combined English/Writing	Writing
36	99	
35	99	
34	99	
33	99	
32	99	
31	97	
30	95	
29	92	
28	89	
27	85	
26	81	
25	75	
24	69	
23	62	
22	54	
21	47	
20	38	
19	31	
18	25	
17	19	
16	15	
15	11	
14	8	
13	5	
12	4	99
11	2	99
10	2	97
9	1	88
8	1	75
7	1	41
6	1	25
5	1	7
4	1	4
3	1	1
2	1	1
1	1	
Mean	22.0	7.6
S.D.	5.1	1.6

Note: These norms are the source of the Writing Test norms printed on the ACT score reports of students who take the optional Writing Test during 2006–2007. Sample size: 774,662.



College Readiness Standards™

Teachers have available to them the College Readiness Standards for each of the four multiple-choice sections of the ACT, including the English Test.

The College Readiness Standards for Writing are detailed, research-based descriptions of the skills and knowledge associated with what students are *likely* to know and to be able to do based on their ACT Writing Test scores. These Standards are available on the ACT website at www.act.org/standard/planact/writing/index.html.



Part IV

Teaching Persuasive Writing Through an Integrated Language Arts Curriculum

by **Beverly Ann Chin, Professor of English, University of Montana, Missoula**

“How can I help my students do well on the ACT Writing Test?” ask English teachers.

The answer to this question is to provide solid, systematic writing instruction throughout the school year. Teaching students to be effective, persuasive writers is an essential part of the English language arts curriculum. The ability to take a stance on an issue, provide reasons and support for the position, and use language appropriate for the audience is a lifelong skill as well as an academic goal. By integrating instruction in reading, speaking, listening, and viewing, teachers can help students grow as writers and thinkers.



Dr. Beverly Ann Chin, PhD, is Professor of English, Director of the English Teaching Program, former Director of the Montana Writing

Project, and former Director of Composition at the University of Montana in Missoula. She is a member of the National Advisory Committee for the ACT Writing Test.

In 1995–1996, Dr. Chin served as President of the National Council of Teachers of English. From 1995–2003, she was a Member of the Board of Directors of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and the Board Liaison to the Adolescence/Young Adulthood English Language Arts Standards Committee.

From 1998–2000, Dr. Chin chaired the Joint K–16 Composition Standards Committee in Montana. In 2000, she became the Senior Advisor for the Montana Writing Proficiency Steering Committee.

Formerly a high school English teacher and adult education reading teacher, Dr. Chin has taught at several colleges and universities. She is an author, editor, and consultant to several literature and composition/grammar programs.

During her 26 years as an educator, she has received numerous awards for her teaching and service.



Classroom Standards

The importance of critical thinking, effective communication, and lifelong literacy is emphasized in *The Standards for English Language Arts*, published by the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association (1996). These voluntary, national content standards promote the vision that all language skills—speaking, listening, reading, writing, and viewing—are interrelated literacy experiences. Several of the NCTE/IRA standards address the need for all students to learn effective written communication skills:

4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.
7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

The full text of the NCTE/IRA standards is available at

www.ncte.org/about/over/standards/110846.htm.

While the NCTE/IRA content standards promote a vision of integrated language arts, most states have developed discrete standards for reading, writing, listening and speaking, viewing, and media literacy. Most state standards include the expectation that students must write clearly and effectively for a variety of purposes, modes, and audiences, as illustrated by the following excerpts from the McREL compendium of state standards for Language Arts, grades 9–12 (4th edition).

Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.

Students use strategies to address writing to different audiences and for different purposes; students write expository, narrative, descriptive, reflective, and persuasive compositions; students write in response to literature and write personal and business correspondence.

Standard 2: Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing.

Students organize ideas; students use precise and descriptive language and paragraphing form; students use a variety of sentence structures and lengths, a variety of transitional devices, and a variety of techniques to provide supporting detail.



Standard 3: Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions.

Students follow correct conventions for use of nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and commonly confused terms; students use standard format in written composition.

Standard 4: Gathers and uses information for research purposes.

Students use appropriate methodology, consult a variety of sources, evaluate the reliability of sources, synthesize information from multiple sources, and use systematic strategy to record information; students write research papers using standard documentation.

The full text of the standards compendium and the benchmarks for the standards may be found at www.mcrel.org/compendium.

Local districts use the national and state standards as they develop their writing curriculum. While students should have writing experiences in all modes—descriptive, narrative, informative, and persuasive—throughout their schooling, persuasive writing becomes especially important as students prepare to graduate from high school and enter the workforce and/or postsecondary education.

Teachers can help students grow in their ability to write persuasively when they take advantage of the many texts and topics that interest their students. By integrating speaking, listening, viewing, and reading activities into the composition curriculum, teachers can develop students' writing abilities and thinking skills.

Integrated English Language Arts Classroom Activities

Following are examples of integrated English language arts activities that support students' growth in persuasive communication skills.

Analysis of and response to televised political debates

By viewing videotapes of televised political debates, students can identify and analyze each speaker's stance on an issue. Students can take notes and evaluate the evidence and support provided by each speaker. Students can compare the ways each speaker introduces and concludes his/her statements as well as assess the effectiveness of specific examples and word choices in the debate.

If transcripts of the debate are available, students can also read the speeches and analyze the organization (introduction, major points, transitions, and conclusion) and the content (facts, examples, details, reasons). Students can also identify words and phrases that appeal to the audience.

If televised or print commentary on the debate is available, students can analyze the commentary for its own stance and/or bias. Students might write and publish their own commentary on the debate, or they might write their own position paper on one of the issues.

Analysis and creation of public service announcements and advertisements

By viewing print media and television public service announcements and advertisements and by listening to radio advertisements, students can identify and analyze the target audiences. Students can describe the age range, gender, socioeconomic background, ethnicity, interests, and needs of the intended



audience. Students can also analyze how the advertising medium of print, television, and radio affect the persuasive message through elements such as layout, color, font, volume, movement, etc.

Students may wish to create and produce their own public service announcements or advertisements for local events or issues. As students prepare their advertisements, they can identify and analyze their target audience and select the ideas, images, and words that will best persuade the audience.

Reading and writing editorials, letters to the editor, opinion columns

By reading newspaper and magazine editorials, letters to the editor, and opinion columns, students can determine how clearly each writer takes a stance on the issue and how effectively the writer supports his/her position. Students can identify persuasive devices such as testimonials, bandwagon, and glittering generalities.

Students can then write and publish their own editorials, letters to the editor, or opinion columns on the same or similar issues.

Reading and analyzing persuasive essays

Students can read essays that argue for or against a controversial issue. After analyzing the writers' positions and arguments, the students can form writing partnerships. One partner can write an essay from one point of view; the other partner can write an essay from an opposing view.

During the revision workshop, the two writing partners can exchange their papers. The partner can read the draft aloud to the writer. Based on this oral reading, both students can discuss the writer's stance and analyze the evidence presented in the essay. The writing partners can learn about the reasons that support different sides of the issue, and they can discover ways of presenting

counterarguments in their own persuasive essays. As the writer listens to the partner reading the writer's essay aloud, the writer can hear examples of language fluency. Both students can identify and discuss where the ideas and language are particularly persuasive and where the draft needs improvement. By reading each other's essays aloud, the writing partners learn to listen and think critically.

Students can also use the ACT scoring criteria and holistic rubric as they offer feedback for revision. Based on feedback, students can revise their essays and place them in their writing portfolios. They can also reflect on how the revision workshop and writing partnership affected their thinking about the controversial issue and their written product.

Addressing community issues and problem solving

To involve students in their local community, teachers can ask students to brainstorm a list of current issues and transform the issue into a question. For example, a current issue in the community might be the proposal to increase parking fines. The issue could be posed as the question: Should parking fines be increased?

Students could create a T chart, listing the reasons for and against the increased parking fines. Next, students can list possible audiences they wish to address. For example, if students are writing on the topic of parking fines, they might consider these audiences: parking commission, city officials, community members, local business owners, etc. For each audience, the students could do an audience analysis: What is the audience's interest in this topic? What information or background knowledge does the audience already have? What reasons would persuade the audience to support or



not support the increased parking fines? What criteria would the audience use to make its decision about the parking fines?

Students might conduct a survey to discover how community members feel about this issue.

Based on their own opinions and their field research, students can take a stance on the issue and write a letter to the parking commission.

After students have written the first draft of their letter, students can read each other's drafts, using these questions to guide revision:

1. Does the writer take a position on the issue?
2. Does the writer present support or evidence for the position using specific details?
3. Are any of the ideas confusing or distracting?
4. Is the letter organized logically with an introduction, body, and conclusion?
5. Does the writer use transitions to help the audience follow the ideas?
6. Does the writer use language appropriate for the audience? Are the word choices effective and persuasive?

As students give each other feedback, teachers should encourage students to identify reasons and words that are particularly persuasive for the intended audience. By writing these examples on the board, teachers can engage all students in a discussion about how writers make decisions as they revise their writing.

After the students have revised their letters, teachers can conduct an editing workshop for conventions and mechanics. If the students plan to send their letters to the intended audience, the students will be

motivated to carefully proofread their writing. Students may also wish to use their letters and research as a basis for a debate or present their ideas in person at a community meeting.

Responding to and writing about literature

Many selections of literature address the theme of personal responsibility and decision making. After students have read such a story, they can discuss the question, "Who is most responsible for the problem?" For example, in Ray Bradbury's short story, "All Summer in a Day," students could write a persuasive essay on the character most responsible for Margot's exclusion from her classmates. Students might consider the following characters: the teacher, the classmates, Margot's parents, and Margot.

As students read critical essays about literature selections, they may discover that literary critics disagree on the merit of a work. For example, students may read an article that claims the ending to Suzanne Fisher Staples' *Shabanu* is unrealistic. Students could discuss the ending of the novel and write an essay in which they agree or disagree with the realism of the ending. As another example, students may read critical essays on the interpretation of the ending to *The Giver* by Lois Lowry. Students could discuss why they think the ending is optimistic or pessimistic and write a persuasive essay in which they provide reasons for their interpretation.

Creative drama activities can also engage students in thinking, speaking, and writing persuasively about literature. Through role playing, a student could become a character who must persuade another character to make a different decision or to change an opinion on an issue. For example, if students were reading Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War*, they could improvise a scene in which



Roland Goubert (The Goober) tries to convince Jerry Renault to give into the demands of The Vigils. Speaking and acting in the role of a literary character brings the character's personality, thoughts, emotions, and motivations to life. By taking on the persona of a literary character who is engaged in an argument with another character, students can gain insight into the conflict and see different sides of the issue. Students can draw upon their creative drama experiences when they write about the literature.

All of the above activities are examples of integrated language arts in which students speak, listen, view, read, and write. By using print and nonprint texts, teachers can increase students' understanding of persuasive language in all media. When students identify, analyze, and evaluate the ideas, organization, and language of the message, they become more critical listeners, viewers, and readers. When students take informed stances on topics they care about, they become more articulate, persuasive speakers and writers.

Improving students' ability to think and communicate is central to the English language arts curriculum. Through effective writing instruction, teachers help students find their own voices and views on significant issues and enable them to succeed in their school, in their life and work endeavors, and on the ACT Writing Test.

