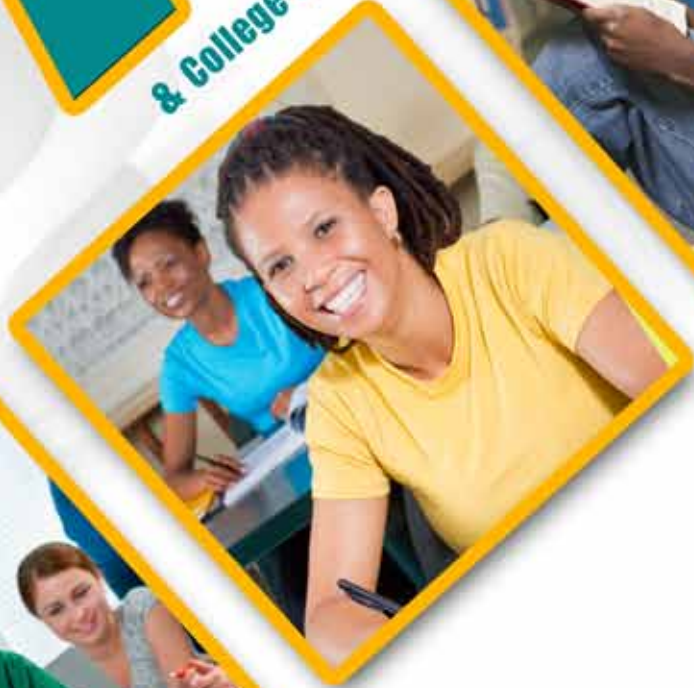
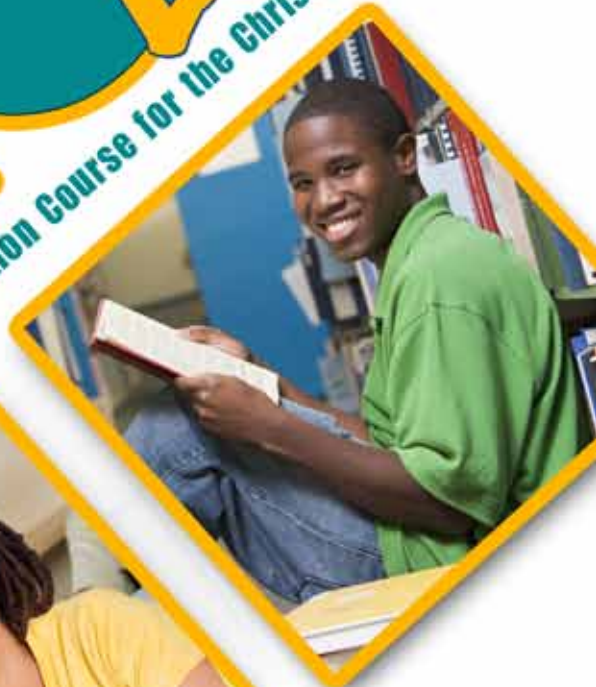


ACT

Essay

& College Preparation Course for the Christian Student



JAMES P. STOBAUGH

First printing: January 2012

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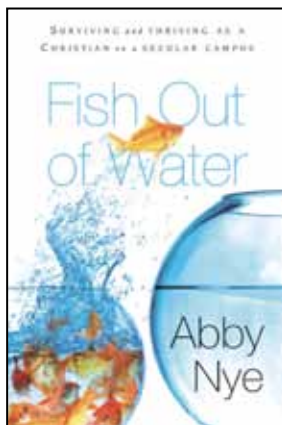
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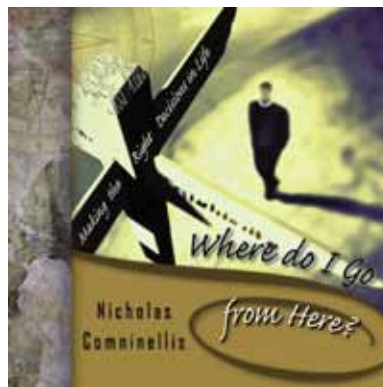
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This free downloadable workbook is an added resource for students preparing for the ACT exam. It has been designed in conjunction with the ACT & College Preparation Course for the Christian Student, Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2012. Please visit our website for this and other resources for students preparing for college and parents, including:



Fish Out of Water
ISBN: 978-0-89221-621-5



Where Do I Go From Here
ISBN: 978-0-89221-515-7



Already Compromised
ISBN: 978-0-89051-607-2

PREFACE

Get ready to take the ACT!

Many American colleges, especially in the Midwest, utilize the ACT as a part of their admissions process.

The ACT test measures the general educational development of high school students and predicts their ability to complete college-level work. It does this by assessing student performance in high school, and therefore is more a measure of college readiness than it is a prediction of college performance. The converse is true for the SAT. Nonetheless, the ACT is gaining popularity among American colleges and universities in a prodigious way.

ACT Essay Section

The written portion of the test is a 30-minute essay test that measures writing skills—specifically those writing skills emphasized in high school English classes and in entry-level college composition courses. It is optional, but I highly recommend that all ACT students take it. For one thing, with this workbook it could produce a student's highest score on the exam. Besides, it is the easiest score on the ACT to increase.

Next, more and more colleges are referencing the SAT and ACT essay and comparing it to the college admission essay.¹ Some college admission officers realize that there are college admission applicants plagiarizing essays and receiving inappropriate help from teachers and relatives. Thus, looking at the spontaneous ACT and SAT essay is a quick and easy way for colleges to know if students are good writers. So students, take the ACT essay seriously!

The test consists of one writing prompt that will define an issue and describe two points of view on that issue. Students will be given 30 minutes to respond to a question about your position on the issue described in the writing prompt. In doing so, students may adopt one or the other of the perspectives described in the prompt, or you may present a different point of view on the issue. Scores will not be affected by the point of view students take on the issue. However, as I explain below, I would not use this venue as a platform for apologetics.

The essay measures ability to defend or develop a personal point of view on an issue presented in a reading excerpt using reasoning and examples from readings, studies, experience, or observations.

You must write in standard English convention. In other words, scores will be diminished by poor sentence mechanics. Syntax and diction matter. I am an SAT and ACT grader and this matters to me; it will matter to my colleagues as well.

One final note: To those who are Christian believers I must warn you that the ACT consistently chooses prompts that are controversial and in my opinion, prejudiced against our Judeo-Christian morality. Worse than that, almost all the prompts pertain to public and private schools, making it more difficult for homeschoolers! We believers will be offended, no doubt, and may be tempted to use this portion of the ACT as a forum to share our beliefs. Don't do that. It might hurt your score, and in defense of the ACT, you are being asked to discuss what an issue means, or what a quote means, or what an authority means—you are rarely asked to offer your opinion. So, if you need some wriggle room, I would state what the quote means, communicate a scholarly opinion, take one of the positions, and quietly pray for the ACT essay creators and the ACT essay graders! I would not use this venue as a forum to parade your beliefs, however laudable and accurate they might be.

The following workbook is an effective way to improve your ACT essay score. If you carefully complete each exercise, your essay writing will no doubt improve. Blessings!

¹ Stephen Kramer and Michael London, *The New Rules of College Admission* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 2006)

OUTLINE OPTION 1

You will have 30 minutes to write your essay, therefore you will be tempted to skip the outline step. Do not do that. The less time you have, the more concise you have to be, and the more important an outline becomes.

Why create an outline? An outline:

- Helps you organize your ideas
- Shows the relationships among ideas in your writing
- Defines the limit and purpose of your essay.

How do I create an outline?

- Determine the purpose (thesis) of your paper.
- Determine the audience you are writing for.

Then:

- Organize: Group related ideas together. You will read through two ways to do that in the following exercises.
- Order: Arrange material in subsections from general to specific or from abstract to concrete. <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>

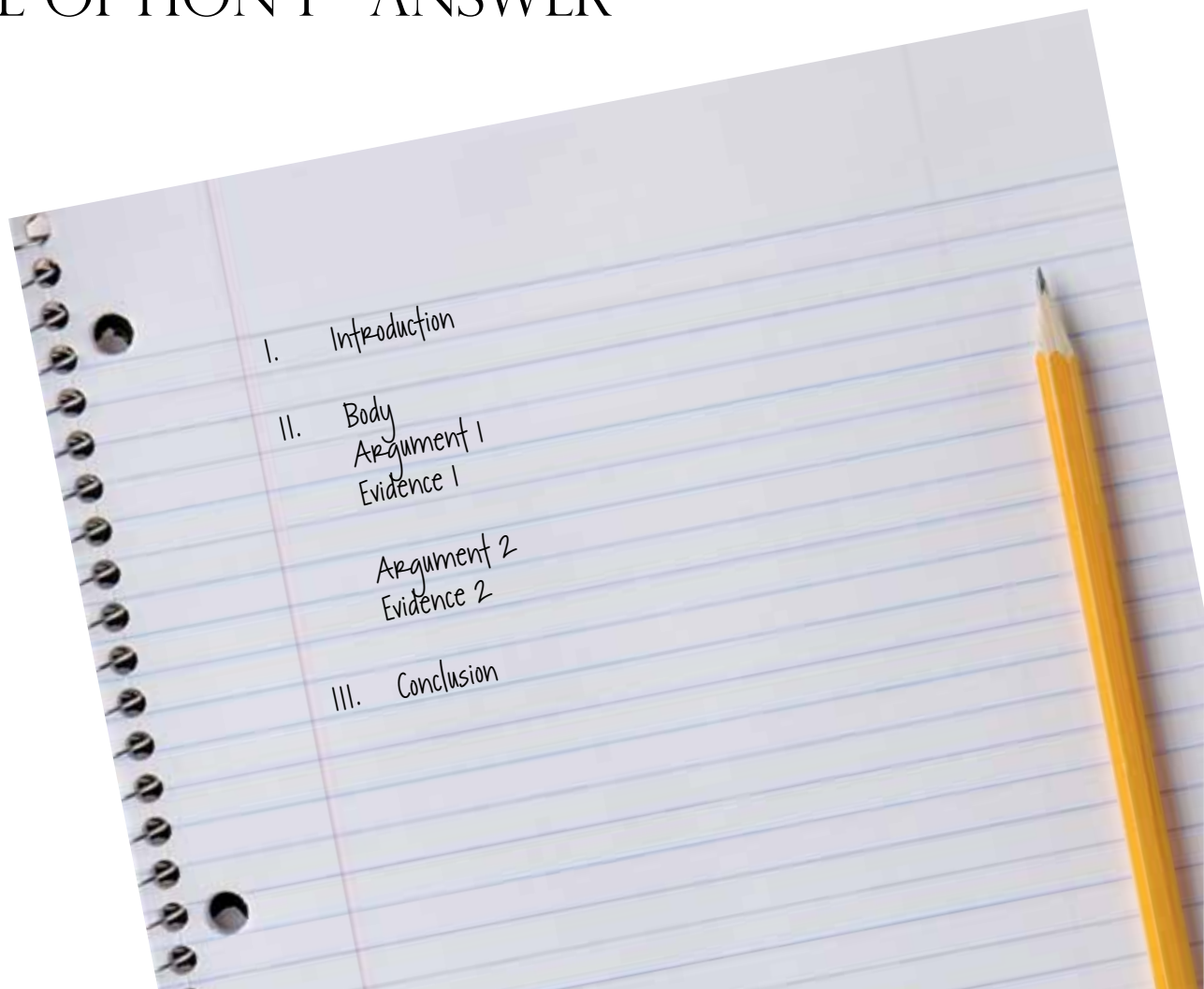
Remember: an outline is a critical, necessary step!

The following is an essay prompt provided by the ACT. Before you write an essay on this topic, create an outline. The first outline should be an orthodox outline (i.e., I, A, B, etc.). The second outline should be a schematic/graphic organization of your essay. Of course you will only choose one option when taking your exam. Take no more than 2-3 minutes to create this outline.

S A M P L E

Over the past several years many schools have gone from a nine month school year to year-round schooling. Although students attend school the same number of days, they have several shorter breaks throughout the year instead of one long summer break. Advocates of year-round schooling claim that students are able to retain more of what they have learned, while opponents feel that it disrupts summer vacation. In your opinion, is year-round school better than a traditional nine-month school year? Write an essay in which you take a position on this question. You may choose either argument presented above or introduce a different point of view. Develop your essay with specific details that support your opinion. Property of ACT®.

OUTLINE OPTION 1 - ANSWER



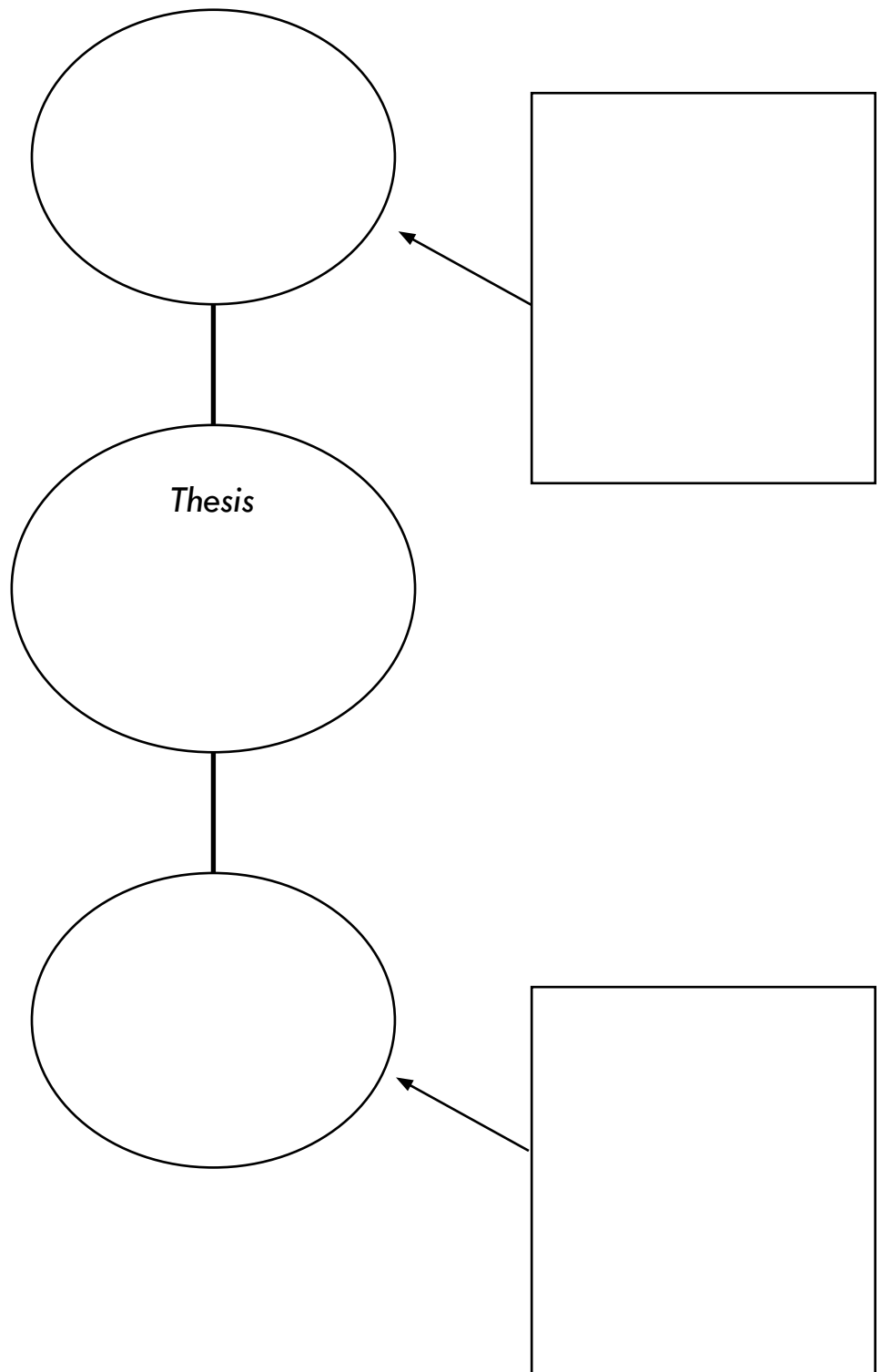
Did your outline follow this pattern? Carefully consider what you have included or omitted in your outline.

OUTLINE OPTION 2

SAMPLE

Over the past several years many schools have gone from a nine month school year to year-round schooling. Although students attend school the same number of days, they have several shorter breaks throughout the year instead of one long summer break. Advocates of year-round schooling claim that students are able to retain more of what they have learned, while opponents feel that it disrupts summer vacation. In your opinion, is year-round school better than a traditional nine-month school year? Write an essay in which you take a position on this question. You may choose either argument presented above or introduce a different point of view. Develop your essay with specific details that support your opinion. Property of ACT®.

The following is another way to organize an essay. Fill in the following diagram:

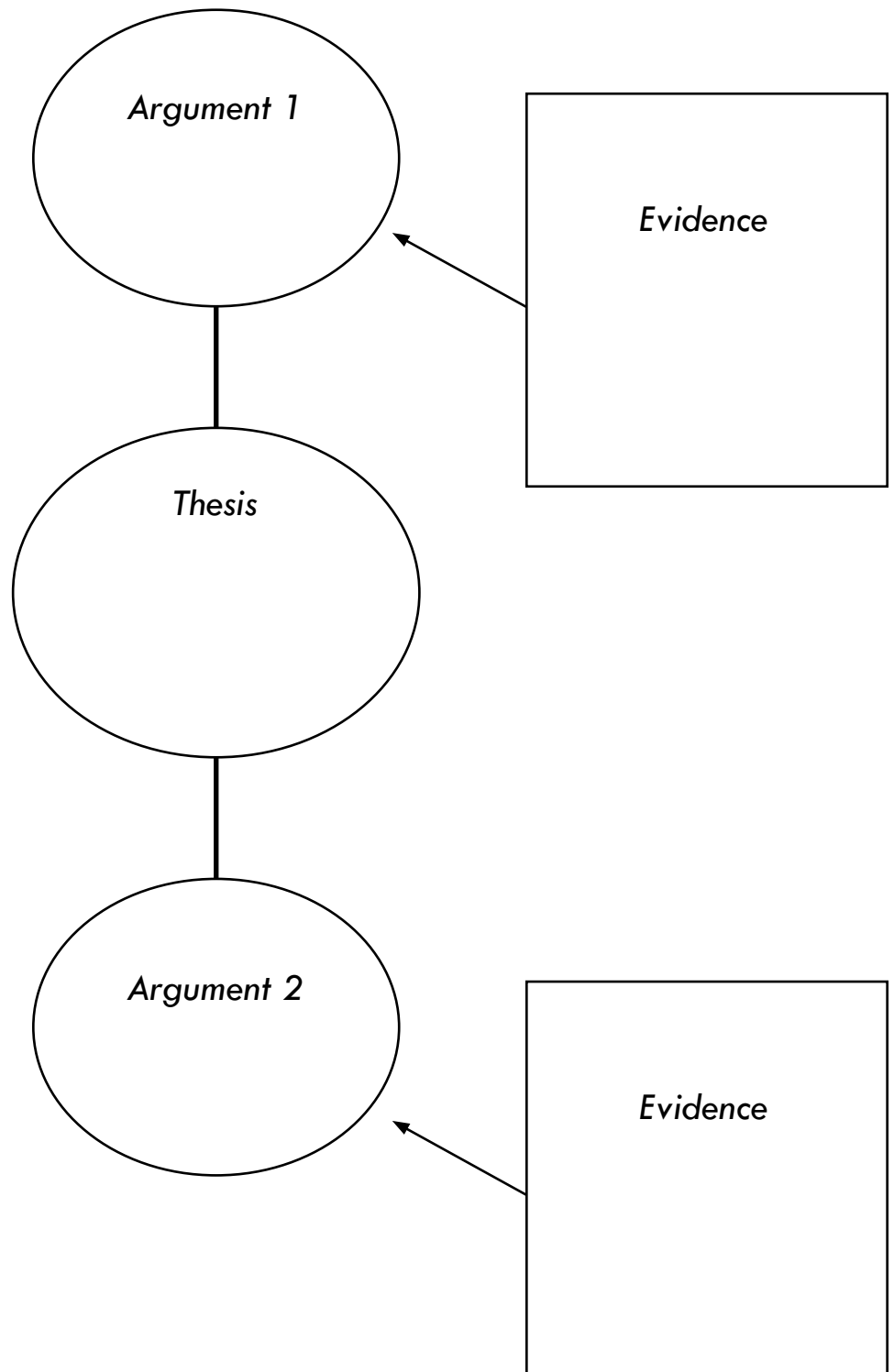


What outline option works best for you?

OUTLINE OPTION 2 - ANSWER



In a diagram outline, you clearly show your thesis, argument, and evidence.



INTRODUCTION



The introduction is the broad beginning of the essay that asks three important questions:

1. What is this?
2. Why am I reading it?
3. What argument/position do you want me to accept?

You should address these questions by doing the following:

1. *Set the context*: Provide general information about the main idea, explaining the situation so the grader can make sense of the topic and the claims you make and support. Restate the question and ask it again.
2. *State why the main idea is important*: Tell the grader why s/he should care and keep reading. Your goal is to create a compelling, clear, and convincing essay the grader will want to read and act upon.
3. *State your thesis/claim*: Compose a sentence or two stating the position you will support with *logos* (sound inductive and deductive reasoning), *pathos* (balanced, emotional appeal), and *ethos* (author credibility).

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>

In summary, all information discussed in the essay is presented in the introduction. No new arguments may be added after the introduction is created. Don't surprise your reader! Presume nothing; explain everything.

One final word: Avoid format writing. Format writing is addressed by the following indicators:

1. Inevitably, format writing emphasizes form over content. Normally, format writers use some sort of contrived checklist.
2. Format writing is full of broad, predictable generalizations where the writer purports to be a specialist in everything. But in fact the format writer is substantially unable to develop, and much less to defend, any serious rhetorical point. One rarely finds a credible thesis (i.e., purpose statement) in a format writing piece.
3. All essays begin and end exactly the same way. Predictability is a sign of inferior writing and endemic to format writing.
4. Format writing does not consider audience, content, or purpose.

Your ACT essay graders are trained, certified, professionals—usually English teachers. They know inferior writing when they see it. They will mark you down if you employ a canned, format writing strategy!

S A M P L E

Over the past several years many schools have gone from a nine month school year to year-round schooling. Although students attend school the same number of days, they have several shorter breaks throughout the year instead of one long summer break. Advocates of year-round schooling claim that students are able to retain more of what they have learned, while opponents feel that it disrupts summer vacation. In your opinion, is year-round school better than a traditional nine-month school year? Write an essay in which you take a position on this question. You may choose either argument presented above or introduce a different point of view. Develop your essay with specific details that support your opinion. Property of ACT®.

1. Introduction

- A. Opening comment—set the context (you need to take control of the topic right here):

- B. Restatement of the question and why it is a compelling question:

- C. Thesis—the purpose, claim, and position of this essay (the grader should know exactly what you are arguing and have a hint at how you will argue it):

INTRODUCTION - ANSWER

I. Introduction

- A. Opening comment: *Scholar Allan Bloom observed, "Only Socrates knew, after a lifetime of unceasing labor, that he was ignorant. Now every high-school student knows that. How did it become so easy?"*

<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/high-school.html>

NOTE: Beginning with a quote is always a good idea. It is an interesting, timely way to bring your reader into your topic. It also impresses graders by showing them that you can talk about specifics. Never give the graders an impression that you do not know what to say, that you are "beating around the bush." To that end avoid general comments like: "Everyone knows that high school is important." This is a vastly inferior beginning because your reader is asked to take a side; readers who agree with you are pleased and those who disagree are irritated. Avoid these unsubstantiated generalizations. Also, do not write in a colloquial style. You are trying to inform and to persuade your graders. You are not trying to become their friends. Show respect, accept your place in the universe, and write well!

- B. Restatement of the Question: *Summer vacation: relaxation, fun, and . . . a time when many students forget most of what they have learned in the last nine months. While students in nations with higher achieving students, such as Japan, South Korea, India, and Germany, persevere through summer months, American students are enjoying blissful, halcyon afternoons at the pool. It's time we reject the antiquated nine month calendar and start competing in the world community.*

NOTE: You accurately restate the question while, at the same time, offering your position. This statement is a precursor to the thesis that will come next. Remember: the more times you can present your case to the graders in 30 minutes, the more chances the graders will understand if not agree with your case. Begin here to make a case that you will repeat multiple times. While graders in fact read every word in your answer, repeating your argument multiple times will make evaluating the essay easy. Leave no doubt that you are taking a position, that it is a good position, and that you will prove that position to be the best one. Don't wimp out in the introduction! Show some backbone!

- C. Thesis: *With shorter vacation breaks and more efficient use of school facilities, year-round school improves education and saves money at the same time.*

NOTE: A thesis is a short, pithy, but accurate summary and purpose statement of what the subsequent essay will be. It is not an opportunity for the reader to pontificate on the essay topic (unless that is the purpose of the essay) nor is the thesis an opportunity to trick the reader into believing some partisan position. Very simply, the thesis must be clearly and cogently stated, defining the purpose of this essay. Make sure you don't preach to the graders or turn this persuasive, academic, expository essay into a polemic.

THE BODY: ARGUMENT 1, EVIDENCE 1

SAMPLE

Over the past several years many schools have gone from a nine month school year to year-round schooling. Although students attend school the same number of days, they have several shorter breaks throughout the year instead of one long summer break. Advocates of year-round schooling claim that students are able to retain more of what they have learned, while opponents feel that it disrupts summer vacation. In your opinion, is year-round school better than a traditional nine-month school year? Write an essay in which you take a position on this question. You may choose either argument presented above or introduce a different point of view. Develop your essay with specific details that support your opinion. Property of ACT®.

The body of an essay is the core of the essay. It is where the argument is developed and the evidence provided.

The four elements of a good body include paragraphs that have:

1. A topic sentence that tells the grader what you will be arguing in the paragraph.
2. Specific evidence and analysis that supports your thesis and that provides a deeper level of detail than your topic sentence.
3. A brief wrap-up sentence that tells the reader how and why this information supports the paper's thesis. The brief wrap-up is also known as the warrant. The warrant is important to your argument because it connects your reasoning and support to your thesis, and it shows that the information in the paragraph is related to your thesis and helps defend it.

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource>

Now, write the first argument for your essay body.

Argument 1

Evidence 1

THE BODY: ARGUMENT 1, EVIDENCE 1 - ANSWER



Argument 1

A Duke University study argues that students attending year-round schools are at a definite advantage because they don't forget what they learned during the long summer break.

NOTE: The author states succinctly that “students attending year-round schools are at a definite advantage because they don’t forget what they learned during the long summer break.” Notice that the author did not say “I believe” or “some students” or “A Duke University study suggests.” The author is forthright and cogent, and therefore, the author is credible.

Evidence 1

“The longer students are away from material, the more forgetting occurs,” says Charles Ballinger, executive director emeritus of the National Association for Year-Round Education in San Diego, California. Twelve month education reinforces and saves the work so diligently acquired in the previous school year! Likewise, know that students lose what they’ve learned the previous year by the time they come back. A twelve month school year eliminates this problem. Shorter, more frequent breaks, assure that students will retain what they learn.

NOTE: Offering a study from Duke University offers strong credibility to the author’s case. While the author probably does not remember exact percentages or precise data, he is able truthfully to argue that a Duke University study supports his case. That is good enough. Next, the author quotes a respected educator, Charles Ballinger. It is not necessary to get the quote exactly right; it is quite enough merely to paraphrase this quote.

THE BODY: ARGUMENT 2, EVIDENCE 2

S A M P L E

Over the past several years many schools have gone from a nine month school year to year-round schooling. Although students attend school the same number of days, they have several shorter breaks throughout the year instead of one long summer break. Advocates of year-round schooling claim that students are able to retain more of what they have learned, while opponents feel that it disrupts summer vacation. In your opinion, is year-round school better than a traditional nine-month school year? Write an essay in which you take a position on this question. You may choose either argument presented above or introduce a different point of view. Develop your essay with specific details that support your opinion. Property of ACT®.

Now, provide another argument and evidence.

Argument 1

Evidence 1

THE BODY: ARGUMENT 2, EVIDENCE 2 - ANSWER

Argument 2

Next, year-round school also means year-round, healthy after-school activities. Debate, sports, and band practice are not interrupted by a July and August interlude. Also, parents don't have to worry about entertaining their children in long, inactive summer months. In fact, parents who work during the summer months can save money on child-care because their child would be safe in school. Besides, twelve-month schools streamline instructional preparation.

NOTE: The transition “next” draws the graders forward to the author’s following argument. Namely, “year-round school also means year-round, healthy after-school activities.” Finally, the author argues “parents who work during the summer months can save money on child-care because their child would be safe in school.”

Evidence 2

The author provides specific examples: debate, sports, and band. The author discusses more specifically the impact of twelve-month schools on teachers: “Besides, twelve-month schools streamline instructional preparation.”



THE BODY: ARGUMENT 3, EVIDENCE 3

SAMPLE

Over the past several years many schools have gone from a nine month school year to year-round schooling. Although students attend school the same number of days, they have several shorter breaks throughout the year instead of one long summer break. Advocates of year-round schooling claim that students are able to retain more of what they have learned, while opponents feel that it disrupts summer vacation. In your opinion, is year-round school better than a traditional nine-month school year? Write an essay in which you take a position on this question. You may choose either argument presented above or introduce a different point of view. Develop your essay with specific details that support your opinion. Property of ACT®.

Now, after you have offered 2-3 arguments in favor of your position, offer a personal example.

Argument 3

Evidence 3

THE BODY: ARGUMENT 3, EVIDENCE 3 - ANSWER



Argument 3

Personally, I would love a twelve-month school year. For one thing, I forget much of what I have learned the previous year.

NOTE: “Personally” draws the graders to your next point.

Evidence 3

Last year, for example, in calculus it was at least October, before I had relearned the second derivative function. Basically, September was a waste! If I had a twelve-month school year with shorter breaks, I would learn and retain much more.

NOTE: The author impresses the graders—he coincidentally mentions that he had a calculus class. Now the graders know that he is probably an honor student. They will want to give him high marks. Finally, the author offers a very specific example with a little humor: “it was at least October, before I had relearned the second derivative function. Basically, September was a waste!” He finishes with a restatement of his argument. “If I had a twelve-month school year with shorter breaks, I would learn and retain much more.”

THE BODY: COUNTER-ARGUMENT

SAMPLE

Over the past several years many schools have gone from a nine month school year to year-round schooling. Although students attend school the same number of days, they have several shorter breaks throughout the year instead of one long summer break. Advocates of year-round schooling claim that students are able to retain more of what they have learned, while opponents feel that it disrupts summer vacation. In your opinion, is year-round school better than a traditional nine-month school year? Write an essay in which you take a position on this question. You may choose either argument presented above or introduce a different point of view. Develop your essay with specific details that support your opinion. Property of ACT®.

It is common knowledge that a counter-argument, a rebuttal of the opposing view, is critical to a high score. The trick is to state enough of the opponent's position without giving this argument any credibility. Not an easy feat!

Counter-Argument

Evidence

THE BODY: COUNTER-ARGUMENT - ANSWER

Counter-argument

Some will argue that keeping the school over twelve months a year will hinder regular maintenance and building repairs. This is nonsense.

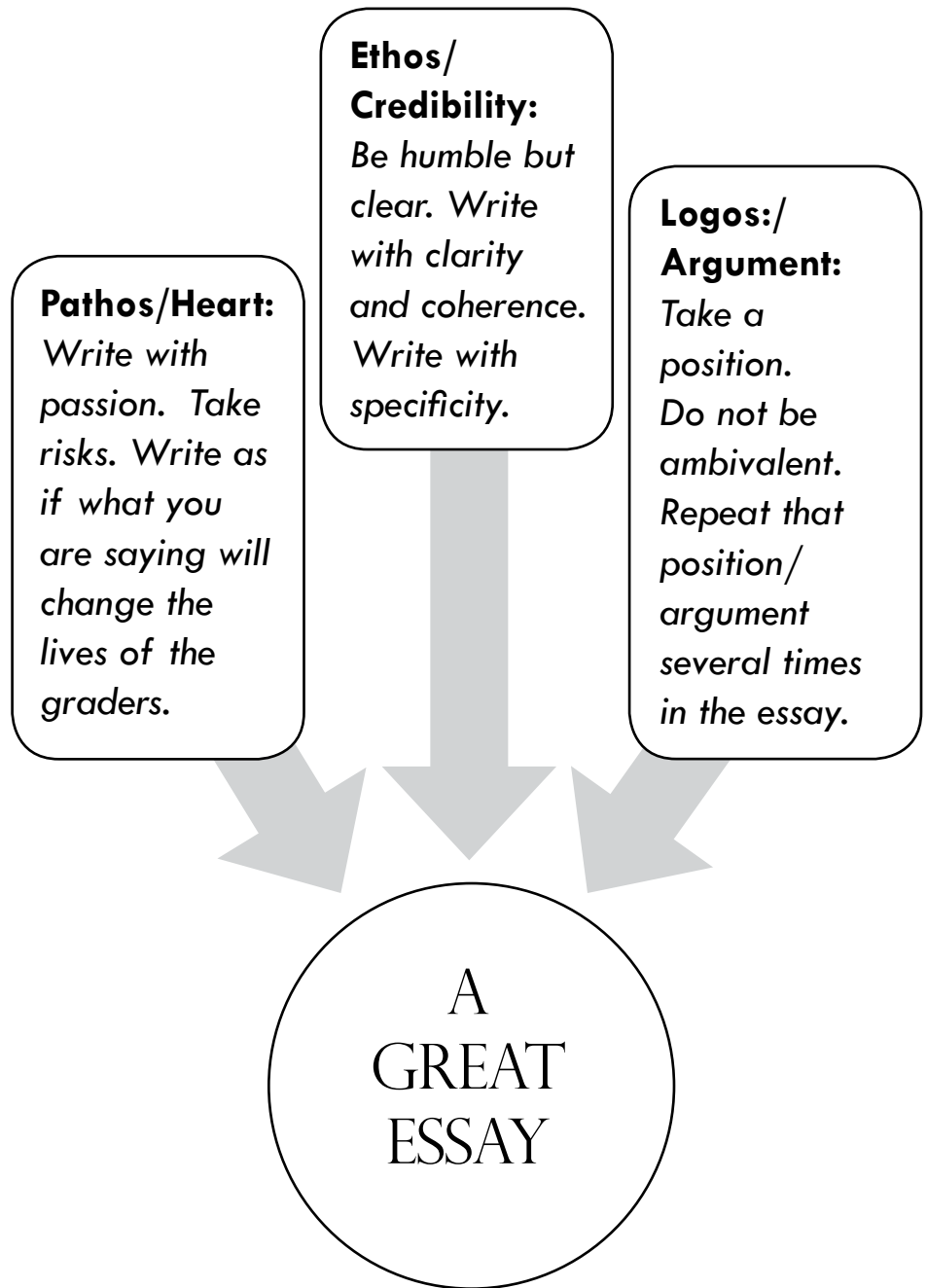
NOTE: Two counter-arguments are offered: “Some will argue that keeping the school over twelve months a year will hinder regular maintenance” and “building repairs.”

Evidence

Most repairs can occur on the weekend, and other repairs can occur during the shorter breaks. But what about building costs? Studies have shown that heating and cooling a year all year round is much cheaper than heating and cooling two separate buildings, which might occur if parallel schools are open nine months a year.

NOTE: The author begins with a strong refutation: “This is nonsense.” This is a nice touch. Graders like that. It reminds them that the author has a strongly held opinion. No equivocation! Next, anticipating other arguments, the author quickly states “Most repairs can occur on the weekend, and other repairs can occur during the shorter breaks.” But what about building costs? “Studies have shown that heating and cooling a year all year round is much cheaper than heating and cooling two separate buildings, which might occur if parallel schools are open nine months a year.”

A GREAT ACT ESSAY - BALANCE



THE CONCLUSION

SAMPLE

Over the past several years many schools have gone from a nine month school year to year-round schooling. Although students attend school the same number of days, they have several shorter breaks throughout the year instead of one long summer break. Advocates of year-round schooling claim that students are able to retain more of what they have learned, while opponents feel that it disrupts summer vacation. In your opinion, is year-round school better than a traditional nine-month school year? Write an essay in which you take a position on this question. You may choose either argument presented above or introduce a different point of view. Develop your essay with specific details that support your opinion. Property of ACT®.

In a general way your conclusion will:

- Restate your topic and why it is important.
- Restate your thesis/claim.

Remember that once you accomplish these tasks you are finished. Don't try to bring in new points or end with a sermon or polemic. Stay focused and stay on task! Finish with confident humility.

The conclusion:

THE CONCLUSION - ANSWER

The conclusion:

Undoubtedly, year-round school is better than a traditional nine-month school year. Students tend to forget a lot during the summer, and shorter vacations might increase retention rates. Schools that are used year-around will save energy resources, increase human resources.

Teachers, students, parents, and all involved will benefit from a year round education!

NOTE: The conclusion is a chance to have the last word on the subject. The conclusion is also a way to summarize one's thoughts, to demonstrate the importance of one's ideas, and to propel your grader to a new view of the subject. It is also an opportunity to make a good final impression.



THE WHOLE ESSAY

SAMPLE

Over the past several years many schools have gone from a nine month school year to year-round schooling. Although students attend school the same number of days, they have several shorter breaks throughout the year instead of one long summer break. Advocates of year-round schooling claim that students are able to retain more of what they have learned, while opponents feel that it disrupts summer vacation. In your opinion, is year-round school better than a traditional nine-month school year? Write an essay in which you take a position on this question. You may choose either argument presented above or introduce a different point of view. Develop your essay with specific details that support your opinion. Property of ACT®.

Now, rewrite your entire essay.

THE WHOLE ESSAY - ANSWER

S A M P L E

Over the past several years many schools have gone from a nine month school year to year-round schooling. Although students attend school the same number of days, they have several shorter breaks throughout the year instead of one long summer break. Advocates of year-round schooling claim that students are able to retain more of what they have learned, while opponents feel that it disrupts summer vacation. In your opinion, is year-round school better than a traditional nine-month school year? Write an essay in which you take a position on this question. You may choose either argument presented above or introduce a different point of view. Develop your essay with specific details that support your opinion. Property of ACT®.

A Duke University study argues that students attending year-round schools are at a definite advantage because they don't forget what they learned during the long summer break. "The longer students are away from material, the more forgetting occurs," says Charles Ballinger, executive director emeritus of the National Association for Year-Round Education in San Diego, California. Twelve month education reinforces and saves the work so diligently acquired in the previous school year! Likewise, know that students lose what they've learned the previous year by the time they come back. A twelve month school year eliminates this problem. Shorter, more frequent breaks, assure that students will retain what they learn.

Next, year-round school also means year-round, healthy after-school activities. Debate, sports, and band practice are not interrupted by a July and August interlude. Also, parents don't have to worry about entertaining their children in long, inactive summer months. In fact, parents who work during the summer months can save money on child-care because their child would be safe in school. Besides, twelve-month schools streamline instructional preparation.

Personally, I would love a twelve-month school year. For one thing, I forget much of what I have learned the previous year. Last year, for example, in calculus it was at least October before I had relearned the second derivative function. Basically September was a waste! If I had a twelve-month school year with shorter breaks, I would learn and retain much more.

Some will argue that keeping the school over twelve months a year will hinder regular maintenance and building repairs. This is nonsense. Most repairs can occur on the weekend, and other repairs can occur during the shorter breaks. But what about building costs? Studies have shown that heating and cooling a year all year round is much cheaper than heating and cooling two separate buildings, which might occur if parallel schools are open nine months a year.

Undoubtedly, year-round school is better than a traditional nine-month school year. Students tend to forget a lot during the summer, and shorter vacations might increase retention rates. Schools that are used year-around will save energy resources, increase human resources. Teachers, students, parents, and all involved will benefit from a year round education!

SCORING THE ACT ESSAY - EXAMPLE 1

Score of 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 of 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 of 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 of 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 of 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 of 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

SCORING THE ACT ESSAY - EXAMPLE 1 ANSWER

Assignment: Score your own essay. Why did you receive the score that you did? This essay would receive a score of 4.

Here is one sample essay:

In this situation, I would tend to come from a completely different and neutral stance than suggested by the argument in the text. I would suggest that there were definite advantages to both taking a full three month break while doing one's schooling the rest of the year, and taking little breaks, but schooling year round.

This is a fair beginning. The author states his position but what does he mean "I want to come from a completely . . . neutral stance?" It is important to be specific and forceful in the introduction.

Strong moment in the essay. The author personalizes his arguments and offers specific examples.

The obvious advantage to the long break method would be good for someone like me. I have the fortunate opportunity to work with my dad and he farms. The downside to this would be that the times that I am working with him would regularly be the times that I am supposed to be doing school. One of his most active times is during late spring to early summer. This would be the most opportune time to take a long break in the attempt to be of some help during when we work the ground and plant. The problem, or protagonist, in this method would be that my family makes up the very little percentage of people that still farm. So the result is that possibly this would not be the better plan for the majority of the population.

This is a good solution. The problem is that the author offers a solution that he implies is a novel idea "to take small breaks throughout the entire year." The truth is, this solution is stated in the prompt! "Although students attend school the same number of days, they have several shorter breaks throughout the year instead of one long summer break." This could be a fatal mistake! Finally, the biggest problem is that there is no counter-argument. A counter-argument might make this a 5 or 6.

A possible solution to this would be to take small breaks throughout the entire year. This would alleviate some of the problems that children are having about not remembering what they were taught the previous year. The breaks however would have to be frequent and short so as not to overwhelm the students. A problem that is faced here would be that there is not as much of an incentive to work towards the goal of having a long, refreshing, luxurious break for three months.

In conclusion, the teachers must take every student and study their (sic!) own personal situations to determine what the best route is (Joel).

This conclusion is very weak. It is neither a summary nor an argument. It actually states a new argument! Students will "study their own personal situations." Finally, it has bad grammar and in general includes poor grammar.

Score **4**

SCORING THE ACT ESSAY - EXAMPLE 2

S A M P L E

Over the past several years many schools have gone from a nine month school year to year-round schooling. Although students attend school the same number of days, they have several shorter breaks throughout the year instead of one long summer break. Advocates of year-round schooling claim that students are able to retain more of what they have learned, while opponents feel that it disrupts summer vacation. In your opinion, is year-round school better than a traditional nine-month school year? Write an essay in which you take a position on this question. You may choose either argument presented above or introduce a different point of view. Develop your essay with specific details that support your opinion. Property of ACT®.

Score the following essays.

The majority of the people heading the public education system in the United States are promotes of summer vacations for students. The American education system is currently in need of reform. This is obvious from the fact that many of the students who come out of the system are not "well rounded". One of the things is becoming more internationally is to not have a summer break, or least have a very short one. The education systems that have instituted this have benefited from it so far.

Supports of summer breaks claim that our children need and deserve a break. Many say that our children have worked so hard over the "school year" that have earned their time off in the summertime. The students are also said to need time off from all that learning that they do everyday, most of the year anyway. In the end, most people say that it is the way that things have always been done in the public school system.

Supports of year-round school on the other hand, have statistics on their side. It has been shown that to take at break from schoolwork during the summer has negative effects when the students return the fall. Students who are in schools that go year-round are, in fact, "ahead" of similar students in schools that break for the summer.

Countries that have switched that public or government schools to a year-round have seen improvements in the education of their children. Ultimately, the children have more in day and year for things that they enjoy and things that will help them in life (Sean).

Score _____

SCORING THE ACT ESSAY - EXAMPLE 2 ANSWER

Score of 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.



SCORING THE ACT ESSAY - EXAMPLE 3

S A M P L E

Over the past several years many schools have gone from a nine month school year to year-round schooling. Although students attend school the same number of days, they have several shorter breaks throughout the year instead of one long summer break. Advocates of year-round schooling claim that students are able to retain more of what they have learned, while opponents feel that it disrupts summer vacation. In your opinion, is year-round school better than a traditional nine-month school year? Write an essay in which you take a position on this question. You may choose either argument presented above or introduce a different point of view. Develop your essay with specific details that support your opinion. Property of ACT®.

“Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.” These sagacious words of President John F. Kennedy highlight the value and benefits of community service. Since community service uplifts both the doer and the receiver, should high schools require students to complete a certain number of community service hours to graduate? After taking a look back at history, one can see that community service should not be forced upon students for a number of reasons, including the fact that forced procedures have not successfully determined the voluntary actions of citizens without compromising the great American ideal of freedom.

As historians delineate, Prohibition exemplifies that government mandates fail to dictate the actions of the public. Banning alcohol was deemed an act that would benefit everyone; drunkards would stop becoming drunk and innocent citizens would not face consequences resulting from their actions, similar to the multifaceted reasons to mandate community service. However, despite good intentions, this act not only failed to reduce drinking, it actually fomented it. Historians note that it became “cool” and fashionable to drink, while bootleggers began the beginnings of mass crime as they illegally sold liquor across the nation. Prohibition comes as a warning that government regulation may not be the best method to encourage people to do even what is best for them.

Instead, the decision of whether or not to participate in community service should be the choice of each individual. When our Founding Fathers drafted the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, they envisioned a nation free from governmental intervention of public rights, which separated our nation from the tyrannies of Europe. Additionally, uncontrollable circumstances may bar one’s participation in community service. For example, a high school student may need to watch her younger siblings every afternoon while her single mother is at work. She may not be able to perform “community service,” but she is serving others in a different way.

Some people would likely argue that, since community service benefits students, it should be required. However, our nation currently faces an education crisis as one-third of all high school students drop out before graduation, citing reasons such as an inability to keep up with homework or move from one grade to the next. Putting more extracurricular requirements would only exacerbate this problem, to the detriment of our nation.

For the sake of freedom and the inability of mandates to regulation action, community service should be a first priority.

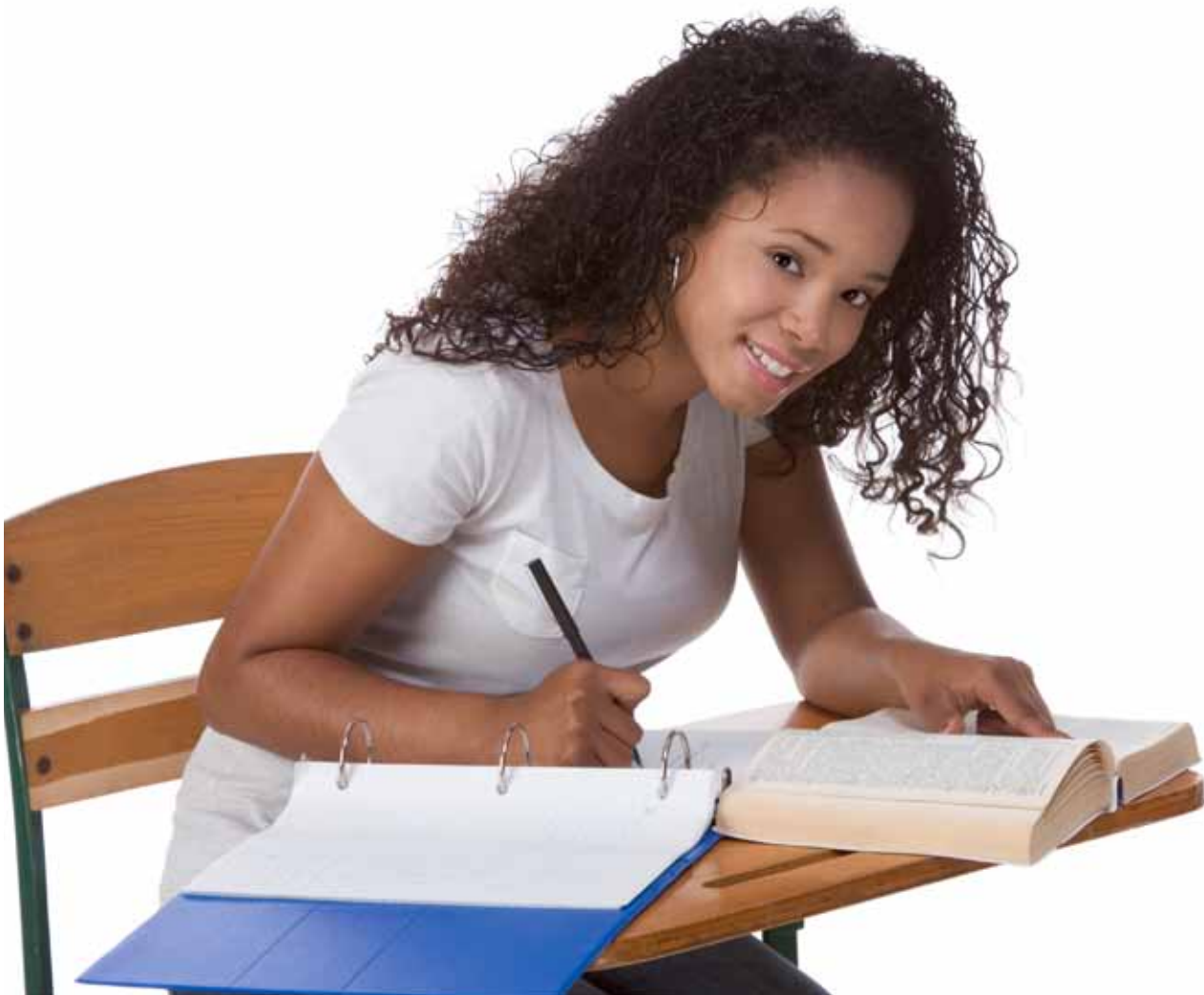
Score _____

SCORING THE ACT ESSAY - EXAMPLE 3 ANSWER

Score of 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 counter-arguments 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.



SCORING THE ACT ESSAY - EXAMPLE 4

S A M P L E

Over the past several years many schools have gone from a nine month school year to year-round schooling. Although students attend school the same number of days, they have several shorter breaks throughout the year instead of one long summer break. Advocates of year-round schooling claim that students are able to retain more of what they have learned, while opponents feel that it disrupts summer vacation. In your opinion, is year-round school better than a traditional nine-month school year? Write an essay in which you take a position on this question. You may choose either argument presented above or introduce a different point of view. Develop your essay with specific details that support your opinion. Property of ACT®.

A student population that tries to survive school until the nearest break rolls around, a staggering high school drop-out rate, and teachers trying to teach to the test- these are some of the scenarios that advocates of nine month school years use to defend their cause. Kids and teachers need that respite from school to look forward to many say. What of instead of trying to find a bandage for the issue of thousands of stressed students and teachers, the cause of the issue was treated? Indeed, it is these issues that critics of year round schooling use in their criticisms that support the need for full year education.

Students wish that summer break would come around largely because they are so tired from several months of consistent schooling with nothing but minimal, occasional breaks to keep them going. One of the advantages of year round schooling, however, is that it offers several frequent breaks throughout the school year as refreshers. Suddenly, students no longer have to live for the nearest extended summer and winter break, causing them to be more able to enjoy their time in school.

There is an unbelievable high school drop- out rate among high school students. The average high school student crams the multitude of differing information being hurled at them long enough to get them through the nearest chapter test or semester exam. After this test is over the information is gone, and those months of hard work yield very little in the way of long term fruits. This condition of living academic crisis to academic crisis and the struggle of juggling multiple workloads causes many students to become overwhelmed and call it quits. Furthermore, for the student whose learning speed may be more limited, he finds himself feeling stupid and worn. With year round schooling, there is a larger expanse of time over which students can learn the material. With more breaks to study over and a longer amount of time devoted to each subject area, their saturated brains are more able to, not only take in the information, but retain it long term. Teachers may also take more time if needed to work with a student based upon the student's individual needs. This leads to a better understanding of the material and more ultimate enjoyment of school for the student involved.

Lastly, teachers are being forced to teach for the test. More specifically, they are forced to teach for the yearly Assessment of Knowledge and Skills test that was initialized as part of George Bush's "No Child Left Behind" program. The teachers have little time to truly explore the fascinating and life enriching aspects of an individual subject, but rather must give a bereft overview- just enough to pat the child along and hope that they can graduate to the next grade. Year round schooling allows more time for the teacher to teach for the required test but also present information and allot projects that will extrapolate on the concepts learned and truly give the student a chance

SCORING THE ACT ESSAY - EXAMPLE 4 CONT.

to grow in their understanding and enjoyment of the course area. This makes education more fulfilling for the student and the teacher.

Happier students, more satisfied teachers, and a more educated population- these are just some of the valuable reasons for year round schooling to thrive. Instead of trying to help kids survive school, why not allow them to enjoy it?



SCORING THE ACT ESSAY - EXAMPLE 4 ANSWER

Score of 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.



IMPROVING SCORES

SAMPLE

In some high schools, students are required to complete a certain number of community service hours prior to graduation. Some people think community service is a good requirement because they think students will benefit from this experience. Other people think schools should not require community service because students will resent the requirement and, as a result, will not benefit from the experience. In your opinion, should high schools require students to complete a certain number of hours of community service?

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. Property of ACT®

Rewrite the score of 4 essay below so that it is a score of 6.

A nine month school could propose bad and good results. The bad results would include: studying at a public school could permit further indoctrination of the teachers and school material, studying year round anywhere would make academics your sole purpose in life. The good benefit would promote an education and review of concepts year round so that there would be no need for review in the fall.

Studying at a public school could permit further indoctrination of the teachers and school material. A few years ago I viewed on television a documentary of what is going on in the public school system. Ideas such as the Darwin theory and the corruptness of fellow schoolmates "hanging out" more at school than they are at home would definitely promote an indoctrinated graduating class. Once school is year round instead of just nine months students will be even more influenced by the reading material and the people they associate with the majority of their year.

Studying school year round would make academics your sole purpose in life. When one's life revolves around school and breaks are taken only to allow the brain to rest so as to do even more schooling, there's hardly time for anything else. The education of a human being is not the only thing that makes up that human being. On searches for college this year, I have noticed that you sat/act scores mean a lot when colleges search for students, but they also want to see community involvement and leadership skills. These are important things in life that should also be taken into account when planning your k-12 life! Once you are out of school sure your scores matter but what makes you a "person" is how you can deal with others and not be self-centered. Benjamin Franklin was book smart but he was also people smart, which made him successful in life. He went through trials, such as his brother using him in the printing business, to further his character. My uncle considers many people who wish to have a job at chase bank. He first once to know their experience with others and how they deal with problems when they arise. Their test scores are not the main focus here.

In looking at 'summer break' in a new perspective one sees a break from school in order to do other things that will benefit him as much as the academic part of life. It is all how you view a given matter and whether it would be better to do another 3 months of academic work or of community service, a job in dealing with the public, or something else.

IMPROVING SCORES

On the flip side there would be the benefit of being productive in doing school year round. One would be learning and reviewing all year so there would be no wasted time spent on reviewing previously learned subjects in the fall. If one keeps up on the knowledge of how to do math problems, he is likely to do better on major tests than the stop-go theory of taking a summer break after a 9 month school year. Organizations such as sylvan promote doing review all summer so that the 9 month learning period is not wasted on a 3 month break. They know that it is statistics that one loses a lot of what he has learned in the school year over a short summer break of having different priorities.

There are good and bad ways of looking at a 12 month school year as compared to a 9 month school year. One has to outweigh what he thinks is important and which will lead him to his desired result in life. The point of life is to develop life skills (Ashleigh).



IMPROVING SCORES - ANSWER

Rewrite the score of 4 essay below so that it is a score of 6.

Score of 6 Essay

This paragraph is certainly arresting: “Studying at a public school could permit further indoctrination of the teachers and school material.” Remember most graders are public school teachers! Next, the author is inviting controversy by advancing a Creationist viewpoint. While I agree, this author would be wiser to avoid this controversial position—which is tangential.

The rest of the essay is unfocused and somewhat confusing. But the author does offer a counter-argument and does thoroughly answer the question.

A nine month school could propose bad and good results. The bad results would include: studying at a public school could permit further indoctrination of the teachers and school material, studying year round anywhere would make academics your sole purpose in life. The good benefit would promote an education and review of concepts year round so that there would be no need for review in the fall.

Studying at a public school could permit further indoctrination of the teachers and school material. A few years ago

I viewed on television a documentary of what is going on in the public school system. Ideas such as the Darwin theory and the corruptness of fellow schoolmates “hanging out” more at school than they are at home would definitely promote an indoctrinated graduating class. Once school is year round instead of just nine months students will be even more influenced by the reading material and the people they associate with the majority of their year.

Studying school year round would make academics your sole purpose in life. When one’s life revolves around school and breaks are taken only to allow the brain to rest so as to do even more schooling, there’s hardly time for anything else. The education of a human being is not the only thing that makes up that human being. On searches for college this year, I have noticed that you sat/act scores mean a lot when colleges search for students, but they also want to see community involvement and leadership skills. These are important things in life that should also be taken into account when planning your K-12 life! Once you are out of school sure your scores matter but what makes you a “person” is how you can deal with others and not be self-centered. Benjamin Franklin was book smart but he was also people smart, which made him successful in life. He went through trials, such as his brother using him in the printing business, to further his character. My uncle considers many people who wish to have a job at chase bank. He first once to know their experience with others and how they deal with problems when they arise. Their test scores are not the main focus here.

In looking at ‘summer break’ in a new perspective one sees a break from school in order to do other things that will benefit him as much as the academic part of life. It is all how you view a given matter and whether it would be better to do another 3 months of academic work or of community service, a job in dealing with the public, or something else.

First, there is at least one typo mistake. The “twelve-month proposed school year” is what this author should say. There are grammar problems. The second sentence has parallelism problems. In short, it is a pretty good introduction but is full of syntax problems. Syntax problems are the most forgivable aspect of the ACT essay. But don’t push it too far!

IMPROVING SCORES - ANSWER

On the flip side there would be the benefit of being productive in doing school year round. One would be learning and reviewing all year so there would be no wasted time spent on reviewing previously learned subjects in the fall. If one keeps up on the knowledge of how to do math problems, he is likely to do better on major tests than the stop-go theory of taking a summer break after a 9-month school year. Organizations such as Sylvan promote doing review all summer so that the 9-month learning period is not wasted on a 3-month break. They know that it is statistics that one loses a lot of what he has learned in the school year over a short summer break of having different priorities.

There are good and bad ways of looking at a 12-month school year as compared to a 9-month school year. One has to outweigh what he thinks is important and which will lead him to his desired result in life. The point of life is to develop life skills.



WRITE A FINAL PRACTICE ESSAY

For additional essay grading, contact jpstobaugh@aol.com or phone 814-479-7710. For a fee, I would be happy to evaluate this and other practice ACT essays.

S A M P L E

Educators debate extending high school to five years because of increasing demands on students from employers and colleges to participate in extracurricular activities and community service in addition to having high grades. Some educators support extending high school to five years because they think students need more time to achieve all that is expected of them. Other educators do not support extending high school to five years because they think students would lose interest in school and attendance would drop in the fifth year. In your opinion, should high school be extended to five years?

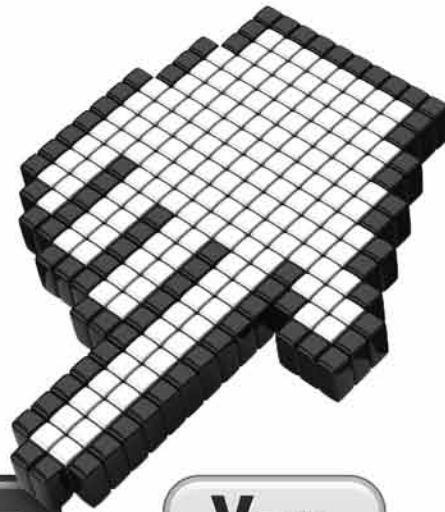
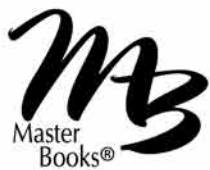
In your essay, take a position on this question. You may write about either one of the two points of view given, or you may present a different point of view on this question. Use specific reasons and examples to support your position. Property of ACT®.

My prayer for you is--

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. I pray that He may grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, and that the Messiah may dwell in your hearts through faith. I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God's love, and to know the Messiah's love that surpasses knowledge, so you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think--according to the power that works in you--to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.

Amen.

(Ephs. 3:14-21)



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