



Exemplar Grade 4 Writing Test Prompt



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Introduction

This booklet explains the ACT[®] Aspire[®] Grade 4 Writing test by presenting a sample test prompt. The prompt is accompanied by an explanation of the writing task and by 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 4 Writing test. Educators can use this resource to

- Become familiar with ACT Aspire Writing test prompts
- Help reinforce or adjust teaching and learning objectives
- 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 are timed tests consisting of a single summative writing task at each grade. The tests are 45 minutes in duration in grades 3 through 5 and 40 minutes in grades 6 through early high school (grades 9 and 10). The tasks target one of three primary modes of writing: reflective narrative, analytical expository, and 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.

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

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>.

writing demands of college. Together with the ACT Aspire English assessment, the Aspire writing assessment targets Common Core State Standards for writing as well as writing skills that ACT's research has identified as being important for developing college and career readiness.

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 ELA score, which incorporates performance on the writing test, students receive scores in four reporting categories that correspond to these analytic rubric domains.

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.

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 4 Analytical Expository Writing

You are going to write an **essay** to explain the qualities of a good movie.

Think about your favorite movie. Think about the qualities that make it a good movie.

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

- What is your favorite movie?
- What is it about the movie that makes it good?
- What makes this movie better than other movies?
- What kinds of things do all good movies have in common?

Now, write an essay in which you **describe** your favorite movie and **explain** the qualities of a good movie. Be sure to include reasons and details that help your reader understand what makes this movie good and what qualities all good movies share.

Common Core State Standards expect students to write proficiently in the Expository mode (CCRA.W2). The ACT Aspire Grade 4 Writing test, which is an expository writing exercise, affords students the opportunity to meet this expectation. This writing task expands the expository mode by asking students not just to explain a topic or subject, but to arrive at insight and deeper understanding by way of exploration and analysis.

Grade-appropriate scaffolds help students meet the demands of this task. This sample task asks students to describe their favorite movie and to explain the qualities of a good movie. The task provides a series of questions meant to stimulate student thinking and writing about this topic. Some questions encourage the generation of subject-specific analysis (*What is it about the movie that makes it good?*), while others facilitate generalization to larger ideas about good movies (*What kinds of things do all good movies have in common?*).

Rubric for Grade 4 Analytical Expository Writing

	Analysis	Development	Organization	Language Use
<p>Score: 5 Responses at this score point demonstrate capable skill in writing an analytical essay.</p>	<p>The response engages with the task, and presents a thoughtful analysis that discusses implications and complications of the subject. There is purposeful movement between specific details and generalized ideas.</p>	<p>Ideas are capably explained, with purposeful use of supporting reasons 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 analysis. Transitions between and within paragraphs consistently clarify the relationships among ideas.</p>	<p>The response demonstrates the ability to capably convey meaning with clarity. Word choice is usually precise. Sentence structures are clear and often varied. Voice and tone are appropriate for the analytical 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 an analytical essay.</p>	<p>The response is appropriate to the task, and presents an analysis that recognizes implications and complications of the subject. There is clear movement between specific details and generalized ideas.</p>	<p>Ideas are adequately explained, with satisfactory use of supporting reasons and/or examples.</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 analytical purpose, but may be inconsistently maintained. While errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics are present, they rarely impede understanding.</p>
<p>Score: 3 Responses at this score point demonstrate some developing skill in writing an analytical essay.</p>	<p>The response is somewhat appropriate to the task, with an analysis that is oversimplified or imprecise. Implications or complications are only somewhat clear or relevant. Specific details and generalized ideas are somewhat connected.</p>	<p>Explanations of ideas are limited, but include some use of supporting reasons and/or relevant 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 analytical purpose but are inconsistently maintained. Distracting errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics are present, and they sometimes impede understanding.</p>

Rubric for Grade 4 Analytical Expository Writing *(continued)*

	Analysis	Development	Organization	Language Use
Score: 2 Responses at this score point demonstrate weak or inconsistent skill in writing an analytical essay.	The response demonstrates a rudimentary understanding of the task, with weak or inconsistent skill in presenting an analysis. Implications or complications are not clearly relevant. Any connections between specific details and generalized ideas are unclear or incomplete.	Explanations of ideas are unclear or incomplete, with little use of supporting reasons or examples.	The response exhibits only a little evidence of organizational structure. Logical grouping of ideas is inconsistent or unclear. Transitions between and within paragraphs are often missing, misleading, or poorly formed.	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 analytical purpose. Distracting errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics are present, and they impede understanding.
Score: 1 Responses at this score point demonstrate little or no skill in writing an analytical essay.	The response demonstrates little or no understanding of the task. The response lacks connections between specific details and generalized ideas.	Ideas lack explanation, with virtually no use of supporting reasons or relevant examples.	The response exhibits no evidence of organizational structure. Ideas are not logically grouped. Transitional devices may be present, but they fail to relate ideas.	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 analytical purpose. Sentence structures are mostly unclear. Errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics are pervasive and significantly impede understanding.
Score: 0 Unscorable	The response is blank, voided, off-topic, illegible, or not written in English.			

Sample Essay 1

Score: 1122

I think what makes a good movie is action, comedy, and aventure in a mix. I

Score Explanation

Analysis (1)

The response demonstrates little understanding of the task. It names a *mix* of characteristics that make a good movie, offering no explanation or analysis of what action, comedy, and adventure are or why they make a movie good.

Development (1)

The response is virtually undeveloped. No support is provided for the writer's claim about a good movie.

Organization (2)

No evidence of organizational structure can be seen, as the response contains virtually no developed ideas.

Language Use (2)

The response demonstrates a weak ability to convey meaning, using rudimentary word choices to create a list of broad film genres.

Sample Essay 2

Score: 2222

YAY! I AM GOING TO THE MOVIE THEATER. I CAN NOT WAIT BECAUSE I AM SEEING MY FAVORITE MOVIE CALLED TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES. IT IS A GOOD MOVIE BECAUSE IT IS AN ACTION PACK MOVIE IT HAS A GOOD TITLE, A GOOD AMOUNT OF CHARICTERS, AND FLASH BACKS. THAT IS HOW YOU TELL A GOOD MOVIE FROM A BAD MOVIE.

Score Explanation

Analysis (2)

The response takes a rudimentary approach to answering the question, offering a weak analysis of what makes *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* a good movie (*BECAUSE IT IS AN ACTION PACK MOVIE; A GOOD TITLE; A GOOD AMOUNT OF CHARICTERS; FLASH BACKS*). The connections between the characteristics of this specific movie and movies in general are not explained (*THAT IS HOW YOU TELL A GOOD MOVIE FROM A BAD MOVIE*).

Development (2)

Some information is provided to explain the writer's choice of movie. However, the writer does not illustrate or elaborate on these characteristics—for example, how many characters is *A GOOD AMOUNT*?

Organization (2)

The little organizational structure evident in the response comes mainly from the questions asked in the prompt. Transitions, when they are used, are poorly formed or misleading (*AN ACTION PACK MOVIE IT HAS A GOOD TITLE; THAT IS HOW*).

Language Use (2)

The response demonstrates some developing ability to convey meaning. Though word choice is general, there is a little bit of variety to the sentence structures (*IT IS A GOOD MOVIE BECAUSE; THAT IS HOW YOU TELL A GOOD MOVIE FROM A BAD MOVIE*). The enthusiastic tone is somewhat appropriate, though it is inconsistently maintained (*YAY!; I CAN NOT WAIT*).

Sample Essay 3

Score: 3333

Some people like scary movies some like funny or maybe Holiday movies. But my favorite its kind of scary.

My favorite movie is Divergent.

The reason it think Divergent is a good movie because there are many parts. There are some scary,sad,funny parts that all make the movie better. One of the scary parts that I like are when she almost gets hit by a knife. But one of the sad parts are when one of the main characters good friends die. And some of her family.

One of the reason I thick this movie is better than other movies is this movie is very exciting. One of the parts that makes this movie very exciting is when she lives at the end but her parents and some of her other good friends die. Because she is very brave. Because she is Divergent. And grew up in hard times

All the good movies have exciting parts in common. To a good movie it's good to be exciting. If the movie is not exciting than people will not want to see it. All movies should be a exciting.

Those are the reason I think divergent is the best movie. I honestly think there is not a better movie out there. I think the makers of that movie should make a mother another movie. Because I would go see it.

Score Explanation

Analysis (3)

The response is somewhat appropriate to the task. The writer states why she chose to write about the movie *Divergent* (*There are some scary,sad,funny parts that all make the movie better*) and references a quality that all good movies possess (*All the good movies have exciting parts in common*). Though the response names an implication of this quality (*If the movie is not exciting than people will not want to see it*), this potentially complex idea is not developed further.

Development (3)

This response offers some limited support for its claims by naming some reasons why *Divergent* is a good movie. Development for the idea that *Divergent* has many parts also comes mainly in the form of naming those parts without describing them or explaining what makes them scary or sad (*One of the scary parts that I like are when she almost gets hit by a knife. But one of the sad parts are when one of the main characters good friends die. And some of her family*).

Organization (3)

There is some evidence of organization in this response. Some of the ideas are logically grouped together (*There are some scary,sad,funny parts; One of the scary parts; .But one of the sad parts*). Transitions are sometimes used to clarify relationships between ideas (*One of the reason I thick this movie is better; One of the parts that makes this movie very exciting; Those are the reason I think divergent is the best movie*). While the five-paragraph structure is not essential to a well-organized essay, the writer demonstrates some developing skill in using it to organize this response. The engaging introduction and conclusion help unify the elements of this response.

Language Use (3)

The response demonstrates some developing ability to convey meaning. Word choice is repetitive, and sentence structures show little variety (*One of the scary parts; But one of the sad parts; One of the reason; One of the parts; this movie is very exciting; this movie very exciting is when; movies have exciting parts in common; it's good to be exciting*). Voice and tone are inconsistently maintained (*But my favorite is kind of scary; I honestly think there is not a better movie*).

Sample Essay 4

Score: 4444

My favorite movie is Heaven is For Real. The movie is good because it's a little sad but entertaining, it's also based on a real experience. I think this movie is better than others because it's what happened to a real child it touches your heart. It sort of makes you feel bad for the child because he doesn't know if his parents believe him or not. His father even thought he was near death because the child said he saw God, and angels. He even said he saw his dad's dad (his grandpa), and his sister who died before she was even born. When he told his mom and dad that he saw her they both started crying because they just then realized that he actually did see heaven. I thought it really touched my heart and at the end of the movie it showed a girl who also saw heaven and she painted a portrait of what God looked like. Then the child said that that was what God looked like because he was shown paintings and pictures of what people thought God looked like. In the back of the book Heaven is For Real it showed the portrait of God. I think every good movie either touches your heart or makes you laugh and feel good inside.

Score Explanation

Analysis (4)

This response is appropriate to the task, presenting an analysis about why the writer believes *Heaven Is For Real* is a good movie (*it's a little sad but entertaining, it's also based on a real experience*). The writer does not go in depth on how or why these qualities make a movie good. However, in explaining why this movie is better than others, the writer recognizes an implication: because it's based on a true story, the movie has a direct effect on the audience (*it's what happened to a real child it touches your heart*). There is clear movement from this specific idea to a more general claim (*every good movie either touches your heart or makes you laugh and feel good inside*).

Development (4)

The response provides many satisfactory examples and details that adequately explain the writer's ideas of the movie's sadness and effect on the audience (*It sort of makes you feel bad for the child; he doesn't know if his parents believe him or not; they both started crying because they just then realized that he actually did see heaven*). The accumulated examples serve to develop the analysis and implications presented.

Organization (4)

Though the entire response consists of a single paragraph, it exhibits a clear and simple internal organizational structure. The writer states that the film is based on a true story (*happened to a real child it touches your heart*) and follows that with supporting examples that are logically grouped together. Transitions are used to clarify the relationships between elements (*His father even thought; they both started crying because they just then realized that he actually did see heaven*).

Language Use (4)

The writer demonstrates the ability to clearly convey meaning with a variety of sometimes-precise word choices (*real experience; touches; portrait*). Sentence structures are usually clear, even when they are more complex (*His father even thought he was near death because the child said he saw God, and angels; He even said he saw his dad's dad (his grandpa), and his sister who died before she was even born*). Voice and tone are appropriate to the writing task (*It sort of makes you feel bad; I thought it really touched my heart*).

Sample Essay 5

Score: 5555

Do you ever wonder what a good movie is like? Well, if you would like to know than keep on reading. The movie Frozen is one of the best movies I have ever seen. It is an amazing movie for many different reasons. It is also better than other movies because it is a comedy. It also teaches you a life learning lesson.

It is a good bonding movie because you could go see it with the whole family. You get to spend time with the family watching a funny movie, laughing and being happy together. Frozen is the type of movie that makes the whole family want to go see more movies together. It is one of the best family movies of all time! That is why I think Frozen is an amazing movie to watch for family bonding.

I also think that Frozen is an amazing movie because it is a comedy. In my opinion, I like comedy movies better than sad movies. There aren't a lot of funny movies now, so a comedy movie stands out from the other movies. The comedy in the movie comes from funny characters like the snowman and the reindeer. Also there are a lot of jokes in it, but the jokes come from all different characters. Frozen is an entertaining movie because of its funny jokes.

Another thing that I love about Frozen is that there is a life lesson within the movie. The life lesson is that sisters love is more powerful than any other love. I really like this lesson because it teaches you that there is no greater power than love. In the end of the movie the two sisters learned that lesson when they saved each other and the kingdom. The movie teaches you that when you have a sister, to always love her no matter what.

As you can see, Frozen is a funny yet truthful movie at the same time. It makes you laugh and feel sentimental at the same time. I love this movie because it is like no other. It is like no other because it teaches you a very valuable lesson. It teaches you that no matter what, love will always be the answer.

Score Explanation

Analysis (5)

This response engages with the task, providing a thoughtful analysis that examines implications (*It also teaches you a life learning lesson; It teaches you that no matter what, love will always be the answer*) while also discussing why comedies are better movies. The writer addresses complications (*Frozen is a funny yet truthful movie at the same time. It makes you laugh and feel sentimental at the same time*). There is purposeful movement between specific details about the movie and ideas about movies in general (*Frozen is an amazing movie because it is a comedy; There aren't a lot of funny movies now, so a comedy movie stands out from the other movies; the type of movie that makes the whole family want to go see more movies together*).

Development (5)

The response capably develops the idea of the life lesson (*The life lesson is that sisters love is more powerful than any other love*). The writer integrates her reasoning and support into the claim that *Frozen* is a good family bonding movie (*You get to spend time with the family watching a funny movie, laughing and being happy together. Frozen is the type of movie that makes the whole family want to go see more movies together*). The writer also capably supports claims about the movie being funny (*comedy in the movie comes from funny characters like the snowman and the reindeer; the jokes come from all different characters*) and sentimental (*the two sisters learned that lesson when they saved each other*), bringing those two characteristics together in the end to explain that this combination is what makes *Frozen* such a good movie (*funny yet truthful; makes you laugh and feel sentimental at the same time*).

Organization (5)

Internal organization in each section is purposeful, as is the organization of the response overall. Ideas are logically sequenced, and two organizational threads run throughout the entire response: the life lesson and the idea that comedies are good movies. The response discusses each of these ideas separately and together to demonstrate why *Frozen* is a good movie (*As you can see, Frozen is a funny yet truthful movie at the same time. It makes you laugh and feel sentimental*). Transitions are consistently used to clarify the connections within and between paragraphs (*That is why; I also think that Frozen is an amazing movie because; Another thing that; As you can see*).

Language Use (5)

Meaning is capably conveyed through clear and usually precise word choices (*life learning lesson; comedy; family bonding; no greater power; sentimental*). Sentence structures are clear and varied, and voice and tone are appropriate for the analytical purpose (*Well, if you would like to know than keep on reading; to always love her no matter what*).