



Exemplar Grade 3 Writing Test Prompt



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Introduction

This booklet explains the ACT Aspire[®] Grade 3 Writing test by presenting a sample test prompt. The prompt is accompanied by an explanation of the task the prompt poses, ideas for improvement, and scored student responses that illustrate student writing at different score points on the test rubric. The exemplar test prompt included here is representative of the range of content and types of questions found on the ACT Aspire Grade 3 Writing test. Educators can use this resource in several ways:

- Become familiar with ACT Aspire Writing test prompts.
- Help reinforce or adjust teaching and learning objectives.
- Learn how ACT Aspire improvement idea statements can help students identify key skills they have not yet mastered.
- See examples of actual student writing that have been scored and annotated according to the Writing test analytic scoring rubric.

Writing Framework

The ACT Aspire Writing assessments consist of a single 30-minute summative writing task at each grade in grades 3 through 8 and early high school (grades 9 and 10). The tasks target one of three primary modes of writing: reflective narrative, analytical expository, or persuasive/argumentative. The assessments are designed to provide a strong indication of whether students have the writing skills they will need to succeed as they begin work at their next grade level. All writing tasks are designed to target a depth of knowledge (DOK) level 3.¹ Student responses are evaluated according to analytic rubrics that assess the generation, development, organization, and communication of ideas in standard written English.

Because there is one extended writing task at each grade level, ACT Aspire rotates through the three modes to ensure coverage across the grades.

The reflective narrative mode appears at grades 3 and 6. The analytical expository mode appears at grades 4 and 7 and at early high school. The persuasive/argumentative mode appears at grades 5 and 8. The ACT Aspire assessments are designed to give students at every grade level an opportunity to display the higher-order thinking skills needed for meaningful reflection, analytical explanation, or persuasive argumentation.

¹ Norman L. Webb, “Depth-of-Knowledge Levels for Four Content Areas,” last modified March 28, 2002, <http://facstaff.wcer.wisc.edu/normw/All%20content%20areas%20%20DOK%20levels%2032802.doc>.

Taken as a whole, the ACT Aspire Writing assessments are intended to reflect an integrated continuum of writing ability that advances in skill and complexity grade by grade. This continuum culminates in the ACT® writing test, which provides a measure of student readiness for the writing demands of college. The ACT Aspire assessments cover Common Core State Standards that pertain to writing as well as the ACT College and Career Readiness Standards, which are derived from ACT research.

Foundations

The ACT Aspire assessments represent an extension into earlier grades of the philosophy of writing and assessment found in established ACT high school writing tests—the ACT writing test and the ACT QualityCore® English constructed-response assessments. The ACT writing test was designed from extensive research identifying the essential skills needed for success in entry-level college writing. Data validate that test takers who perform adequately on the ACT writing test are likely to succeed in their first-year college composition courses. Thus our claim that the ACT writing test is a reliable measure of a student’s readiness for college-level writing is supported with empirical evidence.

The ACT QualityCore End-of-Course Assessments were designed to help more high school students achieve the level of writing readiness they will need for college and career success. ACT QualityCore took shape from *On Course for Success*, a research project conducted by ACT and The Education Trust, which examined the curricula of high schools where students excel despite facing socioeconomic challenges.² ACT then built the ACT QualityCore assessments around the high academic standards found in these schools, with the intention of helping more schools understand and incorporate into their classrooms the level of academic rigor needed for their students’ success. There are four ACT QualityCore constructed-response assessments, one at each grade from 9 through 12. The demanding 45-minute tests encourage critical thinking and accomplished composition in the modes of reflective narrative (grade 9), literary analysis (grade 10), persuasive writing (grade 11), and expository writing (grade 12).

The ACT Aspire Writing assessments draw upon this rich research base for their design and reflect the same principles of writing that are found in the ACT writing test and in the ACT QualityCore constructed-response assessments.

Writing Competencies and Analytic Scoring

The Writing Test is scored with a four-domain analytic scoring rubric. Each grade level has a unique rubric because the writing tasks assess different writing modes, but the underlying design is the same across grades.

Each of the four rubric domains corresponds to a different trait of the writing sample; traits in the writing sample are evidence of the writing competencies described below. In addition to an overall writing test score, students receive scores in four reporting categories that correspond to these analytic rubric domains.

² ACT and The Education Trust, *On Course for Success: A Close Look at Selected High School Courses That Prepare All Students for College and Work* (Iowa City, IA: ACT, 2004).

Reflective Narrative/Analysis/Argument

The name of the first rubric domain corresponds to the mode of writing assessed at the grade level. Regardless of the mode, this rubric domain is associated with the writer's generation of ideas. Scores in this domain reflect the ability to generate productive ideas and engage with the writing task. Depending on the mode, writers generate ideas to provide reflection, analysis, or persuasive and reasoned argument. Competent writers understand the topic they are invited to address, the purpose for writing, and the audience. They generate ideas that are relevant to the situation.

Development and Support

Scores in this domain reflect the writer's ability to develop ideas. Competent writers explain and explore their ideas, supporting them with reasons, examples, and detailed descriptions. Their support is well integrated with their ideas. They help the reader understand their thinking about the topic.

Organization

Scores in this domain reflect the writer's ability to organize ideas with clarity and purpose. Competent writers arrange their writing in a way that clearly shows the relationship between ideas, and they guide the reader through their reflection, analysis, or argument about the topic.

Language Use

Scores in this domain reflect the writer's ability to use language to convey their ideas with clarity. Competent writers make use of the conventions of grammar, syntax, and mechanics. Their word choice is precise, and they are also aware of their audience, adjusting voice and tone to enhance their purpose.

Task Templates

The ACT Aspire writing tasks are built from task templates that have been designed to elicit the writing competencies discussed above. Through these templates we strive to generate writing tasks that give students with a wide range of abilities a reasonable opportunity to demonstrate their best writing. Thus, the templates call for writing topics that are accessible in language and concept to a large majority of students at a given grade level, that are free from cultural bias, and that do not require of students any preexisting specialized or background knowledge. At the same time, each template is designed to provide an opportunity for students to think critically if they can, and to demonstrate the upper range of their composition skills.

Improvement Ideas

ACT Aspire includes simple improvement ideas at the reporting category (skill) level on student and parent reports. These improvement ideas are provided for the lowest performing skill for each subject tested. The skills are always ordered from highest performing to lowest performing based on the percentage of points correct. If the percentages for two or more skills are tied, the skill with the lower number of total points is displayed first.

Keep in mind that the order of skills listed on reports may not always be exemplary of where to focus learning. For example, the skills in which a student performed within the ACT Readiness Range may not always be listed first, and the skills in which a student did not perform within the ACT Readiness Range may not always be listed last. Also, keep in mind the total number of points possible in each skill when interpreting the percentage correct.

There are two levels of improvement idea statements (low and high) for ACT Aspire summative reporting. Low statements are given on the report if the student's lowest skill score is below the ACT Readiness Range for that particular skill. High statements are given on the report if the student's lowest skill score is at or above the ACT Readiness Range for that particular skill.

Improvement Idea Statements

Reporting category	Grade	Low statement (scored below ACT Readiness Range)	High statement (scored at or above ACT Readiness Range)
Ideas and Analysis (IAA)	3	Practice prewriting strategies such as questioning and brainstorming to generate ideas for a story; when reading a story, try to identify the moral of the story or the lessons it teaches; identify and discuss reasons for selecting one topic for a story over others to fit your writing purpose.	Understand the assignment: learn to identify the purpose, audience, and key words. Before you begin writing a story, ask: Who is going to read this story? Think about what the story means to you. Use vivid details to help your reader feel as you do about the events in your story.
Development and Support (DAS)	3	Review model stories to identify and discuss what types of supporting details and events authors include in order to illustrate their ideas; review your writing to identify areas where you can use more details to describe the experience and can explain your ideas with more precision.	Practice writing a story in which you use descriptive details and dialogue to show rather than tell the story. Think about how you might enrich your story by reflecting on events or characters: How do the people in your story feel? What do the events mean to them?
Organization (ORG)	3	Construct a simple timeline of an experience and discuss how the experience has a beginning, a middle, and an end; practice arranging the details within a story so that the story's meaning logically builds and progresses; review your story to recognize when the story wanders away from its main idea.	Use clustering, concept mapping, or another visual organizer to identify the relationships among the ideas in your essay. Practice arranging the details and examples so the main ideas in the essay logically build and progress. Review your essay to recognize when it wanders away from its main ideas.
Language Use and Conventions (LUC)	3	Read and discuss the works of favorite writers or subjects; use a dictionary to learn any unfamiliar words or phrases; practice proofreading your or others' work to identify obvious errors and missing words; regularly write in a journal to get more practice using both new and familiar words.	Read and discuss the works of favorite writers or subjects; use a dictionary to learn any unfamiliar words or phrases; practice proofreading your or others' work to identify obvious errors and missing words; regularly write in a journal to get more practice using both new and familiar words.

Sample Prompt

This section presents a sample prompt, a written explanation of the task, a task-specific scoring rubric, and sample student responses. The sample task has been developed to DOK level 3.

Grade 3 Reflective Narrative Writing:

You are going to write a **story** about a time when you helped a person or an animal in need.

Think about how you felt when you helped the person or animal, and what you learned about helping others.

Here are some questions to help you think about and plan your story:

- Whom did you help, and why did they need your help?
- How did you feel when you helped this person or animal?
- Did you ever think you might not be able to help them? Why or why not?
- The next time you are faced with helping someone in need, how will you respond?
- How did this experience affect the way you feel about helping others?

Now, write a story that **describes** a time when you helped a person or an animal in need. Your story should tell your reader what you **learned** about helping others.

The Common Core State Standards expect students to write proficiently in the Narrative mode (College and Career Readiness anchor standard [CCRA] W3). The ACT Aspire Grade 3 Writing test, which is a narrative writing exercise, affords students the opportunity to meet this expectation. This writing task expands the narrative mode by asking students not just to recount an experience, but to think critically about its meaning.

Grade-appropriate scaffolds help students meet the demands of this task. This sample task asks students to recount a time that they helped a person or animal in need and to reflect on what they learned about helping others. The task provides a series of questions meant to stimulate student thinking and writing about this topic. Some questions encourage the generation of story elements and narrative detail (*Whom did you help, and why did they need your help?*), while others facilitate reflection by asking students to consider general principles that might arise from their experience and its meaning (*How did this experience affect the way you feel about helping others?*).

Rubric for Grade 3 Reflective Narrative Writing

	Reflective Narrative	Development	Organization	Language Use
<p>Score: 5 Responses at this score point demonstrate capable skill in writing a reflective narrative.</p>	<p>The response engages with the task, and presents a capable reflective narrative. The narrative conveys the significance of the event through thoughtful reflection on the experience and on the meaning of the experience. There is purposeful movement between specific and generalized ideas.</p>	<p>The narrative is capably developed through purposeful conveyance of action, sensory details, and/or character. Reflection on experience and meaning is supported through apt description and/or explanation. Details enhance the story and help to convey its significance.</p>	<p>The response exhibits a purposeful organizational structure, with some logical progression within the story. Transitions within the response clarify the relationships among elements of the reflective narrative.</p>	<p>The response demonstrates the ability to capably convey meaning with clarity. Word choice is usually precise. Sentence structures are clear and often varied. Voice and tone are appropriate for the narrative purpose and are maintained throughout most of the response. While errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics may be present, they do not impede understanding.</p>
<p>Score: 4 Responses at this score point demonstrate adequate skill in writing a reflective narrative.</p>	<p>The response is appropriate to the task, and presents an adequate reflective narrative. The narrative demonstrates recognition of the significance of the event through reflection on the experience and/or on the meaning of the experience. Connections between specific and generalized ideas are mostly clear.</p>	<p>The narrative is adequately developed through conveyance of action, sensory details, and/or character. Reflection on experience and/or meaning is mostly supported through description and explanation. Details may enhance the story and help to convey its significance.</p>	<p>The response exhibits a clear organizational structure, with a discernable logic to the story. Transitions within the response clarify relationships among the elements of the reflective narrative.</p>	<p>The response demonstrates the ability to clearly convey meaning. Word choice is sometimes precise. Sentence structures are occasionally varied and usually clear. Voice and tone are appropriate for the narrative purpose, but may be inconsistently maintained. While errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics are present, they rarely impede understanding.</p>
<p>Score: 3 Responses at this score point demonstrate some developing skill in writing a reflective narrative.</p>	<p>The response demonstrates a limited understanding of the task, and presents a somewhat appropriate reflective narrative. Reflection on the experience or on the meaning of the experience is limited or only somewhat relevant. Specific and generalized ideas are only somewhat connected.</p>	<p>The narrative is somewhat developed. There is some conveyance of action, sensory details, and/or character, but it may be limited or only somewhat relevant. Reflection on the experience and/or meaning is somewhat supported through description and explanation.</p>	<p>Organization is somewhat appropriate to the task, but may be simplistic or may digress at times. Transitions within the response sometimes clarify relationships among the elements of the reflective narrative.</p>	<p>The response demonstrates some ability to convey meaning. Word choice is general and occasionally imprecise. Sentence structures show little variety and are inconsistently clear. Voice and tone are somewhat appropriate for the narrative purpose but are inconsistently maintained. Distracting errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics are present, and they sometimes impede understanding.</p>

Rubric for Grade 3 Reflective Narrative Writing *(continued)*

	Reflective Narrative	Development	Organization	Language Use
<p>Score: 2 Responses at this score point demonstrate weak or inconsistent skill in writing a reflective narrative.</p>	<p>The response demonstrates a rudimentary understanding of the task, with weak or inconsistent skill in generating a reflective narrative. Reflection on the experience or on the meaning of the experience is unclear or incomplete, or may be irrelevant. If present, connections between specific and generalized ideas are weak or inconsistent.</p>	<p>Development is weak. Elements of the story are reported rather than described. Reflection on the experience and/or meaning through description or explanation is weak, inconsistent, or not clearly relevant.</p>	<p>Organization is rudimentary. The logic of the story may be unclear. Transitions within the response are often misleading or poorly formed.</p>	<p>The response demonstrates a weak ability to convey meaning. Word choice is rudimentary and vague. Sentence structures are often unclear. Voice and tone may not be appropriate for the narrative purpose. Distracting errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics are present, and they impede understanding.</p>
<p>Score: 1 Responses at this score point demonstrate little or no skill in writing a reflective narrative.</p>	<p>The response demonstrates little or no understanding of the task, with virtually no narrative, and/or virtually no reflection on the experience or its meaning.</p>	<p>The response is virtually undeveloped, with little or no action, sensory detail, or character, and little or no reflection.</p>	<p>The response shows virtually no evidence of organization. Transitional devices may be present, but they fail to relate elements of the reflective narrative.</p>	<p>The response demonstrates little or no ability to convey meaning. Word choice is imprecise, making ideas difficult to comprehend. Sentence structures are mostly unclear. Voice and tone are not appropriate for the narrative purpose. Errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics are pervasive and significantly impede understanding.</p>
<p>Score: 0 Unscorable</p>	<p>The response is blank, voided, off-topic, illegible, or not written in English.</p>			

Sample Essay 1

Score: 1122

One time my family and I fostered a dog that was going to die but we took him and saved his life now our grandma has the dog and the dog is wide.

Score Explanation

Reflective Narrative (1)

The response identifies an occasion when the writer helped an animal in need, but there is virtually no narrative. Readers are left with no understanding of how the animal was helped (*we took him and saved his life*). There is also no reflection of any kind on the experience or on what the writer learned about helping others.

Development (1)

The response is virtually undeveloped. There is very little action (*fostered a dog that was going to die*). Though the writer offers a little information about the dog's current state (*our grandma has the dog and the dog is wide*), it tells readers nothing about what the experience felt like or meant.

Organization (2)

Organization is rudimentary. The response contains a couple of vague time markers, which do not provide any further clarification on the elements of the narrative (*One time; now*).

Language Use (2)

The response demonstrates a weak ability to convey meaning through vague, un-descriptive word choices (*going to die; saved his life; the dog is wide*). All elements are strung together in one unstructured sentence.

Sample Essay 2

Score: 2222

I helped a person and thay needed the door open thay had ther hands fild and thay cood not open the door so I help tham and I felt grate about it and I helped her becus it is the right thang to do and I thank it is good to help others.

Score Explanation

Reflective Narrative (2)

The response contains a couple of moments of reflection that weakly respond to the writing task (*I felt grate about it; I thank it is good to help others*). No further discussion of the specific experience is provided, nor does the writer elaborate further on the general claim that helping others is good.

Development (2)

Events are reported rather than described in detail (*thay had ther hands fild and thay cood not open the door; I help tham*). The weak reflection on the experience (*I felt grate*) and its larger meaning (*it is the right thang to do*) are not supported with explanation or illustration.

Organization (2)

The elements of the response are organized in a rudimentary manner, from the specific instance of helping to the general claim that helping others is good. “And” is repeatedly—and sometimes incorrectly—used as a transitional device, demonstrating weak skill at organizing the elements of a reflective narrative (*I helped a person and thay needed the door open; and I helped her becus; and I thank it is good*).

Language Use (2)

Rudimentary word choice contributes to the response’s lack of specificity and substance (*I help tham; I felt grate; good to help others*). This, together with unclear sentence structure, demonstrates a weak ability to convey meaning.

Sample Essay 3

Score: 3333

One day I helped the poor by volenteiring at Road Runner Food Bank. It felt really good to know that they now had food on their plate. My first thought was that I could never do it because I have never done it before. If I had to help someone in need again I would absolutly say yes. That experience made me want to help others more all the time. When I helped the poor I learnd that helping others can make you more humble as a person by not wanting to be more well known or be jelous.

Score Explanation

Reflective Narrative (3)

The response presents a somewhat appropriate reflective narrative on helping out at the food bank. Reflection on the experience is limited (*It felt really good to know that they now had food on their plate*), and the writer does not explain how she went from thinking she *could never do it* to wanting to *help others more all the time*. Ideas about the specific event (*It felt really good; I have never done it before*) are only somewhat connected to more general ideas about helping others (*When I helped the poor I learnd that helping others can make you more humble as a person by not wanting to be more well known or be jelous*). The writer does not explain how jealousy or wanting to be well known are related to helping others.

Development (3)

The narrative is developed around the day the writer volunteered at the food bank. There is some conveyance of action and details, but it is limited and does not enhance the story (*I have never done it before; they now had food on their plate*). The claim of wanting to help others in the future is given some support (*If I had to help someone in need again I would absolutly say yes*).

Organization (3)

The organization is somewhat appropriate to the task. The writer responds simply to the prompt's questions in their given order. Transitions within the response sometimes show a simple chronological relationship between the elements of this narrative (*One day; now; My first thought; because; again; When*).

Language Use (3)

Some developing ability to convey meaning can be seen in the general word choice (*volenteiring; never done it before; food on their plate*). Sentence structures show some variety (*My first thought was that I could never do it because I have never done it before; That experience made me want to help others more all the time*).

Sample Essay 4

Score: 4444

One day I was walking down a long side walk when suddenly I herd a whimper. I turned and saw a baby Great Dane stuck in a hole in a fence. I ran over to the fence to help the puppy, but the puppy was stuck! So I tried to pull the fence ,but the fence would not move! I tried to pull and pull the fence, but the fence was really, really stuck. So I decided to give up. Then I sat with the puppy and waited for anyone to walk by, but know one did. I was not able to help the puppy. So I gave the puppy a name, and I named him Guinness. Then suddenly I got an idea. I could bend the fence with a stick. So I ran to a tree and I got a branch. Then I ran Back to the puppy and jammed the fence with the stick I pulled and pulled and pulled and the puppy ran out of the fence. then I called Guinness, and the puppy came top me. I felt like I acomplished something that day.

Score Explanation

Reflective Narrative (4)

The writer presents an adequate reflective narrative about a time the writer tried and eventually succeeded in helping an animal in need. The response demonstrates the significance of the experience, reflecting on what it was like to fail at first (*I decided to give up. Then I sat with the puppy; I was not able to help the puppy*) as well as what it felt like to successfully free the puppy (*I pulled . . . and the puppy ran out of the fence; I felt like I acomplished something that day*).

Development (4)

The narrative is adequately developed through conveyance of action, as when the writer describes attempts to free the puppy (*Then suddenly I got an idea. I could bend the fence with a stick. So I ran to a tree and I got a branch*). Development also comes in the form of descriptions of the writer's connection to and concern for the puppy (*I sat with the puppy and waited for anyone to walk by, but know one did; I gave the puppy a name; then I called Guinness, and the puppy came top me*). These details of the writer caring for and continuing to try to free the puppy enhance the story and support the final reflection (*I felt like I acomplished something that day*).

Organization (4)

The response is clearly organized in a chronological fashion, taking the reader from discovery (*One day I was walking down a long side walk when suddenly I herd a whimper*) to failure, to solution, and then to success (*I pulled . . . and the puppy ran out of the fence; I felt like I acomplished something that day*). Transitions are used to clarify relationships between the elements of the narrative (*I turned and saw; I ran over; So I decided to; Then suddenly I got an idea*). Some transitions are used repetitively but correctly, and they keep the narrative moving in a way that is helpful to the reader.

Language Use (4)

The response demonstrates the writer's ability to clearly convey meaning. Action is described using clear and sometimes precise word choices (*sudenly I herd a whimper; jammed the fence with the stick*) in clear and occasionally varied sentence structures.

Sample Essay 5

Score: 5555

I have helped many people but, one of my favorite times was when I was playing basketball. this story doesn't end fair but, I did do something that I will never regret. when I think about it I know I did the right thing but, sometimes it feels like I did the wrong thing.

I was dribbling down the court dodging the players who kept jumping in front of me, but out of all of the confusin I was in I made out a girl sitting on the ground crying her eyeballs out. I knew I only two things I could do I could either help her or keep right on doing what I was doing. I didn't want to do the right thing ,but I knew I would regret not doing the right thing later. I started to make my way to her the crowd started screaming,"No turn around you can make a shot!," and ," Why are you turning around?"As soon as I got to her , her teammates came charging at me like bulls and I knew the only way I could help her was to get the ball as far away from me as possible. So, I threw a ball a cross the floor and you know what that girl did to me she push me down to the floor with a big BANG and a CRACK! She had spong my ankle and I fell down when I tried to get up! I thought I was going to die or wake up in the hospital, but the next morning when I woke up I was in my room not in the hospital, not in heaven but, in my room.

Well that's my story of helping someone what's your's?

Score Explanation

Reflective Narrative (5)

This narrative capably conveys the importance of making the choice to do what is right even under difficult circumstances (*I could either help her or keep right on doing what I was doing; I started to make my way to her the crowd started screaming, "No turn around you can make a shot!,"*). The writer thoughtfully reflects that helping is worthwhile even when the attempt to help is unsuccessful (*this story doesn't end fair but, I did do something that I will never regret*).

Development (5)

The narrative is developed through descriptions that capably convey the exciting and chaotic atmosphere of the basketball game (*I was dribbling down the court dodging the players who kept jumping in front of me; As soon as I got to her , her teammates came charging at me like bulls*).

Readers are given insights into what was going through the writer's mind before and after she decided to help the crying girl. These insights help support the writer's claims about the experience and its meaning (*I didn't want to do the right thing ,but I knew I would regret not doing the right thing later; I thought I was going to die or wake up in the hospital*).

Organization (5)

The response exhibits a purposeful organizational structure, beginning with an introductory paragraph that frames the incident in a positive way (*one of my favorite times*) even though it didn't end well for her (*this story doesn't end fair*). The introduction is more substantive than the perfunctory conclusion (*Well that's my story of helping someone what's your's?*). Still, within this uneven frame, the writer effectively uses transitions to organize the elements of the narrative, giving readers a clear picture of the action (*but out of all of the confusin I was in I made out a girl; I started to make my way to her; As soon as I got to her*).

Language Use (5)

The response clearly conveys action and reflection with precise and descriptive word choices (*dribbling; dodging; charging at me like bulls; I knew I would regret not doing the right thing later*). Sentence structures are clear and often varied, and a few errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics do not impede understanding. Voice and tone are appropriate for the narrative, communicating the writer's feelings about the experience (*when I think about it I know I did the right thing but, sometimes it feels like I did the wrong thing; you know what that girl did to me she push me down to the floor with a big BANG and a CRACK!*).