



Exemplar Grade 8 Writing Test Prompt



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Introduction

This booklet explains the ACT Aspire[®] Grade 8 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 8 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)	8	Try prewriting strategies such as freewriting and brainstorming for generating ideas or perspectives on a topic; rewrite an essay to include additional ideas and perspectives that strengthen 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: What is my position on this topic? What reasons support my position? Make a diagram or outline to show how your ideas and reasons relate to one another.
Development and Support (DAS)	8	Review model essays to identify and discuss what types of evidence and examples writers use to support claims; think about which types of support will be most persuasive to different audiences; 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)	8	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)	8	Read and discuss the works of skilled writers to become more familiar with correct language use; practice proofreading to identify obvious errors and missing words; revise your writing with a focus on clearly communicating your intended meaning while avoiding vague or imprecise word choices.	Read and discuss the works of skilled writers; 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 8 Persuasive/Argumentative Writing

Mel has been in a band with his friends since they were little kids. As he has grown older, Mel has come to recognize that he is a better musician than his friends are. Instead of playing in his friends' garage band, Mel is thinking about joining the all-city jazz band, where he can play with and learn from some of the best musicians around.

Should Mel join the jazz band instead of playing with his friends? Consider the positions below as you think about how you would answer this question.

- **Yes**—We owe it to ourselves to develop our individual talents to their maximum.
- **No**—Our friends deserve our loyalty.

Now, take a position on this question and write a **persuasive essay** in which you argue for your position. Be sure to provide reasons for your position 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 8 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).

The Grade 8 Writing test marks the second appearance of the argumentative mode in the ACT Aspire suite of writing assessments. Just as the grade 5 argumentative task makes use of an accessible scenario, this task places students in a grade-appropriate rhetorical situation. This sample task asks students to consider the situation of Mel, who is thinking about the importance of developing a personal talent in relation to the importance of demonstrating loyalty to friendships. The task provides two possible options, each with corresponding rationales (e.g., *Yes—We owe it to ourselves to develop our individual talents to their maximum.*). Together, these rationales describe a conflict of values or priorities, and work to stimulate the generation of an argument that moves from localized to generalized ideas.

Rubric for Grade 8 Persuasive/Argumentative Writing

	Argument	Development	Organization	Language Use
<p>Score: 6 Responses at this score point demonstrate effective skill in writing a persuasive argumentative essay.</p>	<p>The response critically engages with the task, and presents a skillful argument driven by insightful reasons. The response critically addresses implications, complications, and/or counterarguments. There is skillful movement between specific and generalized ideas.</p>	<p>Ideas are effectively explained and supported, with skillful use of reasoning and/or detailed examples. The writer's claims and specific support are well integrated.</p>	<p>The response exhibits a skillful organizational strategy. A logical progression of ideas increases the effectiveness of the writer's argument. Transitions between and within paragraphs strengthen the relationships among ideas.</p>	<p>The response demonstrates the ability to effectively convey meaning with clarity. Word choice is precise. Sentence structures are varied and clear. Voice and tone are appropriate for the persuasive purpose and are maintained throughout the response. While a few errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics may be present, they do not impede understanding.</p>
<p>Score: 5 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>Score: 4 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>

Rubric for Grade 8 Persuasive/Argumentative Writing *(continued)*

	Argument	Development	Organization	Language Use
<p>Score: 3 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>
<p>Score: 2 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>Score: 1 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>Score: 0 Unscorable</p>	<p>The response is blank, voided, off-topic, illegible, or not written in English.</p>			

Sample Essay 1

Score: 1111

Yes

Because the guys has been in a band when he are a little kids and, are the best musicians around city

Score Explanation

Argument (1)

The response shows no skill in writing a persuasive essay. Although a position is taken, the attempted reasons are unintelligible (*because the guys has been in a band when he are a little kids*) and incomplete (*and, are the best musicians around city*).

Development (1)

There is virtually no use of reasoning or examples.

Organization (1)

The response shows no evidence of organization because there is just the position at the beginning followed by incorrect and incomplete statements.

Language (1)

The response demonstrates little ability to convey meaning, sentence structures are mostly unclear, and word choice is imprecise.

Sample Essay 2

Score: 2223

I think mel should stay with his band his friends. Because I don't think he should leave his friends because those are his friends. And as mel grows older and older him his his friends could be really good. Cause they can keep on practicing and practicing and get better and better. And maybe his band will become really good and then his band can become famous and make lots of money. If I had my own band I would want to stay with my friends and I'd think it would be more fun to hang out with my friends. And If we ever got famous It would be cool. Cause can get alot of money and be rich. I would buy so many things and my life would be awesome. I'd probably get a nice house, nice car and many other things. I would probably help out with my family. If I was In a band I would play the guitar or the drums.

Score Explanation

Argument (2)

This response shows rudimentary understanding of the persuasive writing task. The writer has taken the position that Mel should stay with his friends in the band. The reasons are unclear and incomplete (*because those are his friends. And as mel grows older and older him his his friends could be really good*). There is mention of a repetitive list of weak implications that could result from staying with his friends in the band (*become really good; become famous and make lots of money; hang out with my friends; can get alot of money and be rich*).

Development (2)

The support and explanation of ideas are incomplete and repetitive. The explanation of reasons is limited to a list of things that would result from becoming rich and famous (*nice house, nice car; help out with my family*).

Organization (2)

The response exhibits only a little organizational structure, with a position statement followed by a few ideas grouped in a single-body paragraph. The use of transitions is extremely basic and repetitive (*And; Cause; If*).

Language (3)

This response displays some ability to convey meaning. There are some distracting errors, but the language is understandable. Word choice is general and repetitive (*Cause; If I; If we; I would*). Some of the sentence structures are incorrect (*Because I don't think he should leave his friends because those are his friends; Cause can get alot of money and be rich*).

Sample Essay 3

Score: 3333

I think that Mel should join the jazz band. There are many reason why I think this. The first reason is because he will be getting the best learning experience. Joining the jazz he will be getting leasons from poeple that are great at music. This will make Mel a really good musican. Learning from a person who know how to play well may open new doors from him, such as being a background player for one of the best musicians around.

The second reson why I think Mel should going the Jazz band is because he is getting older. Since Mel is getting older jazz because be a really fun and soothing hobby/job. I think that Mel should take a break from the garage band because he may need to go out and try new things. Another reson is maybe he will like the jazz band more than he likes the garage band.

The third reason why Mel should join the jazz band is because he is a greater muisican. Mel has notice that he like jazz and being a good musician he should see can he master jazz. And if not he can always go back to playing with his friends in the garage.

Inconclusion I think that Mel should vencher out and try to play jazz.

Score Explanation

Argument (3)

The response is somewhat appropriate to the task and presents a somewhat clear argument (*I think that Mel should join the jazz band*). The position is driven by three reasons (*because he will be getting the best learning experience; because he is getting older; because he is a greater muisican*). The writer addresses two somewhat relevant implications to the purpose (*Joining the jazz he will be getting leasons from poeple that are great at music. This will make Mel a really good musican; Mel has notice that he like jazz and being a good musician he should see can he master jazz*).

Development (3)

Explanation and support of ideas are limited but include some use of reasoning (*Learning from a person who know how to play well may open new doors from him, such as being a background player for one of the best musicians around; I think that Mel should take a break from the garage band because he may need to go out and try new things; And if not he can always go back to playing with his friends in the garage*).

Organization (3)

The response shows some evidence of organizational structure, and some ideas are grouped logically. Simple transitions (*I think; The first; The second; The third; In conclusion*) sometimes clarify the relationships among ideas. The introduction and conclusion are under-developed because the language is merely repeated from the prompt and because the writer did not extend the summation past a single conclusive statement.

Language (3)

The response shows some developing ability to convey meaning. Sentence structures show little variety and are sometimes unclear (*I think that Mel should take a break from the garage band because he may need to go out and try new things*). Word choice is general and sometimes appropriate (*background player; soothing hobby/job; vencher out*). There are some distracting errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics, but the language is understandable.

Sample Essay 4

Score: 4444

This is an extremely difficult choice, but, if I were in Mel's position, I would try to do something good for myself and join the jazz band. It's a great opportunity to go and get some experience he would never receive playing in a band with his friends. Besides, if they were his real, true friends, they would want him to go and succeed, and would understand if he left them. Maybe they would have some time to practice more while he's gone, and they could form another band together again. At some times, it is only the right thing to do to stay with your friends and be loyal to them, but they've been together since they were kids, so they would have to understand that, if he has the chance to go and play in a professional band with the big leagues, they should support him for his choices like any good friends would do.

On the other hand, I can see the conflict with him thinking he should not go. Friends, despite their loyalty and love for you, they could become jealous and start to push you away from the group. Then, that would make Mel feel terrible, maybe even bad enough to quit the band! The, he would have no friends, no band, and nothing to fall back on. However, if it turns out that Mel had friends that would be so jealous like that, they are not his real friends, and he should keep pursuing his dream. Life is about doing things that make you happy, and if his friends can't understand that, he should just drop them, forget them, and get on with his career. If Mel works hard enough, he deserves to have a long successful career ahead of him. He owes it to himself to become the best musician he could possibly be and to live his dreams. If he tries hard enough, he can develop enough to become to the best of his ability. He could go back after that and give his friends lessons, and they could be a band together again. They could travel the world together, and make people happy with their music and friendship, and his friends would be happy that they are now able to play to the best of their talent and make people joyful.

In conclusion, if Mel thinks that he has the chance to join a big, professional band like the all-city jazz band, he should leave his friends behind and try. Although loyalty to friends is extremely important, pushing yourself and getting better at what you love to do is sometimes even more. If he has true friends, Mel shouldn't worry about them, and go off to be the best musician he can be. His friends should support his choices no matter what (unless they're really bad choices, then probably not), and they should be happy for Mel for going out, pushing himself to his maximum extent, and being the best musician he possibly can, all while trying to better themselves so they could join him in his journey to fulfill his dreams.

Score Explanation

Argument (4)

The response is appropriate to the task and presents a clear argument. The writer takes a position (*if I were in Mel's position, I would try to do something good for myself and join the jazz band*) and offers a satisfactory reason (*It's a great opportunity to go and get some experience he would never receive playing in a band with his friends*). The response demonstrates recognition of a complication of friendship (*Besides, if they were his real, true friends, they would want him to go and succeed, and would understand if he left them; and On the other hand, I can see the conflict with him thinking he should not go. Friends, despite their loyalty and love for you, they could become jealous and start to push you away from the group. Then, that would make Mel feel terrible, maybe even bad enough to quite the band*). The response demonstrates recognition of a counterargument (*However, if it turns out that Mel had friends that would be so jealous like that, they are not his real friends, and he should keep pursuing his dream*). There is movement between general and specific ideas throughout the response (*Life is about doing things that make you happy, and if his friends can't understand that, he should just drop them, forget them, and get on with his career; He owes it to himself to become the best musician he could possibly be and to live his dreams*).

Development (4)

Ideas are adequately explained and supported with satisfactory use of reasoning (*At some times, it is only the right thing to do to stay with your friends and be loyal to them, but they've been together since they were kids, so they would have to understand that, if he has the chance to go and pay in a professional band with the big leagues, they should support him for his choices like any good friends would do*).

Organization (4)

The response exhibits some evidence of an organizational structure consisting of a brief introduction, a body paragraph, and a detailed conclusion. There is some evidence of logical sequencing within each paragraph. Transitions between paragraphs (*if I were; On the other hand; In conclusion*), along with transitions within paragraphs (*Besides; Maybe; At some times; Then; However; If; Although; etc.*), help to clarify the relationships among ideas.

Language (4)

The writer demonstrates the ability to clearly convey meaning. Word choice is sometimes precise (*extremely difficult choice; big leagues; despite their loyalty; successful career; maximum extent; journey to fulfill his dreams*). Sentence structures are occasionally varied and usually clear (*Although loyalty to friends is extremely important, pushing yourself and getting better at what you love to do is sometimes even more*). While there are errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics, they rarely impede understanding.

Sample Essay 5

Score: 5555

Yes, we should try to further develop our talent because although we owe loyalty to our friends, we owe more loyalty to ourselves. We should be honest to our friends and let them know that we want to further develop our talent and maybe one day, they could possibly be joining. If they're my real friends, they'll support me no matter what and respect the decisions I make. If they're not my real friends, they'll be made at me and not want to be my friend anymore.

As we grow older, we find more talents that we have. Sometimes you have to venture out because if we go off what people's feelings are, we could be stuck in the same areas of life forever. Nobody wants to hurt anyone's feelings, but everyone has things that they're better at in different aspects of life. We still can be friends and as close as we were if they'll support me. If they can't support me, we should have no connection. We should have no connection because no one has time for negativity in their life. People who are surrounded by positive people living a positive life tend to be less stressed than those who are around people who constantly bring negativity. My friends and I show our friendship by being positive about each other's talents, not by being negative.

If we think about Mel's opportunity in a bigger way, venturing out on our own can give us an opportunity that others can't give us. That opportunity is exploring. Not just exploring a career, but the world. Traveling around, getting job bookings, etc. We have a chance to see the world for ourselves and not just sit at home wishing we were the ones who we see on the commercial having fun in different cities. If we pass this opportunity up we'd regret it. We'd regret it because if one day, the "Garage Band" decides to break up, we'd be stuck at home wishing we would've taken the chance while we had it. We should take chances, because a chance not taken, is a mystery unknown in life.

If we think about how friends should react to this, our friends should be the most supportive. The people are called our friends are sometimes considered as family. If they ever need anything, we'd be the first ones to offer any kind of help that we can. We are supportive of our friends and their ideas. While sometimes a friend's wishes might seem wrong and crazy, we should still support them if we want them to support us. In friendship, support is the main thing—and honesty. The two things go together. If we are honest, and tell them how we feel they'll support us. Lying and not telling them anything will most likely hurt their feelings and they won't support us.

Although we owe our friends loyalty, we owe more to ourselves. We should take the chance to get to explore life on our own terms. We should not let what people say or think change our aspect of things. How we feel is the most important. Going off the feelings of others is not important because in that case, a lot of doctors and lawyers wouldn't be who they are today. We should chase our dreams. Go after what we believe in and make our dreams become reality. I believe we were all sent from God with a special purpose. Everybody's purpose is different, and true friends know that.

Score Explanation

Argument (5)

The response engages with the task and presents a thoughtful argument that we should try to further develop our talent, driven by apt reasons (*because although we owe loyalty to our friends, we owe more loyalty to ourselves*). The response demonstrates recognition of the complexity of friendship versus self-gratification with discussion of the complications of the issue in the first and second paragraphs. First, the writer establishes that *We should be honest to our friends* and then attempts to solve the acknowledged complication of saying that we should *let them know that we want to further develop our talent and maybe one day, they could possibly be joining*. The writer then introduces a counterargument with *Nobody want to hurt anyone's feelings* but refutes it immediately with *but everyone has things that they're better at in different aspects of life*. The response demonstrates recognition of an implication (*If they can't support me, we should have no connection*), thus supporting the claim that *we owe more loyalty to ourselves*. There is purposeful movement between specific and generalized ideas (i.e. negative versus positive feelings; venturing out and exploring new opportunities; friendship and support).

Development (5)

Ideas are capably explained and supported with purposeful use of reasoning (*Nobody want to hurt anyone's feelings, but everyone has things that they're better at in different aspects of life; If we pass this opportunity up we'd regret it; In friendship, support is the main thing—and honesty. The two things go together. If we are honest, and tell them how we feel they'll support us*) and specific examples (*We still can be friends and as close as we were if they'll support me; Not just exploring a career, but the world. Travleing around, getting job bookings, etc. We have a chance to see the world for ourselves and not just sit at home wishing we were the ones who we see on the commercial having fun in different cities*).

Organization (5)

The response exhibits a purposeful organizational strategy that uses a clear structure and internal sequencing that balances several ideas at once. In the introductory paragraph, the writer infers a position and three reasons for that position. This paragraph is followed by three paragraphs that group ideas in a sequence moving from the impact on self and on friends to what the decision means on a personal level and then to a more detailed discussion of how friends should support one another. The concluding paragraph restates the writer's position and the reasons to support that position. Transitional phrases between paragraphs (*As we grow older; Although we owe our friends loyalty*) and within paragraphs (*If they can't support me; We'd regret it because if one day*) show a clear relationship among ideas.

Language (5)

The response demonstrates the ability to capably convey meaning. Precise word choices (*venture; connection; negativitiy*) and a variety of clear and usually varied sentence structures are used effectively. Voice and tone are consistently appropriate for the persuasive purpose (*We should take chances, because a chance not taken, is a mystery unknown in life*), and a few minor language errors (*If we pass this oppurtunty up we'd regret it. We'd regret it because if one day, the "Garage Band" decides to break up, we'd be stuck at home wishing we would've took the chance while we had it*) do not impede understanding.

Sample Essay 6

Score: 6666

Should we put the interests of others over our own in all cases? If Mel stays with his friends' garage band, he might never get to play music as well as he would like to. Also, he might not be as successful in his musical career playing with his friends as he would be if he played with the all-city jazz band. Following your life's ambitions is very important, and Mel would only be living up to them if he leaves his friends' garage band. Based on the information given in the prompt, joining the all-city jazz band would be best for Mel because of the many advantages it would provide for his musical career and personal life.

Mel knows that he plays better than his friends and consequently, he understands that if he stays with them, they could hold him back and cause him to stagnate in the same place throughout his musical career. If Mel stays in his friends' garage band, he will be unhappy with how his musical talent is limited. This may cause Mel to begin, rightly or wrongly, to blame his friends and the friendship will suffer. Those who hear the garage band might assume that Mel plays merely as well as the rest of the band instead of recognizing his true talent. All the hard work that Mel puts into playing his instrument will not pay off because he is not living up to his full potential. And while loyalty to friends is admirable, it is also admirable to recognize your own needs. The two do not need to conflict.

Associating with people who are close to your level and understand you is very important. By joining the all-city jazz band, Mel will be showing what he can do with others who can do it equally well or better. Even if he is not quite at the band's level of expertise, he will learn from it and eventually be just as good as the other group members if not better. Being part of the all-city jazz group will expand Mel's horizons because more people will come to see him and the rest of the group play. A garage band is certainly not as big or as skilled as an all-star band, and by getting in the habit of playing live shows for larger, more discriminating audiences, Mel will identify as a key part of the diverse talent the latter band has.

It is important to ensure we put ourselves first when it comes to career and life choices. No one should persuade you to live your life doing something you know you are not committed to doing. The great part about life is that you can make your own choices and do what you truly enjoy doing for a living. If Mel chooses his friends over his passion, he will never be at peace with himself. He knows there are better options available and he wants to take a chance that could lead him to do bigger and better things. Joining the all-city jazz band could really jumpstart his career in music and provide him with the lifestyle he has imagined for himself.

In conclusion, the best decision Mel could make in this dilemma is to take the leap and join the all-city jazz band. Nothing is better than becoming what you've dreamed of being. Mel has worked diligently since he was a young child to get to the point where he is now, and just continuing to be a part of his friends' garage band would be putting his serious talent to waste. Mel will finally be able to break free and show his determination and musical gifts by joining the allcity jazz band and letting his true self shine.

Score Explanation

Argument (6)

The response critically engages with the task and presents a skillful argument by taking a position in favor of Mel joining the all-city jazz band due to the many advantages it will have on his career and personal life, driven by insightful reasons (*If Mel stays with his friends' garage band, he might never get to play his music as well as he would like to. Also, he might not be as successful in his musical career playing with his friends as he would be if he played with the all-city jazz band*). The writer effectively addresses implications (*Following your life's ambitions is very important; If Mel stays in his friends' garage band, he will be unhappy with how his musical talent is limited; Those who hear the garage band might assume that Mel plays merely as well as the rest of the band instead of recognizing his true talent*). There is skillful movement between specific and generalized ideas throughout the response (*All the hard work that Mel puts into playing his instrument will not pay off because he is not living up to his full potential; It is important to ensure we put ourselves first when it comes to career and life choices. No one should persuade you to live your life doing something you know you are not committed to doing. The great part about life is that you can make your own choices and do what you truly enjoy doing for a living. If Mel chooses his friends over his passion, he will never be at peace with himself*).

Development (6)

Ideas are effectively explained and supported with skillful use of reasoning (*Associating with people who are close to your level and understand you is very important*) and specific examples (*By joining the all-city jazz band, Mel will be showing what he can do with others who can do it equally well or better*). Ideas are effectively explained as the writer draws critical conclusions from the discussion (*He knows there are better options available and he wants to take a chance that could lead him to do bigger and better things. Joining the all-city jazz band could really jumpstart his career in music and provide him with the lifestyle he has imagined for himself*).

Organization (6)

The response exhibits a skillful organizational strategy in its logical sequencing of ideas that contributes to the effectiveness of the writer's argument. In particular, the response repeats key ideas in order to emphasize them, and the repetition becomes an effective way to structure key ideas. Transitions between paragraphs (*Mel knows that he plays better than his friends; Associating with people who are close to your level; It is important to ensure we put ourselves first*) and within paragraphs (*Based on the information given in the prompt; Even if*) strengthen the relationships among ideas.

Language (6)

The response demonstrates the ability to effectively convey meaning with clarity. Word choice is precise (*life's ambitions; full potential; horizons; letting his true self shine*). Sentence structures are varied and clear (*Mel knows that he plays better than his friends and consequently, he understands that if he stays with them, they could hold him back and cause him to stagnate in the same place throughout his musical career; Even if he is not quite at the band's level of expertise, he will learn from it and eventually be just as good as the other group members if not better*).