



# Exemplar Grade 5 Writing Test Prompt



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# Introduction

This booklet explains the ACT Aspire<sup>®</sup> Grade 5 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 5 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.

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<sup>2</sup> 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)	5	Learn prewriting strategies such as freewriting and brainstorming for generating ideas or perspectives on a topic; revise an essay to include additional ideas or reasons that support the essay's main claim; identify and discuss reasons for selecting one position on an issue over others.	Understand the assignment: learn to identify the purpose and audience as well as the key words and ideas in the assignment. Before you begin writing, ask: Who is going to read this essay? What is my opinion on this topic? Think about reasons and examples that will help persuade your reader to agree with you.
Development and Support (DAS)	5	Review model essays to identify and discuss what types of evidence and examples writers use to support their claims; review your writing to identify areas where you can explain your points with more detail or precision.	Review model essays to identify and discuss how the author uses reasons and detailed examples to persuade his or her reader. Practice writing an essay in which you use detailed examples and reasons to persuade your reader. Reread your essay to see if you have fully explained your ideas.
Organization (ORG)	5	Discuss the purpose and importance of the opening paragraph for directing the rest of the essay; practice arranging sentences within a paragraph so that discussion logically builds and progresses; review your writing to recognize when an essay wanders away from its main claim.	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)	5	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 5 Persuasive/Argumentative Writing

You are going to write an **essay** in which you express and support your opinion.

Your local library wants to encourage kids to learn about the past and is trying to decide which resource to use: historical fiction books **or** movies about historical events. Which would you choose to get kids to learn about the past, and why?

Write an essay in which you give reasons for your choice and explain why your choice is better than the other option. Be sure to include details and examples to support your reasons.

Common Core State Standards expect students to write proficiently in the Argumentative mode (CCRA.W1). The ACT Aspire Grade 5 Writing test, which is an exercise in persuasive argumentation, affords students the opportunity to meet this expectation. This writing task expands the argumentative mode by recognizing that rhetorical skill includes not just appeals to logic (logos), but also to shared sentiment (pathos) and personal knowledge and experience (ethos).

A grade-appropriate scenario provides students with an accessible rhetorical situation. This sample task asks students to decide whether historical books or movies about historical events would be more effective to get kids to learn about the past and to argue persuasively for their choice. Targeted task language encourages the generation of rationale (*give reasons for your choice*) and facilitates the use of persuasive techniques (*explain why your choice is better than the other option*).

## Rubric for Grade 5 Persuasive/Argumentative Writing

	Argument	Development	Organization	Language Use
<p><b>Score: 5</b> Responses at this score point demonstrate capable skill in writing a persuasive argumentative essay.</p>	<p>The response engages with the task, and presents a thoughtful argument driven by apt reasons. The response addresses implications, complications, and/or counterarguments. There is purposeful movement between specific and generalized ideas.</p>	<p>Ideas are capably explained and supported, with purposeful use of reasoning and/or detailed examples. The writer's claims and specific support are sometimes integrated.</p>	<p>The response exhibits a purposeful organizational strategy. A logical sequencing of ideas contributes to the effectiveness of the writer's argument. Transitions between and within paragraphs clarify the relationships among ideas.</p>	<p>The response demonstrates the ability to capably convey meaning. Word choice is usually precise. Sentence structures are clear and often varied. Voice and tone are appropriate for the persuasive 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><b>Score: 4</b> Responses at this score point demonstrate adequate skill in writing a persuasive argumentative essay.</p>	<p>The response is appropriate to the task, and presents a clear argument, with satisfactory reasons for the position. The response demonstrates recognition of implications, complications, and/or counterarguments. There is some movement between specific and generalized ideas.</p>	<p>Ideas are adequately explained and supported, with satisfactory use of reasoning and/or detailed examples. The writer's claims and specific support may be integrated.</p>	<p>The response exhibits a clear but simple organizational structure. Ideas are logically grouped. Transitions between and within paragraphs clarify the relationships among ideas.</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 persuasive purpose, but may be inconsistently maintained. While errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics are present, they rarely impede understanding.</p>
<p><b>Score: 3</b> Responses at this score point demonstrate some developing skill in writing a persuasive argumentative essay.</p>	<p>The response is somewhat appropriate to the task, and presents a somewhat clear argument with a vague or oversimplified position. Reasons for the position are somewhat appropriate and/or somewhat relevant. Implications, complications, and counterarguments are oversimplified or not clearly relevant to the purpose. Specific and generalized ideas may be only somewhat connected.</p>	<p>Explanation and support of ideas are limited, but include some use of reasoning and/or examples.</p>	<p>The response exhibits some evidence of organizational structure. Some ideas are logically grouped. Transitions between and within paragraphs sometimes clarify the relationships among ideas.</p>	<p>The response demonstrates some developing ability to convey meaning. Word choice is general and occasionally imprecise. Sentence structures show little variety and are sometimes unclear. Voice and tone are somewhat appropriate for the persuasive purpose but are inconsistently maintained. Distracting errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics are present, and they sometimes impede understanding.</p>



## Rubric for Grade 5 Persuasive/Argumentative Writing *(continued)*

	Argument	Development	Organization	Language Use
<p><b>Score: 2</b> Responses at this score point demonstrate weak or inconsistent skill in writing a persuasive argumentative essay.</p>	<p>The response demonstrates a rudimentary understanding of the task. The position may be unclear. Reasons for the position are unclear, incomplete, or not clearly relevant. If present, implications, complications, or counterarguments are weak. Any connections between specific and generalized ideas are unclear, incomplete, or irrelevant.</p>	<p>Explanation and support of ideas are unclear or incomplete, with little use of reasoning and/or examples.</p>	<p>The response exhibits only a little evidence of organizational structure. Few ideas are logically grouped. Transitions between and within paragraphs are often missing, poorly formed, or misleading.</p>	<p>The response demonstrates a weak ability to convey meaning. Word choice is rudimentary and frequently imprecise. Sentence structures are often unclear. Voice and tone may not be appropriate for the persuasive purpose. Distracting errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics are present, and they impede understanding.</p>
<p><b>Score: 1</b> Responses at this score point demonstrate little or no skill in writing a persuasive argumentative essay.</p>	<p>The response demonstrates little or no understanding of the task. If a position is taken, there are virtually no reasons for the position.</p>	<p>Ideas lack explanation and support, with virtually no use of reasoning or examples.</p>	<p>The response exhibits no evidence of organizational structure. Ideas are not logically grouped. Transitional devices may be present, but they fail to relate ideas.</p>	<p>The response demonstrates little or no ability to convey meaning. Word choice is imprecise and difficult to comprehend. Voice and tone are not appropriate for the persuasive purpose. Sentence structures are mostly unclear. Errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics are pervasive and significantly impede understanding.</p>
<p><b>Score: 0</b> <b>Unscorable</b></p>	<p>The response is blank, voided, off-topic, illegible, or not written in English.</p>			

## Sample Essay 1

Score: 1111

Books Sow Cizu Can Iunu Batu The Pasdu be Coz I Thag IT Wood be  
Fun OT Lun Bat The Paszu IT Wood be COOL Sow That IT

### Score Explanation

#### Argument (1)

This response demonstrates little understanding of the task. While the response states a choice of books, it demonstrates little to no skill at writing a persuasive argument.

#### Development (1)

While the response demonstrates a trace of ideas (*Sow Cizu Can Iunu Batu The Pasdu be Coz I Thag IT Wood be Fun OT Lun Bat The Paszu*), there is no demonstrated support through explanation or example.

#### Organization (1)

The one sentence exhibits no evidence of organizational structure.

#### Language (1)

The response demonstrates little or no ability to convey meaning. Pervasive mechanical, and grammatical errors significantly impede understanding.

## Sample Essay 2

Score: 2222

the labray shoud pick movies cause kids like watching movie and it has more pictures and there could be more colors and the books kids dent like reading but some do and It dent have that much pictures and on the movies you can laugh and on the book you cant laugh that much and thats why they should pick the movie.

### Score Explanation

#### Argument (2)

The response demonstrates a rudimentary understanding of the task by making a choice and offering some reasons for that choice (*kids like watching movie; it has more pictures; there could be more colors; you can laugh*) while additionally offering weak counterarguments (*kids dent like reading; it dent have that much pictures; on the book you cant laugh that much*).

#### Development (2)

The explanation in support of ideas is incomplete, with little use of reasoning or explanation (*kids dent like reading but some do; on the movies you can laugh and on the book you cant*).

#### Organization (2)

The response exhibits only a little evidence of organizational structure by stating the choice at the beginning and then listing the reasons for the choice. Few ideas are logically grouped, and there is virtually no use of transitions.

#### Language (2)

The language in the response demonstrates a weak ability to convey meaning in the service of the persuasive purpose. Word choice is rudimentary and frequently imprecise, due in large measure to its repetitiveness.

## Sample Essay 3

Score: 3333

I would choose movies because books dont entertain kids as much as movies. Some kids cant read so they would watch movies. Movies can also provide more information, It doesn't take long to get information from a movie but books on the other hand take long to read. Most kids think that books are not fun and movies are. Kids enjoy watching something while learning. There is lots of channels like discovery channel and animalplanet. So i think a movie or video is right for them.

### Score Explanation

#### Argument (3)

The response makes a clear choice (*I would choose movies*) reasoned with somewhat appropriate although general driving reasons (*Some kids cant read; Movies can also provide more information*). The counterarguments are vague (*books on the other hand take long to read; books are not fun*). All in all, the response demonstrates some developing skill in writing a persuasive argument.

#### Development (3)

The response shows limited support for the choice and the driving reasons. The ideas are stated more than supported, with very little extension (*It doesn't take long to get information from a movie; books are not fun and movies are; Kids enjoy watching something while learning*), and there is limited use of explanation (*There is lots of channels like discovery channel and animalplanet*).

#### Organization (3)

Some evidence of an organizational structure is present. Some ideas are logically grouped: there is an ending sentence that somewhat restates the position, and the transitions present sometimes help to clarify the connection between ideas.

#### Language (3)

The response shows some developing ability to convey meaning. There is enough clarity to understand the position taken in the limited argument; word choice is general, and sentence structures show little variety. Voice and tone show an awareness to persuade (*as much; It doesn't take long; on the other hand take long; fun; enjoy*).

## Sample Essay 4

Score: 4444

I believe that if the library wants to encourage kids to learn about history, the library should use historical books. I think this because, first of all, it is a library. Libraries encourage kids to read, so to make sense they should choose to use books. One of the whole purposes of libraries, are to inspire, and show kids new books that they would not typically read. For example, take historical books, there are many different stories that can show children, and even adults, interesting facts, and all about different things A lot of the time people judge books by there cover. When libraries encourage more people to read historical books (even if they do not look interesting.), they will be open to more different types of books. Another reason that the library should use historical books as a resource, Is these days people aren't very much into reading. And instead, over a book they choose to watch television, or movies. If the library chooses books instead, that will help more children, and adults, be excited to read. Then the hopefully more people will choose reading over movies. History can be really interesting, ands in books they make history accurate. In movies, a lot of the time, they stretch the truth. Instead of what a person really needs. The truth. Another reason Is that a genre you can read is, historical fiction. Historical fiction is when some of the characters are not real, but the plot is real. Reading is the type of thing, that children shouldn't think of as rest a chore. Reading takes a pesons imagination to whole different levels.

## Score Explanation

### Argument (4)

The response demonstrates a clear argument in favor of using historical books. Persuasion is accomplished by adequately moving from general ideas to more specific notions about encouraging kids to read. The argument for choosing books is straightforward (*first of all, it is a library. Librarys encourage kids to read, so to make sense they should choose to use books*). The library's purpose is to inspire and show kids new books that they wouldn't otherwise read. The counterargument of using movies instead of books is implicit (*If the library chooses books instead, that will help more children, and adults, be excited to read*).

## Development (4)

Ideas are adequately explained. The claims made are often given as direct support for the stated choice. Encouraging more people to read historical books will make them more open to reading different types of books. The counterarguments are also adequately explained and supported with satisfactory use of reasoning.

## Organization (4)

The response demonstrates a clear, simple organizational structure. Transitions used (*first of all; For example; Another reason*) clarify the relationships among ideas. Although the text is presented as a single paragraph, most ideas are logically grouped.

## Language (4)

Meaning is clearly conveyed. Word choice is sometimes precise (*inspire; typically; stretch the truth; genre*). The language centers on the task of being persuasive, although some imprecision is present (*In movies, a lot of the time, they stretch the truth. Instead of what a person really needs. The truth.*)

## Sample Essay 5

Score: 5555

If kids are trying to learn about the past, and we have two resources to teach them with, books or movies, I believe that books would teach them more about history than movies would.

For one, when you read something, your brain looks at every single word individually and then puts them all together to form a sentence. Seeing every single word and their meanings put together would help the brain memorize the topic or subject better than a movie would, because most people would be distracted by the pictures and not the informational speaking in the background. But with the books? The picture is all in the background, and the words are the main point of attention.

Another reason I think we should be teaching these kids with books is because when you read the book, you see the world in your mind. The majority of people work better on their own judgments and not others', so seeing a movie on, say slavery, and seeing these people reenact those days only how they perceived it, and not how we could might make the topic seem uninteresting and make kids not want to learn about history and the past.

Another handy reason we should use the books to be teaching kids about history is that it wouldn't take a long to teach. Whether it would be reading in a group or individually, running your eyes over some words definitely wouldn't take as long as watching a 2 or 3 hour movie. Plus you can carry the book around with you, say, in a bag or just in your arms, but when a movie is on and you need to go do something else that requires taking your eyes away from the subject, you can't take that with you. Yea, you can pause it, but what good does that do? Your mind would break that chain and once you get back you'd have to remember what was going on during the movie.

Also, why you should use a book instead of a movie with teaching history, is because you can choose whichever level you need. For example, if you're reading a book, it can be way down in the elementary level or even college level! But with a movie, it's either going to be extremely interesting and talking way into the true meanings of slavery and presidential history, or just a little educational play for young kids. But if you're in middle school and you need to learn about those studies, there's no movies, there's only videos. But with books, you can get them at whatever level suits you best and whatever subject you want to learn about.

As you can clearly see, books would definitely suit all of the kids better in the library when it comes to teaching about history, and I think the library should agree.

## Score Explanation

### Argument (5)

The response capably argues that books would teach kids more about history than movies would. The argument is thoughtful and driven by apt reasons (*when you read something, your brain looks at every single word individually and then puts them all together; Seeing every single word. . . would help the brain memorize the topic or subject.*) Also, the response addresses a counterargument for each point made. Complications and implications are also addressed.

### Development (5)

The four reasons given in support of the position are capably developed. Learning about the past by reading books is explained with details about how the brain processes words and about how reading inspires imagination, can be done in less time, and can be custom fit to an individual's grade level.

### Organization (5)

A capable introduction states the position. A straightforward arrangement to the body paragraphs establishes a connection among ideas (*For one; Another reason; Also*). The organization within each paragraph demonstrates capable skill even more than the movement of ideas from paragraph to paragraph.

### Language (5)

Capable language conveys meaning. Word choice is usually precise (*individually; memorize; majority; perceived*), and sentence construction is varied. The voice and tone are appropriate (*Yea, you can pause it, but what good does that do?*) and is maintained throughout the response. Any errors that are present do not impede understanding.