

ACT Writing: read through the scoring guide and these example essays. Note the commentary by the higher scoring examples—those comments reveal what the ACT Writing graders are looking for!

Six-Point Holistic Scoring Rubric for the ACT Writing Test

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

Score = 6

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

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

Score = 5

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

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

Score = 4

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

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

Score = 3

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

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

Score = 2

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

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

Score = 1

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

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

No Score

Blank, Off-Topic, Illegible, Not in English, or Void

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How to Score the Writing Test

Two trained readers will score your essay on the actual Writing Test. These readers are trained by reading examples of papers at each score point and by scoring many practice papers. They are given detailed feedback on the correctness of their scores during practice. During actual scoring, score differences of more than one point will be evaluated by a third trained reader to resolve discrepancies. This method is designed to be as objective and impartial as possible. So—how can you rate your own practice Writing Test?

It is difficult to be objective about one's own work, and you have not had the extensive training provided to actual readers of the ACT Writing Test. However, it is to your advantage to read your own writing critically. Becoming your own editor helps you grow as a writer and as a reader. So it makes sense for you to evaluate your own practice essay. It may also be helpful for you to give your practice essay to another reader to get another perspective: perhaps that of a classmate, a parent, or an English teacher, for example. Thinking and talking with others about writing is good preparation for the ACT Writing Test. To rate your essay, you and your reader(s) should read the scoring guidelines and example essays, which begin below and continue through page 71, and then assign your practice essay a score of 1 through 6.

For an actual administration, each essay will be scored on a scale from 1 (low) through 6 (high). The score is based on the overall impression that is created by all the elements of the writing. The scores given by the two readers are added together, yielding the Writing subscore range 2–12 shown in Table 4 on page 72.

Example Essays and Scoring Explanations

Readers for the ACT Writing Test are trained by scoring many essays before they score "live" essays. Although we cannot provide you with the same extensive training these readers receive, reading the example essays that follow will help you better understand some of the characteristics of essays at each score point. You will also be able to read a brief explanation of how each essay was scored. The example essays are in response to the practice prompt on page 58.

Score = 1

I think we should consider because not everybody likes the same books. There are people who like, cartoon stories, stories that talk about the olden days. We would not complain so much if we actually had a book to read that we enjoy. We could improve our reading skill if we could choose the books we want to read. If we had the same book, some people have already read in the past and they could tell the ending. I think if we have to read books then we should read books that we feel comfortable with.

Scoring Guidelines (see page 66)

These are the guidelines that will be used to score your essay. These guidelines are also called a "rubric." Many papers do not fit the exact description at each score point. You should note that the rubric says: "Papers at each level exhibit *all or most* of the characteristics in the descriptors." To score your paper, read your response and try to determine which score point and paragraph in the rubric best describes most of the characteristics of your essay.

Then (because your Writing Test subscore is the sum of two readers' ratings of your essay), you should multiply your 1–6 score by 2 when you use Table 4, on page 72, to find your Combined English/Writing score. Or, if both you and someone else read and score your practice essay, add those scores together.

Comparing Your Scores

The Writing Test norms table (Table 3B on page 65) allows you to compare your score on the practice Writing Test with the scores of recent high school graduates who took the ACT Plus Writing. The norms for the Writing Test are reported the same way as the norms for the multiple-choice tests (see page 59). For example, a Writing subscore of 8 has a cumulative percent of 81. This means that 81% of students had a Writing subscore of 8 or lower. Remember that your scores and percents at or below are only *estimates* of the scores you will obtain on an actual administration of the ACT Plus Writing. They should be considered in connection with your performance on other essay tests and your planned college curriculum.

College Readiness Standards

The College Readiness Standards for Writing (see page 59) can be found at www.act.org/standard.

Score Point 1

Scoring Explanation

Essays that earn a score of 1 show little or no skill in responding to the writing task. This essay shows little engagement with the prompt task. The writer takes a position (*I think we should consider because not everybody likes the same books*), but ideas are not developed beyond single-sentence assertions and therefore remain unelaborated and unexplained (*We would not complain so much if we actually had a book to read that we enjoy. We could improve our reading skill if we could choose the books we want to read. If we had the same book, some people have already read in the past and they could tell the ending*). There is no discernible organization present. Transitions are not used, and ideas are not logically grouped. No introduction or conclusion is present, unless the position statement is considered an introduction to the response. Sentence structure and word choice are simple. Most sentences begin with a simple subject-verb construction (*I think...*, *We would...*, *We could...*). Errors, such as an unnecessary comma, are distracting but do not impede understanding.

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Score = 2

I think that students should not be allowed to pick their own book out in class. I think that students would get a lot more out of reading the same book as everyone else in the class. Some students I think would probably get easier books to read than others and that wouldn't be fair. It would probably just cause conflict. What would they do in class just sit and read these books!

I think that if they had the same books that they could have discussions in class. It would keep the whole class interested and they would probably keep reading. Then maybe when they're done reading the class can watch the movie. I also think by keeping the class working on the same book together that they will learn more and be able to help each other out. I think if they read the same book they will greatly improve their reading skills. That's what my policy would be.

**Score Point 2
Scoring Explanation**

Essays that earn a 2 demonstrate inconsistent or weak skill in responding to the task. This writer takes a clear position (*I think students should not be allowed to pick their own book out in class*) and offers specific supporting reasons (*I think that students would get a lot more out of reading the same book as everyone else in the class. Some students I think would probably get easier books to read than others and that wouldn't be fair. It would probably just cause conflict*), but development of these reasons is thin, and the relevance of some of the ideas is not made clear (*What would they do in class just sit and read these books!* and *Then maybe when they're done reading the class can watch the movie*). There is some indication of an organizational structure, and ideas seem to be logically grouped—the first paragraph briefly discusses why having students read different books wouldn't work and the second paragraph briefly discusses the benefits of having students read the same book. A few simple transitions are used (*Then maybe...*, *I also think...*). However, the writer includes no discernible introduction beyond the one-sentence position statement, and the conclusion consists of only the essay's final sentence (*That's what my policy would be*). Sentence structure and word choice are simple, with an overreliance on the use of *I think...* to open sentences. Errors are rarely distracting (for example, using *there* for *their*) and do not interfere with meaning.

Score = 3

It is a great idea for students to choose the books they read. They will be more interested, more understanding, and more reliable to do so.

The students will be more interested to read the books they chose rather than a book they know nothing about. They will also be interested in a book they actually like. Students like the feeling that they can be trusted to do something right. People are often excited by reading a book on a topic they like, however if it is a topic they care nothing about, they will often put it off.

Also, the students will be more understanding of their topic. If the student chooses their own book they are most likely common with the story behind the book, or the meaning of the story. Now days, many teenagers are reading books about the war in Iraq and the economy, because it is what they hear about everyday on the news, or local radio station.

Students will also be more reliable of reading their books if it is something they actually care about. The teacher can actually rely on them to go home and read the pages assigned for homework the night before. Rather than giving them a book on a topic which they have no feelings about, and expecting them to give up the time they have away from school to actually work on it. Students who chose their own books would be more likely to actually do the assignment.

Students choosing their own books or topics for class is a great idea. The student will be more reliable, more interested, and definitely more understanding of the book.

**Score Point 3
Scoring Explanation**

Essays that earn a 3 demonstrate some developing skill in responding to the task. This essay opens with a position statement that outlines the writer's three supporting points, but the writer does not provide any context for the discussion. Development of the three ideas is limited, with little movement between general statements and specific reasons or examples (*The students will be more interested to read the books they chose rather than a book they know nothing about. They will also be interested in a book they actually like. Students like the feeling that they can be trusted to do something right. People are often excited by reading a book on a topic they like, however if it is a topic they care nothing about, they will often put it off*). Although the writer provides specific examples in the third paragraph (*Now days, many teenagers are reading books about the war in Iraq and the economy, because it is what they hear about everyday on the news, or local radio station*), more explanation is needed to clearly connect these supporting examples to the writer's point. The essay is organized simply—the structure of the essay follows the order of points in the writer's opening statement. Ideas are logically grouped, but there is little evidence of logical sequencing of ideas. The writer uses a single transition (*Also*) throughout the essay to connect ideas. Although the introduction and conclusion are clearly discernible, they are underdeveloped and consist only of the writer's position statement as the introduction and a reiteration of that position statement in the conclusion. Language demonstrates a basic control. Sentence structure shows little variety (for example, the repetition of the phrase *students will be more...* throughout the essay). Word choice is also usually simple and sometimes lacks clarity (for example, using *common* when *familiar* would be clearer, and the misuse of the word *reliable*). Errors are occasionally distracting, but generally do not interfere with meaning.

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Score = 4

At some high schools, teachers are now allowing students to choose the books they want to read for class rather than requiring that all students read the same book. These teachers feel that students will be more likely to read the book if they find the book interesting; and as a result, increasing their reading skills. While some may believe this is a good idea, I completely disagree. Allowing students to choose their own books would not only create problems, but it would be very hard for teachers to help students and it would irradicate the whole idea of class discussion.

Allowing students to chose their own books could create many problems. Some books may not be school appropriate, or may contain information that is irrelevant to the area of study. Question as to whether the book is appropriate would be up to the discretion of teacher. This may lead to negative teacher-student interaction, and create an even larger number of complications for a student choosing his or her book.

If students were allowed to choose their own book, teachers may not be able to guide the student through it properly. Questions from students may be left unanswered if the teacher is unfamiliar with the book or hasn't read it at all. If this were to be the scenario, the student might be unable to complete an assignment; therefore, he or she would be at a disadvantage compared to someone who chose a book that the teacher was familiar with.

Allowing students to choose their books would also eliminate class discussions. While class discussions concerning works of literature are very important, these students would be missing out. They would not receive the input from the teacher that is needed to understand to full meaning of a book. They may also not be able to discuss points or topics among their classmates that may otherwise be helpful if they were all reading the same book.

Although some of the books assigned by teachers may seem boring, it is very beneficial to a student that everyone is reading the same book at all times. This gives every student a fair chance to obtain help from the teacher and engage in helpful class discussions. It also eliminates problems associated with choosing a book. In the classroom setting, the teacher should always assign the same book, and if the student wishes to read another book than he or she may do it on their own time.

Score Point 4
Scoring Explanation

Essays that earn a 4 demonstrate adequate skill in responding to the task. This essay takes a clear position (*Allowing students to choose their own books would not only create problems, but it would be very hard for teachers to help students and it would irradicate the whole idea of class discussion*) and provides some context by reiterating a portion of the prompt. The writer demonstrates some complexity by briefly acknowledging counterarguments (*While some may believe this is a good idea, I completely disagree and Although some of the books assigned by teachers may seem boring, it is very beneficial to a student that everyone is reading the same book at all times*). Development of the writer's three ideas is adequate, with some movement between general statements and specific reasons (*Allowing students to chose their own books could create many problems. Some books may not be school appropriate, or may contain information that is irrelevant to the area of study. Question as to whether the book is appropriate would be up to the discretion of teacher. This may lead to negative teacher-student interaction, and create an even larger number of complications for a student choosing his or her book*). The organization of the essay is apparent, but predictable. The writer uses a five-paragraph framework to organize the three ideas mentioned in the introduction. Some evidence of logically sequenced ideas is apparent, although the writer does not use transitions to show the connection between ideas. The introduction and conclusion are clear and somewhat developed—the introduction establishes some context and the conclusion reaffirms the writer's main points. Language is adequate, with some sentence variety and mostly appropriate word choice. The rare distracting errors (*irradicate, Question as to whether, and helpul*) do not impede understanding.

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Score = 5

Reading is stressed as the most important requirement during a child's early years of development. From birth, the ability to read is seen as both a mark of education and aptitude. By the time a student reaches the high school level they have probably read a wide variety of novels, biographies, historical accounts, and other types of literature. Many high school students, because of the excessive exposure to literature, lose interest in reading because it has become a common factor in their lives. For this reason high school students should be allowed to choose which books they wish to read, although it stands to reason that the choices should be monitored by teachers.

In my life I have read about fifty to one hundred books, from *Reader Rabbit* to *The Scarlet Letter*. In the books I have read, those that I most enjoyed are those that I chose for myself. While they may not have been the most provocative or best written books, I found them to be more valuable than those that had been forced upon me. If I had been asked to discuss or analyze the novel I would have done so willingly and with more fervor than if I were asked to discuss a book required for my English class. The fact is that students, especially teens, don't like to be told what to do. Teachers should respect this and allow their students to select what they want to read, knowing that consequences will ensue if the chosen book is inappropriate or poorly analyzed. By doing this teachers will allow their pupils to gain a sense of independence and also learn to teach themselves about a book, instead of relying on the teacher to instruct them in their learning.

Class discussion, although helpful, is not vital to a students' success. In fact, it may give lazier students an opportunity to sit back and copy all of the answers down from more dedicated students as they tell what they've learned. If each student read a different book, this problem would be solved. Not only that, but if the student isn't familiar with what everyone else is reading, they will be more likely to ask about the other books people are reading in class. If they find them interesting, an opportunity to connect the concepts from other stories to their own and draw parallels will be opened up. Whereas if everyone reads exactly the same thing, no parallels can be drawn.

While teaching a set curriculum and reading agenda for students has succeeded in teaching certain principles to high school students, the chances are that more students would be willing to learn about a book if they chose it for themselves. Hopefully, with this process, more students will read more often and gain a better interest in literature and class discussion, which would benefit both the student and the teachers.

Score Point 5
Scoring Explanation

Essays that earn a 5 demonstrate competent skill in responding to the task. This writer begins by establishing a broad context for the discussion (*Reading is stressed as the most important requirement during a child's early years of development. From birth, the ability to read is seen as both a mark of education and aptitude. By the time a student reaches the high school level...*) and then takes a clear position on the prompt's issue (*For this reason high school students should be allowed to choose which books they wish to read, although it stands to reason that the choices should be monitored by teachers*). The essay shows recognition of complexity by weaving a response to counterarguments through several parts of the essay (*In the books I have read, those that I most enjoyed are those that I chose for myself. While they many not have been the most provocative or best written books, I found them to be more valuable than those that had been forced upon me...* and *While teaching a set curriculum and reading agenda for students has succeeded in teaching certain principles to high school students, the chances are that more students would be willing to learn about a book if they chose it for themselves*). Development of the writer's ideas is specific, with clear movement between general statements and specific supporting reasons (*Class discussion, although helpful, is not vital to a students' success. In fact, it may give lazier students an opportunity to sit back and copy all of the answers down from more dedicated students as they tell what they've learned*). Organization of the essay is logical and clear, with some integrated transitions (*For this reason...*, *Not only that...*) that show the connection of ideas. The introduction and conclusion are both clear and generally well developed. The introduction offers context, and the conclusion adds emphasis to clarify the writer's argument. Language is competent. Sentences are varied and word choice is varied and sometimes precise (*a mark of education and aptitude, willingly and with more fervor*). The few errors present (such as a misplaced apostrophe and a sentence fragment) do not distract.

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Score = 6

The words "Crime and Punishment" glared at me from the cover of my new book for English class. As my teacher announced our new reading assignment, our class released a simultaneous groan—no one wanted to read Doestoevsky. Nevertheless, after spending my days delving into this dense Russian literature, I unexpectedly found Doestoevsky's masterpiece to become one of my favorite books. If teachers exclusively allow students to choose their own reading material, students education will be impaired and progress of their reading abilities stagnated. Students need a broad foundation of literary works and therefore cannot be responsible for determining the content of their education.

To begin, the literature selections of English class should function, in effect, as a microcosm of the studies of the school itself. Students are required to complete courses not just in subjects that interest them, but instead in all areas of study such as science, social studies, English, and math. While it is true that permitting students to choose their own book will allow them to choose books they wish to read, it is detrimental to students' education to assume that this would be beneficial. Were students allowed to choose their favorite novels or genres, they would perpetually fall back on what they know, which would leave them utterly unprepared to encounter the works of literature that they will be asked to read in college, where students don't have a say in selecting the materials for their courses. To ensure that students are able to persist through literary challenges, there should be a diversity in the collection of literature students read, which will not be achieved if a student only reads what he or she desires.

Furthermore, the abundant rules and regulations present in schools should serve as a blattent warning. Teens clearly need to be guided to perform to the best of their abilities. Even if many teens might benefit from their book selections, an equal or greater number may not choose challenging literature. Reading only elementary literature stagnates the progress of reading skills and would be deleterious to the quality of students education. It is difficult enough to force students to complete homework, allowing the student to choose the difficulty of the homework would not produce the desired results of learning and progress—the sole reason students attend school to begin with. In addition, while some students may select unchallenging books because they are apathetic or lazy, others may choose certain books because they do not know what else is out there. It is the inherent responsibility of the teacher to expose their students to all types of material, even unfamiliar works. This way, other students too, have the opportunity to be pleasantly surprised by the intricacies of Doestoevsky. Thankfully, my teacher had the ability and wherewithal to provide me with such new and exciting literature.

Thus, it is vital that students not be given the control over their education in English class. This would proliferate undiverse and single-minded teens who would likely not choose challenging literature. Such a class would be devoid of enlightening discussion and would not produce the knowledgable and well-rounded individuals schools should strive for. A better solution to this problem would be to allow the class as a group to pick among a selection of books proposed by the English teacher herself. This would produce a more democratic medium and stimulate interest, while avoiding the problems that would result from their own selections.

Score Point 6 Scoring Explanation

Essays that earn a 6 demonstrate effective skill in responding to the task. This essay opens with a broad context (*The words "Crime and Punishment" glared at me from the cover of my new book for English class. As my teacher announced our new reading assignment, our class released a simultaneous groan—no one wanted to read Doestoevsky*) and then critically and persuasively argues that *"students need a broad foundation of literary works and therefore cannot be responsible for determining the content of their education."*

The essay demonstrates complexity by responding to a counterargument to the writer's position (*While it is true that permitting students to choose their own book will allow them to choose books they wish to read, it is detrimental to students' education to assume that this would be beneficial*). The writer further demonstrates complexity by examining some of the long-term implications of allowing students to select their own novels (*Were students allowed to choose their favorite novels or genres, they would perpetually fall back on what they know, which would leave them utterly unprepared to encounter the works of literature that they will be asked to read in college, where students don't have a say in selecting the materials for their courses*).

Development of ideas is ample, specific, and logical. The writer elaborates on general statements (*Teens clearly need to be guided to perform to the best of their abilities*) by supporting such statements with more specific reasons and examples (*Even if many teens might benefit from their book selections, an equal or greater number may not choose challenging literature. Reading only elementary literature stagnates the progress of reading skills and would be deleterious to the quality of students education. It is difficult enough to force students to complete homework, allowing the student to choose the difficulty of the homework would not produce the desired results of learning and progress—the sole reason students attend school to begin with*).

The organization of the essay is clear and grows from the writer's purpose instead of being predictable. Ideas are logically sequenced, and transitions are used to show the connection between ideas (*To begin..., Furthermore..., In addition..., Thus...*). The introduction and conclusion are effective, clear, and well developed. The introduction provides a narrative to establish context for the discussion, and the conclusion goes beyond merely summarizing the essay's main points into a discussion of additional implications of the prompt's proposal (*This would proliferate undiverse and single-minded teens who would likely not choose challenging literature. Such a class would be devoid of enlightening discussion and would not produce the knowledgable and well-rounded individuals schools should strive for*).

The essay shows a good command of language. Sentences are varied and word choice is varied and precise (*delving, microcosm, deleterious, apathetic*). Although there are a few minor errors present in the essay (for example, a comma splice and an occasional missing apostrophe), they do not distract the reader.