

## Part 8 ACT Writing Test

On the ACT Writing Test, you have 30 minutes to read a short prompt and to plan and write an essay in response to it. The prompts on the Writing Test cover a variety of subjects intended to reflect the interests and experiences of high school students, and they are designed to be appropriate for response in a 30-minute timed test.

The Writing Test is an optional test on the ACT. Should you decide to take the Writing Test, it will be administered after the four multiple-choice tests. Taking the Writing Test will not affect your scores on any of the multiple-choice tests or the Composite score. Rather, *in addition* to your scores from the multiple-choice tests and your Composite score, you will receive:

- two additional scores: a Combined English/Writing score on a scale from 1 through 36 (again, this score does not affect your score on the multiple-choice English Test), and a Writing Test subscore on a scale of 2 through 12
- between one and four narrative comments on your essay
- availability of your essay to your high school and colleges to which we report your scores from that test date

You will have a short break between the end of the last multiple-choice test and the beginning of the Writing Test.

### Content of the ACT Writing Test

The ACT Writing Test is designed to measure your writing skills—specifically those writing skills taught in rigorous high school English and writing classes and expected of students entering first-year college composition courses.

The Writing Test consists of one writing prompt that briefly states an issue and describes two points of view on that issue. The prompt inquires about your opinion on the issue. You are asked to take a position and support that position with specific reasons and examples. The position you take does not affect your score. Your essay will be evaluated on the evidence it gives of your ability to do the following:

- express judgments by taking a position on the issue in the writing prompt
- maintain a focus on the topic throughout the essay
- develop a position by using logical reasoning and by supporting your ideas

- organize ideas in a logical way
- use language clearly and effectively according to the conventions of standard written English

The two different points of view provided in the writing prompt are designed to serve as examples of positions others have taken on the issue and to provide a starting place for your response.

Should you choose to do so, you are welcome to adopt either point of view. If you adopt one of these points of view, you should state the position you're adopting and support the position with your own specific reasons and examples. If you choose not to adopt either of the points of view provided in the prompt, you should present a different point of view on the issue.

## How Your Essay Will Be Scored

Your essay will be scored holistically (to see a copy of the actual Six-Point Holistic Scoring Rubric for the ACT Writing Test, please refer to page 141). In holistic scoring, no single aspect of writing is more important than any other—rather, it is the effectiveness of the writing as a whole that is most important. This means that your score will be assigned based on the overall impression created by all the elements of your writing. Two trained readers will separately score your essay, giving it a rating from 1 (low) to 6 (high). The sum of those ratings is your Writing Test subscore (2–12). If the readers' scores disagree by more than one point, a third reader will evaluate your essay and resolve the discrepancy.

Readers of your essay take into account that you had merely 30 minutes to compose and write your essay. Within that time limit, try to make your essay as polished as you can. Make sure that all words are written clearly and neatly so that the readers can read them easily. With careful planning, you should have time to briefly review your essay once you have finished writing it. Keep in mind that it is unlikely you will have time to rewrite or even recopy your essay within the time limit. Instead, you should take a few minutes to think through your essay and jot preliminary notes on the planning pages in the scoring booklet before you begin to write. Such preparatory work not only will help you organize your ideas and ensure that you don't forget anything, but also will help you pace your writing so that you finish your essay on time.

As we said earlier, taking the Writing Test will not affect your scores on any of the multiple-choice tests, nor will it affect your Composite score. Instead, if you take the Writing Test, you will receive two additional scores: one score for a combination of the English and Writing Tests (Combined English/Writing) on a scale of 1–36 and a Writing Test subscore on a scale of 2–12. Taking the Writing Test will not change your score on the English Test; the Combined English/Writing scale score and the Writing Test subscore will be reported *in addition to* the scores on the four multiple-choice tests. You will also receive between 1 and 4 coded narrative comments describing your essay. The comments will highlight strengths or weaknesses in your essay in relation to the scoring criteria in the Six-Point Holistic Scoring Rubric for the ACT Writing Test.

## Types of Prompts on the ACT Writing Test

We've already mentioned that the prompts on the Writing Test cover a wide range of subjects, that these subjects are intended to reflect the interests and experiences of high school students, and that each prompt is designed to be appropriate for response in a 30-minute timed test. It's also important to note that the prompts do not require any specialized knowledge, so you should be able to use many things you have learned both in school and through your own experiences to support and explain the position you take in your essay.

### **Representative ACT Writing Test Prompt**

Writing Test prompts are similar to the following example. The standard directions in the second paragraph will be a part of all prompts used in the Writing Test. You might want to practice by writing in response to this prompt for 30 minutes before you look ahead to the sample responses from other writers.

In some high schools, many teachers and parents have encouraged the school to adopt a dress code that sets guidelines for what students can wear in the school building. Some teachers and parents support a dress code because they think it will improve the learning environment in the school. Other teachers and parents do not support a dress code because they think it restricts the individual student's freedom of expression. In your opinion, should high schools adopt dress codes for students?

In your essay, take a position on this question. You may write about either one of the two points of view given, or you may present a different point of view on this question. Use specific reasons and examples to support your position.

### **Sample Essay Responses**

The six essays that follow represent sample essays produced in response to the writing prompt given above. The essays illustrate how writing at different levels is evaluated and scored for the ACT Writing Test. The essays in no way represent a full range of ideas, approaches, or styles that could be used to fulfill this writing task. While we all can learn from reading other people's writing, you are encouraged to bring your own distinct, imaginative, personal writing skills to the test. You want to produce your own best essay writing for the Writing Test—not an imitation of someone else's essay writing.

The following essays have been evaluated using the Six-Point Holistic Scoring Rubric for the ACT Writing Test printed on page 141. This same rubric will be used to score the response that you write for the ACT Writing Test. Each essay is followed by a Scoring Explanation that comments on the essay.

Please enter the information at the right before beginning the Writing Test.

Use a soft lead No. 2 pencil only. Do NOT use a mechanical pencil, ink, ballpoint, or felt-tip pen.

WRITING TEST BOOKLET NUMBER

Print your 6-digit Booklet Number in the boxes at the right.

□ □ □ □ □ □

WRITING TEST FORM

□ □ □

Print your 3-character Test Form in the boxes above #00 fill in the corresponding oval at the right.

- 40C
- 41C
- 42C
- 43C
- 44C
- 45C
- 46C
- 47C
- 48C
- 49C
- 50C
- 51C
- 52C
- 53C
- 54C
- 55C
- 56C
- 57C
- 58C
- 59C
- 60C

Begin WRITING TEST here.

Well I don't think they should have a dress code because, it takes away from the kids. We shouldn't be mindless drones. I thought this is America where you can express yourself. ~~They~~ The government should stay out of it. Next they will be telling us what we should eat and think. I think if they look good they should be able to wear what they want to. If they start to control how we dress. Next, they will control everything. I for one want to think and dress for myself. If we let them tell us what to do slowly our ~~freedom~~ freedoms will reduced to nothing.

If you need more space, please continue on the next page.

## Essay Example 1 (Score = 1)

### Scoring Explanation

Essays that earn a score of 1 generally demonstrate little understanding of the purpose of the writing task, and this essay is a good example of that. The prompt indicates that the writing task is to take a position and support that position with specific reasons and examples. Essays in the 1 score range often fail to take a clear position. Or, if they do take a position, they fail to fulfill the second half of the task, which is to support that position. The writer of this essay takes a position on the issue in the prompt (*I don't think they should have a dress code*) and maintains focus on the general topic, but does not support his position. Although one reason is expressed for taking his position (*it takes away from the kids*), most of the essay seems to be discussing a different reason for taking that position (*If they start to control how we dress. Next, they will control everything*). Both ideas could be developed into strong support, if the writer explained and illustrated what he means. However, a lack of organization—or even of basic groupings of similar ideas—prevents either idea from being adequately expressed. Although a few transitions appear, they do not effectively link ideas. For the most part, word choice and sentence structure in this essay are very simple and riddled with frequently distracting errors. It is a very weak response.