

**2019-2020**  
**Writing Workbook**

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## What to Expect

The writing sample will be administered at your school during the application period. You will be given **one hour** to respond to **one of two prompts**, meaning that you get to write about the choice that you are most comfortable with. There is no “right” or “wrong” prompt to choose, so go with the one you feel most confident about forming an argument around.

A high scoring paper (four out of four possible points) is described on the rubric as:

*An essay in this category demonstrates clear and consistent mastery, although it may have a few minor errors. A typical essay*

- *effectively and insightfully develops a point of view on the issue and demonstrates outstanding critical thinking, using clearly appropriate examples, reasons, and other evidence to support its position*
- *is well organized and clearly focused, demonstrating clear coherence and smooth progression of ideas*
- *exhibits skillful use of language, using a varied, accurate, and impressive vocabulary*
- *demonstrates meaningful variety and sophistication in sentence structure is free of most errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics*

We will go into further detail about the rubric, but here are some key tips to remember:

- **Be specific when you're writing and giving examples.**
  - Let's say that you're writing about how important arts funding is:
    - **weak:** Being able to have music classes is important.
    - **strong:** Arts funding would include resources for musical programs like school bands. When students participate in a band, it not only teaches them how to read and play music, but it allows them to develop their creativity in a community of their peers.
- **Make your writing sample longer rather than shorter.**
  - It's more likely that the longer your paper is, the more developed your thoughts are. However, be careful not to simply repeat yourself. Make sure that, as you go along, you're contributing new support to your main idea not just “fluff!”
- **You can use the first person (“I”).**
  - Let your voice shine through. Readers want a creative, memorable essay that almost seems like it lets them get to know you a little bit. Be formal, but the prompts often encourage using the first rather than third person.
- **You do not have to write a five paragraph essay.**
  - Often, readers are looking for how you can creatively respond to a prompt. Do not feel constricted to a five paragraph essay, although you can write one.
- **Do not write out your essay then try to copy it onto a final draft.**
  - This is simply a waste of your time. You might want to quickly outline your ideas, but there is no need for a rough draft then final draft.
- **Do not waste your time with the dictionary and thesaurus.**
  - Yes, you can use them, but do not let them eat up your time.

## **Point of View and Support**

The most important part of your essay is maintaining a clear argument, stemming from a strong point of view on the prompt and supported by detailed examples. So what does that mean?

Let's talk about **point of view** first. This is going to be your **unique position** on the topic of the prompt. The teachers and other school officials grading your essay look for **creative** responses to prompts that might twist the question or put a new spin on responding to it. Let's look at an example.

Say your chosen prompt is whether or not standardized testing is a good metric for measuring student success. A well supported argument either defending or attacking standardized testing could yield a high scoring essay. However, by approaching a more nuanced argument, say calling for new standardized testing that better evaluates student creativity, you could immediately demonstrate strong critical thinking ability.

Establish your argument in a **thesis statement**, which we'll discuss in further detail later; this component is critical in defining your point of view and must be consistent with the rest of your essay.

Whether you choose to stick to a more traditional argument or not, you must have lots of **specific support** to back your point of view. You are probably familiar with the typical outline for a five paragraph essay. While you by no means need to adhere to it, its proportion of evidence to argument is a good one to keep in mind. For every major claim you make, including three specific examples to back it up is a good rule of thumb.

What are these specific examples? Let's return to the testing example. One body paragraph could be centered on how tests might disadvantage a student whose first language is not English. Pieces of evidence could include complicated math word problems, strange idioms in reading passages, and a focus on obscure grammar, all of which fail to evaluate critical thinking or creativity. These examples support your major claim, which then must connect back to your main argument about considering other factors to evaluate on such tests.

Where can you get this evidence from? Pretty much anywhere as long as the support is specific. Sources could include personal stories, current events, readings, or other learning experiences. Also, don't be afraid to use the word "I" when forming your argument.

You might want to include a **counter argument** in your essay as well. Again with the testing example, you could include a paragraph dealing with challenges like the fact that recreating testing would be expensive, first presenting the opposing side then refuting it with your own example.

## Organization

We've already talked a little about possibilities when it comes to organizing your essay. Some people feel comfortable with the five paragraph essay form, and if you feel that it fits the prompt requirements, feel free to structure your essay around it.

- I. Introduction
- II. Body (x3)
  - A. Paragraph One
    - 1. evidence #1
    - 2. evidence #2
    - 3. evidence #3
- III. Conclusion

However, the writing sample may be different from your typical class essay in that you do not HAVE to write a five paragraph essay. **Many students are successful in more or less than five paragraphs.**

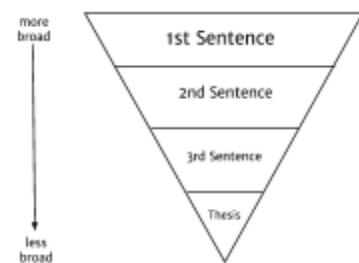
The important part is to center your essay around your point of view in a well developed thesis. How do you write a thesis? Generally, as long as you clearly state a strong central argument, you're good.

ex. Traditional standardized tests are flawed and should be reformed to better evaluate students' creative thinking abilities.

Alternatively, a more structured thesis can act as a "road map" for your essay. If you were to write a five paragraph essay, the first portion of your thesis statement would state the essence of your argument, then the second portion outlines your three major claims.

ex. Standardized testing should be reformed to more accurately evaluate creativity considering their current bias against non-native English speakers, arbitrary standards, and support of an educational climate centered on scores rather than growth.

Your **thesis statement** comes at the end of your introduction, a paragraph in which you should first establish broad context for your argument and gradually include information relevant to the specific prompt. Whether or not you stick to a typical four sentence introductory paragraph, the general rule of the diagram can still apply.



The **body paragraphs** contain all of the support for your argument, as we discussed before, and should move between ideas fluidly by using transition words that we'll talk about later.

The **conclusion** is sort of an inverted introduction paragraph. Begin by restating your thesis statement slightly differently, then broaden out to apply your argument to a larger context. While you want to avoid introducing an entirely new idea, introducing applications of the ideas you discussed to other aspects of the subject area could work. For example, you might broaden the ideas about testing to educational objectives in general.

## Vocabulary

The best way to improve your vocabulary is simply to read – a lot. However, we can give you some words to remember to use or to avoid when you're writing.

### **Nouns**

concept, example, program, development, point, counterpoint, argument, counterargument, claim, challenge, experience, catalyst, epitome, situation, juxtaposition, degradation, detraction, consideration, value, confluence, conglomeration, association, culture, identity, proposal, rejection, acceptance, deliberation

### **Transitions**

Between ideas within a paragraph and between paragraphs themselves, you need to use words that indicate a shift in your train of thought.

#### To Enumerate

first	in the first place	first of all	to begin with	finally
second	in the second place	secondly	next	last
third	in the third place	thirdly	another	

#### To Give Examples

namely	particularly	incidentally	indeed	specifically
in fact	in other words	for example	in particular	for instance

#### To Illustrate

again	further	furthermore	in addition
also	moreover	and	and then
equally important	too	besides	likewise

#### To Compare

similarly	likewise	after all	to contrast	despite
in a like manner	in the same way	still	on the other hand	nevertheless
		though	however	regardless

#### To Show Cause

then	accordingly	consequently	thus
since	because	thereupon	for this purpose
as a result	therefore	hence	to this end

#### To Concede

after all	at the same time	of course	granted
and yet	naturally	although true	perhaps

## To Conclude

all in all  
in short

altogether  
in summary

in brief  
that is

in conclusion  
on the whole

ultimately

## **Strong Verbs vs. Weak Verbs**

Using verbs that are specific to their purpose heightens the level of your writing. Focus on verbs that will efficiently say more in one word than you will in additional explanation.

### Strong

accomplish, achieve, achieve, advance, affect, aid, assemble, assert, assist, attest, build, challenge, conclude, clarify, commence, confirm, construct, convey, deduce, defend, deliberate, deliver, demonstrate, denote, depict, determine, discourage, display, emit, empathize, encourage, enforce, enrich, enrich, entail, establish, exemplify, expand, expose, expound, facilitate, forbid, force, grant, highlight, hinder, identify, illustrate, impart, include, indicate, initiate, kindle, lead, license, link, maintain, manifest, observe, perceive, presume, prevent, prompt, provide, provoke, question, reach, refer, represent, result, reveal, reveals, signify, spark, speculate, stimulate, substantiate, suggest, support, theorize, transform, trigger, underscore, uphold, validate, verify, yield

### Weak

These verbs are vague, and you want to do your best to avoid them.

is, are, was, were, am, has, had, be, been, look, look, take, took, make, run, ran, go, went, gone, did, came, come

You also want to **avoid the passive voice**. The passive voice is when the object rather than the subject of the center is the focus of the sentence.

Active: The cat tore the curtains.

Passive: The curtains were torn by the cat.

Notice the weak verb?

## **Adjectives and Adverbs**

Adjectives modify nouns, and adverbs modify verbs. They make your diction (word choice) even more specific and effective.

### Adjectives

important, salient, necessary, significant, high, increasing, low, declining, adequate, sufficient, prime, main, primary, major, only, sole, annual, hourly, indiscriminate, new, innovative, economical, consistent, sustainable, abstract, hierarchical, different, alternative, variable, likely, possible, sure, definite, inevitable, impossible

### Adverbs

Most adjectives can also be changed into adverbs by adding -ly.

more, very, extremely, even, quite, only, particularly, usually, sometimes, generally, probably, relatively, perhaps, further, also

## Mechanics

Your grammar must by no means be *perfect*, but demonstrating a strong command over effective writing mechanics is still key. Body sentences should roughly follow this form:

Example + Verb + Explanation or Significance

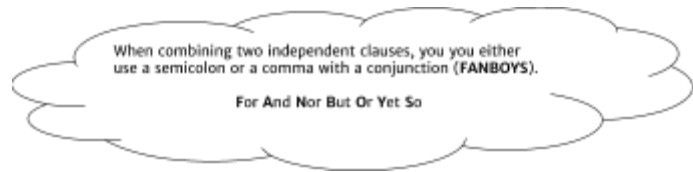
### Common Grammatical Mistakes

- Effect is a noun, affect is a verb.
- Their is possessive, there refers to a place, and they're means they are.
- Its is possessive, it's means it is.
- Your is possessive, you're means you are.
- Listing yourself among a group of people should be arranged Sally, John, and I.
- Who is the subject, whom is the object.

### Sentence Structure

There are four types of sentence structure:

- Simple: one independent clause
  - ex. The whale swam.
- Compound: two or more independent clauses
  - ex. The whale swam, and the baby whale followed.
- Complex: at least one dependent clause and an independent clause
  - ex. The whale swam since it was migrating season.
- Compound-Complex: at least one dependent clause and multiple independent clauses
  - ex. The whale swam, and the baby followed since it was migrating season.



An independent clause is a phrase that can stand as a sentence by itself with a subject and verb forming a complete thought.

ex. The dog ran.

A dependent clause can appear in many forms, but its essential definition is that a dependent clause is *not* a complete thought, and it relies on an independent clause.

ex. After he saw a squirrel, the dog ran.

If the dependent clause is at the beginning of a sentence, a comma must follow it; if it is in the middle or at the end of a sentence, you do not need a comma.

Try to keep your overall tone formal. Contractions are tricky: generally you want to avoid them, but in some personal essays they can help the flow of your writing. You'll get a better sense of when to use them as you practice.

To write with varied sentence structure means to use these sentence types alongside each other, frequently "mixing it up" to write an interesting sample. The point is not so much to use one, "best" type of sentence but rather to use all types with purpose.



## Components Practice

**#1: Write a thesis statement either attacking or defending forest preservation.**

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**#2: Fill out the outline in response to the same prompt.**

I. Introduction

A. Thesis: above

II. Body

A. Paragraph 1: \_\_\_\_\_

1. evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

B. Paragraph 2: \_\_\_\_\_

1. evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

C. Paragraph 3: \_\_\_\_\_

1. evidence: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. evidence: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. evidence: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### III. Conclusion

#### A. Restated Thesis:

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**#3: Would you rather have responded to the prompt in a format other than a five paragraph essay? Why or why not?**

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**#4: Draw an arrow in the direction which your introduction and conclusion should go.**

Introduction:	broad	specific
Conclusion:	broad	specific

**#5: Write a sentence in the passive voice.**

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**#6: Write a sentence in the active voice.**

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**#7: Which voice proves more effective in your essay? \_\_\_\_\_**

**#8: Fill out the chart about sentence structure with the correct numbers of clauses.**

	Independent Clauses	Dependent Clauses
Simple		
Compound		
Complex		
Compound-Complex		

**#9: Rewrite the sentences and avoid using the underlined weak verbs.**

The graph shows the increase in the number of fish.

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This development is bad for trees.

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Such programs do good work in the community.

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My guinea pig is the best.

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Going outside makes me happy.

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**#10: Add appropriate transition words to the paragraph.**

\_\_\_\_\_, healthy forests provide a critical element of human life: oxygen. When we breathe, we release carbon dioxide into the air, which is \_\_\_\_\_ absorbed by trees and converted \_\_\_\_\_ into oxygen. \_\_\_\_\_, the preservation of forests is essential to the preservation of our own lives. \_\_\_\_\_, not all humans are working to ensure the continuation of this sustaining cycle. \_\_\_\_\_, livestock corporations frequently destroy large swatches of rainforest to establish farms and turn a profit. \_\_\_\_\_ we cannot ignore the fact that human existence is going to cause some harm to the environment, we cannot allow greed to become an excuse to avoid lessening it.

**#11: What part of essay writing do you struggle with the most and why?**

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**#12: What part of essay writing do you enjoy the most and why?**

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**#13: On a scale of 1 to 10, how confident are you about essay writing? \_\_\_\_\_**

## **2015 Prompt #1**

### **Is the city or the country better?**

For this prompt, we are going to walk you through a little bit. We're going to use a five paragraph essay format for this one, although you could achieve a high scoring essay without using that format.

First, think about what you are going to argue. Do you know more about the city or the country? Do you have any personal experience that could relate to this prompt? Just start off by brainstorming.

Position	Potential Evidence

Now that you have some ideas in you head, let's start organizing them onto an outline. Again, you probably won't have time for this entire process during the actual writing sample, but we're taking it slowly this time to help you learn and develop your skills.

#### **I. Introduction**

A. Context (broad to specific)

B. Thesis Statement (argument and major claims):

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## II. Body

A. First Major Claim: \_\_\_\_\_

1. evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

2. evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

3. evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

B. Second Major Claim: \_\_\_\_\_

1. evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

2. evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

3. evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

C. Third Major Claim: \_\_\_\_\_

1. evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

2. evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

3. evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

## III. Conclusion

A. Restated Thesis Statement:

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B. Ending (specific to broad)

Make sure that the order of your ideas flow and build off of each other. Start thinking about transition words that you can use, and ensure that your evidence is specific enough. Especially while writing, but even now, check to make sure that your argument is staying true to your thesis statement. You can change your original thesis statement, but beware of making an unachievable argument. Now is the time to make major edits to your line of reasoning.

Believe it or not, the bulk of your work is done. Now you just have to write your essay! Keep in mind transitions, varied sentence structure, strong verbs, and developing a clear train of thought. Also, remember that longer is better for the writing sample.

## Reflection

On a scale of 1 to 10, how confident do you feel in your writing? \_\_\_\_\_

How strong is your point of view and evidence? Is it unique? Is it clear and supported?

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If you could change the organization of your essay, would you and how?

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Look back at you essay. **Circle** weak vocabulary words. Underline simple sentences in blue, compound sentences in red, and complex as well as compound-complex sentences in purple. How varied is your sentence structure? What could you improve?

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Read your paper out loud. Are there any confusing grammatical mistakes?

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What do you think was the best part of your paper?

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What do you think you need to work on for next time?

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Look at the writing rubric. How well do you think you did? \_\_\_\_\_ / 4 points



## **2015 Prompt #2**

### **Should we have more foreign language classes?**

This time we will walk have you do a quick outline then get to writing. Again, you do not need to write a five paragraph essay on the actual writing sample and you will not have enough time to write this extensive of an outline, but this is good practice to start with.

#### **I. Introduction**

##### **A. Thesis Statement:**

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#### **II. Body**

##### **A. First Major Claim:**\_\_\_\_\_

1. evidence:\_\_\_\_\_

2. evidence:\_\_\_\_\_

3. evidence:\_\_\_\_\_

##### **B. Second Major Claim:**\_\_\_\_\_

1. evidence:\_\_\_\_\_

2. evidence:\_\_\_\_\_

3. evidence:\_\_\_\_\_

##### **C. Third Major Claim:**\_\_\_\_\_

1. evidence:\_\_\_\_\_

2. evidence:\_\_\_\_\_

3. evidence:\_\_\_\_\_

#### **III. Conclusion**

Alright, now get to writing!

## Reflection

On a scale of 1 to 10, how confident do you feel in your writing? \_\_\_\_\_

How strong is your point of view and evidence? Is it unique? Is it clear and supported?

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If you could change the organization of your essay, would you and how?

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Read your paper out loud. Are there any confusing grammatical mistakes?

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What do you think was the best part of your paper?

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What do you think you improved on the most from your last essay?

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What did you do to improve? What will you do again or differently?

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Look at the writing rubric. How well do you think you did? \_\_\_\_\_ / 4 points

## **2016 Prompt #1**

**Your YouTube video just hit 1 million views. What was it about?**

Now you will get to decide how to format your essay. We'll ask you to write a thesis statement before writing, but the rest of this page is for whatever scratchwork you may or may not want to do. Note that this is a more personal essay, and you will have to use the first person.

Thesis Statement:

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## Reflection

On a scale of 1 to 10, how confident do you feel in your writing? \_\_\_\_\_

Did you make an outline? Do you think your decision helped or hurt your essay?

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How strong is your point of view and evidence? Is it unique? Is it clear and supported?

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If you could change the organization of your essay, would you and how?

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Look back at your essay. **Circle** weak vocabulary words. Underline simple sentences in blue, compound sentences in red, and complex as well as compound-complex sentences in purple. How varied is your sentence structure? What could you improve?

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Read your paper out loud. Are there any confusing grammatical mistakes?

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What do you think was the best part of your paper?

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What do you think you improved on the most from your last essay?

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What did you do to improve? What will you do again or differently?

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Look at the writing rubric. How well do you think you did? \_\_\_\_\_ / 4 points

## **2016 Prompt #2**

**Describe the greatest gift you have ever given or received.**

Again, you get to decide how to format your essay. Form a thesis statement before writing, but the rest of this page is for whatever scratchwork you may or may not want to do. Be even less afraid to use the first person, as this prompt explicitly calls for it.

Thesis Statement:

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## **Reflection**

On a scale of 1 to 10, how confident do you feel in your writing? \_\_\_\_\_

How strong is your point of view and evidence? Is it unique? Is it clear and supported?

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If you could change the organization of your essay, would you and how?

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Look back at your essay. **Circle** weak vocabulary words. Underline simple sentences in blue, compound sentences in red, and complex as well as compound-complex sentences in purple. How varied is your sentence structure? What could you improve?

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Read your paper out loud. Are there any confusing grammatical mistakes?

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What do you think was the best part of your paper?

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What do you think you improved on the most from your last essay?

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What did you do to improve? What will you do again or differently?

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Look at the writing rubric. How well do you think you did? \_\_\_\_\_ / 4 points

Are you satisfied with you progress so far? Where do you want to be two essays from now?

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## **2017 Prompt #1**

**Should summer break be three months during the summer or should school be year round with breaks spread throughout?**

This time we aren't giving you any outline for prep work. Feel free to use or not to use the rest of this page before starting to write your essay.

## Reflection

On a scale of 1 to 10, how confident do you feel in your writing? \_\_\_\_\_

Did you do any prep work? Did that decision help your writing or would you have made a different decision after writing the essay?

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How strong is your point of view and evidence? Is it unique? Is it clear and supported?

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If you could change the organization of your essay, would you and how?

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What do you think was the best part of your paper?

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What do you think you improved on the most from your last essay?

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What did you do to improve? What will you do again or differently?

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Look at the writing rubric. How well do you think you did? \_\_\_\_\_ / 4 points

## **2017 Prompt #2**

**If you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go?**

We again aren't giving you any outline for prep work. Feel free to use or not to use the rest of this page before starting to write your essay.

## **Reflection**

On a scale of 1 to 10, how confident do you feel in your writing? \_\_\_\_\_

How strong is your point of view and evidence? Is it unique? Is it clear and supported?

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If you could change the organization of your essay, would you and how?

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Look back at your essay. **Circle** weak vocabulary words. Underline simple sentences in blue, compound sentences in red, and complex as well as compound-complex sentences in purple. How varied is your sentence structure? What could you improve?

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What do you think you improved on the most from your last essay?

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What did you do to improve? What will you do again or differently?

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Have you met your progress goal? What is your final target?

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Look at the writing rubric. How well do you think you did? \_\_\_\_\_ / 4 points

## **2018 Prompts**

**(1) What programming should a school fund: arts or sciences?**

**(2) When was a time that you underestimated yourself or someone else.**

On the actual writing sample, you get to choose to write about one of two prompts, so don't freak out if you don't like the first one you see. There is no "right" or "wrong" prompt to choose, and both are meant to be accessible to everyone. Do any brainstorming you want, then start writing and mark which prompt you are responding to.



## Reflection

On a scale of 1 to 10, how confident do you feel in your writing? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you think that you chose the prompt that you could best argue?

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How strong is your point of view and evidence? Is it unique? Is it clear and supported?

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If you could change the organization of your essay, would you and how?

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Look back at your essay. **Circle** weak vocabulary words. Underline simple sentences in blue, compound sentences in red, and complex as well as compound-complex sentences in purple. How varied is your sentence structure? What could you improve?

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Read your paper out loud. Are there any confusing grammatical mistakes?

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What do you think you need to work on for next time?

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Look at the writing rubric. How well do you think you did? \_\_\_\_\_ / 4 points

## **2019 Prompts**

- (1) What is your favorite season and why?**
- (2) Do you agree or disagree with how teens are portrayed in entertainment media?**

## Reflection

On a scale of 1 to 10, how confident do you feel in your writing? \_\_\_\_\_

How strong is your point of view and evidence? Is it unique? Is it clear and supported?

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If you could change the organization of your essay, would you and how?

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Look back at your essay. **Circle** weak vocabulary words. Underline simple sentences in blue, compound sentences in red, and complex as well as compound-complex sentences in purple. How varied is your sentence structure? What could you improve?

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Read your paper out loud. Are there any confusing grammatical mistakes?

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What do you think was the best part of your paper?

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What have you improved the most on?

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Have you met your progress goal? Is there anything else you think you can do to improve?

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Look at the writing rubric. How well do you think you did? \_\_\_\_\_ / 4 points