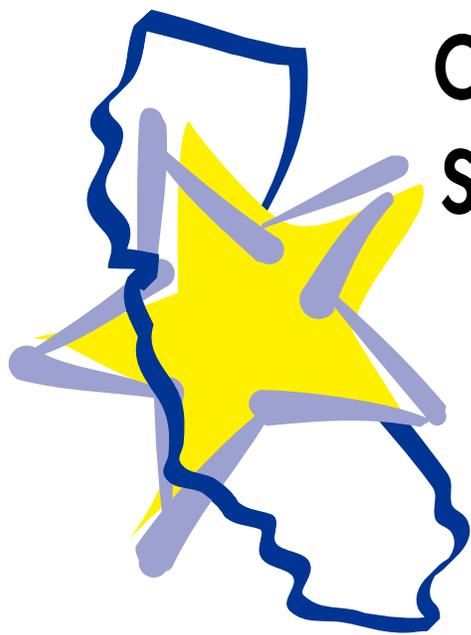


# California Standards Tests

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## Teacher Guide for the California Writing Standards Tests at Grades 4 and 7

**Revised to Include  
New Student Work**

**May 2002**

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prepared by the  
**Standards and Assessment Division**  
**California Department of Education**

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# Table of Contents

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Introduction .....	3
Sample Summary Writing Task—Grade 4 .....	5
Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 4 Summary Writing Task .....	8
Grade 4 Writing Task Administered on May 8 and 9, 2001 .....	11
Sample Narrative Writing Task—Grade 4 .....	12
Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 4 Narrative Writing Task .....	13
Sample Response to Literature Writing Task—Grade 4 .....	17
Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 4 Response to Literature Writing Task .....	19
Grade 4 Scoring Rubric .....	22
Sample Response to Literature Writing Task—Grade 7 .....	24
Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 7 Response to Literature Writing Task .....	28
Grade 7 Writing Task Administered on May 8 and 9, 2001 .....	32
Sample Summary Writing Task—Grade 7 .....	34
Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 7 Summary Writing Task .....	37
Sample Fictional or Autobiographical Narrative Writing Task—Grade 7 .....	41
Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 7 Fictional or Autobiographical Narrative Writing Task .....	42
Sample Persuasive Writing Task—Grade 7 .....	48
Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 7 Persuasive Writing Task .....	49
Grade 7 Scoring Rubric .....	54

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# Acknowledgments

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We wish to thank all those who helped prepare the *Teacher Guide for the California Writing Standards Tests at Grades 4 and 7—Revised to Include New Student Work*. Special Thanks to Karen Hayashi, administrator, Elk Grove Unified School District; Carol Jago, teacher, Santa Monica High School; Judy Welcome, Director, Curriculum and Instruction, Shasta County Office of Education; and Darby Williams, Executive Director, Capitol Region Professional Development Center, Sacramento County Office of Education, for their excellent work in helping to prepare this expanded guide.

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# Introduction

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In February 2000, Governor Davis signed legislation to add writing assessments to California's standards-based testing program at the elementary and middle grade levels. These assessments, the California Writing Standards Tests, were administered for the first time in spring 2001 at grades 4 and 7.

The California Writing Standards Tests address the writing applications standards for grades 4 and 7. At grade 4, the writing applications standards require students to produce four types of writing: narratives, summaries, information reports, and responses to literature. At grade 7, the writing applications standards require students to produce five types of writing: narratives, persuasive essays, summaries, responses to literature, and research reports.

The California Writing Standards Tests are designed to assess only those types of writing that lend themselves to a one-hour assessment. At grade four these include all the types except informational reports, and at grade seven they include all the types except research reports.

In addition to the writing tests, the 2001 and 2002 STAR English-Language Arts Standards Tests at grades 4 and 7 contained 90 multiple-choice questions at each grade level. These included 35 questions specifically written to address the California English-language arts content standards and 55 items selected from the Stanford 9 test for their alignment with the content standards.

Beyond 2002, the STAR English-Language Arts tests at grades 4 and 7 will continue to include a California Writing Standards Test. The writing test at each of those grades might address any of the writing types identified as appropriate for testing at that grade level.

## **Grade 4 and Grade 7 Writing Tasks and Scoring Rubrics**

The 2001 California Writing Standards Test writing tasks at grades 4 and 7 are shown on pages 5–6, 11, 24–26, and 32–33 of this guide. Students in schools, tracks, or programs in session on March 27, 2001, responded to the task administered on that date or on the makeup date, March 28. Students in schools, tracks, or programs not in session on March 27 responded to the task administered on May 8 or on the makeup date, May 9. Students at both grade levels had sixty minutes to read the passages and prompts and write their essays. Sample tasks for the other writing types that may be administered at grade 4 appear on pages 12 and 17–18, and sample tasks for the other writing types that may be administered at grade 7 appear on pages 34–35, 41, and 48. Teachers are invited to use any of the tasks in this guide with their students.

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Student responses are scored using a four-point rubric, with four being the highest. Two readers evaluate each paper and the student's reported score is the sum of these two ratings. If the two readers assign scores that differ by more than one point, a third reader scores the paper. The scoring rubrics for grades 4 and 7 are shown on pages 22–23 and 54–55.

In 2001, scores on the writing tasks were reported separately from scores on the multiple-choice portion of the English-Language Arts Standards Tests. In 2002, writing-task and multiple-choice scores are combined to determine each student's English-language arts performance level.

## **Sample Student Responses and Teacher Commentaries**

Sample student responses to one of the 2001 California Writing Standards Test writing tasks at grade 4 along with teacher commentaries are shown on pages 8–10 of this guide. Sample student responses and teacher commentaries for the other types of writing that can be tested at grade 4 appear on pages 13–16 and 19–21. Sample student responses to one of the 2001 California Writing Standards Test writing tasks at grade 7 along with teacher commentaries are shown on pages 28–31. Sample student responses and teacher commentaries for the other types of writing that can be tested at grade 7 appear on pages 37–40, 42–47, and 49–53.

The sample responses, drawn from field tests, illustrate student work at each score point. It should be remembered, however, that each essay represents only one example of student work at a particular score level. In reality, the range of student work within any of the four score points is broad. To teachers familiar with a six-point rubric, some sample papers that receive a four on a four-point scale may seem less qualified than papers that earn a six on a six-point scale. It should also be remembered that within a given score point, papers will demonstrate differing combinations of strengths and weaknesses.

It should be noted that since all types of writing described in the writing applications standards for grades 4 and 7 are available for testing each year, the types of writing students are asked to produce can change annually.

Following the scoring of the May administration of the 2002 California writing Standards Tests, the California Department of Education will produce an addendum to this guide. The addendum will contain the writing tasks administered in 2002 along with samples of student work and teacher commentaries.

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# Sample Summary Writing Task—Grade 4

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The writing task below, with “Frog or Toad” as the prompt, was administered to students at grade 4 who took the California Writing Standards Test on March 27 or 28, 2001. The prompt “Beavers,” used for the May 8 and 9 administration, is shown on page 11. Sample student essays and teacher commentaries are presented only for “Frog or Toad.”

## Summary of an Article Writing Task

### Directions:

- Read the following informational article.
- As you read, you may mark the article or make notes. Marks and notes will not be scored.
- After reading the article, write a summary of what you have read. You have 60 minutes to read, plan, write, and proofread.
- You may reread or go back to the article at any time during the test.

### Scoring:

Your writing will be scored on how well you:

- state the main ideas of the article;
- identify the most important details that support the main ideas;
- use your own words in writing the summary; and
- use correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.

## Frog or Toad

Some frogs and toads look very much alike. They are cousins in the animal family, but frogs and toads are not the same.

Frogs have round bodies, big heads, and no necks. Their eyes stick out from the tops of their heads. They also have big mouths and sticky tongues. Many types of frogs have teeth on their upper jaws.

*continued...*

Frog skin is smooth. It also feels wet, as if the frog has just stepped out of a shower. So about every ten days, when their skin becomes too tight, frogs shed their old skin. They have brand new skin underneath.

Frogs have short front legs and long back legs. Their back legs are also very strong. This allows them to move quickly by jumping long distances.

Most types of frogs need to live close to water. Their bodies are made for living in water. During the day, you might find some frogs sitting near water. They never go very far away from it, though.

Toads have stout bodies, big heads, and no necks. Their eyes sit on top of their heads, and they also have big mouths and sticky tongues. Toads do not have teeth.

Toads have skin that is bumpy and rough. It feels very dry. Toads also take off their old skin. However, they need new skin every three or four days.

Toads have short back legs. They take short hops to get from one place to another. Their back legs are for hopping instead of for jumping. It takes them quite awhile to get to where they want to be.

Most toads live on land. Some live many miles away from water. Others go into the water only to lay their eggs. Toads often hide during the day. They like to come out after dark, then go back to their hiding places in the daytime.

Frogs and toads may look the same, but they are different in many ways. No matter which you see, both frogs and toads are fun to watch.

### **Writing the Summary**

Write a summary of the article. Your writing will be scored on how well you:

- state the main ideas of the article;
- identify the most important details that support the main ideas;
- use your own words in writing the summary; and
- use correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.

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# Sample Summary Writing Task—Grade 4

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For the summary, narrative, and response to literature writing tasks, student responses are scored using the Grade 4 Scoring Rubric shown on pages 22–23. This rubric incorporates portions of the English-language arts writing strategies and written conventions content standards that address writing in general and includes criteria specific to each genre.

## **Standard**

### **Writing Applications (Genres and Their Characteristics)**

2.4 Write summaries that contain the main ideas of the reading selection and the most significant details.

## **Grade 4 Focus**

For this task, students were expected to summarize main ideas and important details in their own words. Students who did well included only information that was in the article and avoided extraneous commentary. Effective summaries were organized so the reader could easily follow the comparisons and contrasts.

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# Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 4 Summary Writing Task

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## Score Point 4 Essay

### Student Work

Frogs and toads are related (cousins) but are not the same. Frogs have round bodies, huge heads, and not a spot of neck to be seen. Frogs also have colossal mouths and very sticky tongues. Most population of frogs have teeth on their upper jaw. Frog skin is sleek, with a wet feel like it just got out of the pool. Every ten days frogs shed skin, like snakes. Frogs have stubbie front legs and humongous hind legs, not to mention strong for jumping long distances. Almost all kinds of frogs live near some kind of natural water source. Frogs cannot live without water. When on walks you may find frogs sitting by water.

Toads have stout bodies, huge heads, and 0% neck. Thier eyes are always perched on top of thier heads. There's no teeth, but still, a sticky tongue and big head. They have textured skin and shed in three to four days. They are also horrible jumpers. Toads only go to water to lay eggs but they perfer land. Toads often hide during day and come out at dark.

### Commentary

This student responds to all parts of the writing task and shows a clear understanding of the purpose of summary. The main idea is clearly articulated in the first sentence (note the effective use of parentheses to refer the reader to specific information in the text). The student has selected the most important facts and details to include in the summary. There is a consistent organizational pattern, a discussion of frogs in the first paragraph and toads in the second.

This student includes a variety of sentence types. Although some sentences are in need of refinement, the student's intent is clear, and the sentences represent high-quality writing for grade 4.

The major strength of this paper lies in the student's ability to paraphrase. This student has the vocabulary necessary to identify synonyms and paraphrase effectively (e.g., "sleek"; eyes "perched"; "textured" skin). At times the paraphrasing is somewhat awkward, but again, the student's intent is clear and the writing is entirely appropriate for a skilled fourth-grade student. Although this student has not indented, there are clear paragraphs and few other errors in conventions.

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# Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 4 Summary Writing Task

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## Score Point 3 Essay

### Student Work

This story is about frogs and toads. There are many differences but you can't see them. Most frogs live near water. Most toads can live miles away from water. Frogs have long and strong legs to jump quickly and far. Toads have small legs to hop. It takes a long time to hop place to place. Frog skin is wet and smooth. Toad skin is bumpy and rough. Frogs shed there skin in about every week. A toad sheds its skin in three or four days.

Something simalar about toads and frogs is they both eat flyes and have stickey tounges. They both have big heads. A frog has no neck and a toad has no neck. They both have eyes layed on top of there heads

### Commentary

This student clearly understands the purpose of this task and identifies the similarities and differences between frogs and toads. The student addresses the differences in the first paragraph and the similarities in the second, demonstrating a generally consistent organizational focus. The student focuses on mostly relevant facts and details (although the information about eating flies is not in the original passage) and works to paraphrase the information in the passage. The student uses complete sentences but shows little sentence variety. There are some errors in the conventions of English, but they do not interfere with the reader's understanding.

## Score Point 2 Essay

### Student Work

This article is about how much different frogs are than toads. Frogs eyes stick out of the top of there head but toads eyes sit on top of there heads. Toads feets are aculy smaller than frogs. Also frogs have weter skin than toads. toads have rough bumpy skin they also don't jump but hop. a jump is bigger than a hop. That is why it takes them a longetime to get somewhere. Toad's like night better than day but when it is day they all go back in there hideout. But frogs stay in the nice cool water there almost made out of it like us.

### Commentary

This student identifies the main idea and demonstrates some understanding of the purpose of summary. This is evidenced by several attempts at sentences that compare and contrast. The arrangement of the sentences, however, demonstrates an inconsistent overall organizational structure. Sentence structure is also weak, and there is limited sentence variety. The student has difficulty selecting appropriate conjunctions (“toads like night...but when it is day...”). The paper includes errors in spelling, paragraphing, and punctuation that tend to interfere with the reader's understanding.

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# Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 4 Summary Writing Task

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## Score Point 1 Essay

### Student Work

I found out that frogs and toads are a lot different from each other. Lick toads have sort bake legs and frogs have long bak legs.

This story shod mea a lot of theing lick I said in the story fogs have long legs in the back and tods have short legs in the Bake.

The most impotnt that you tellum upart because wote if you have to gev a foger shot and you exodntly gev the told a shot. Fogs have long bak legs and tolds dont. Frogs are smoth, and taods are not.

### Commentary

Although there is an attempt at paragraphing and although the student begins by identifying the main idea (i.e., frogs and toads are different), this essay is clearly at score point one. The only part of the writing task addressed is identification of the main idea. There is no evidence the student understands the purpose of summarizing, and the paper lacks the organizational structure needed for a basic summary of a compare/contrast text such as “Frog or Toad.” For example, although the student identifies two differences between frogs and toads, leg length and skin texture, the difference in leg length is mentioned in all three paragraphs. The student demonstrates little understanding of the passage as a whole. The student also includes marginally related information from his/her prior knowledge (references to shots).

This paper demonstrates little understanding of sentence structure and lacks control over the most basic conventions of grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.

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## Grade 4 Writing Task

### Administered on May 8 and 9, 2001

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The article below was the prompt for the writing task administered at grade 4 on May 8 and 9, 2001. The directions and information that preceded this prompt and the directions that followed it were the same as those for the prompt administered at grade 4 on March 27 and 28, 2001. The same rubric was used for scoring. Student work and teacher commentaries are not included for this task.

#### Beavers

Beavers can be found all over the United States and Canada. They live in areas with both forests and water. They are excellent builders and make their home out of mud and sticks. Part of their home, called a lodge, is above water. The other part of their home is underwater. The beaver makes a tunnel underwater that goes into its lodge. This gives the beaver a safe way into its home where other animals cannot go.

The beaver's body must be strong to allow it to work hard. It must be a strong swimmer to be able to protect itself. It must be able to keep itself warm to live in the water even in very cold weather. The beaver must have strong teeth and jaws to eat and build with wood.

A beaver is a large animal with beautiful fur. It weighs from 35 to 60 pounds. The beaver's body is covered with two layers of brown fur. The inside layer is short, thick fur. The outside layer is long, shiny hair. A beaver's body makes oil that causes its fur to be waterproof. This keeps its body dry. It combs this oil through its fur with its long claws.

A beaver can be recognized by its tail. It has a wide tail that looks like the rubber bottom of a sneaker. This tail steers the beaver through the water. It balances the beaver as the beaver moves a heavy log. It also is used to sound a warning if the beaver senses danger. The animal slaps the tail quickly against the water to tell other beavers to dive for safety.

A beaver has very special teeth. They are covered with a strong orange coating. They have to be strong so that the animal can cut through wood for food and building. As a beaver chews on the wood, the teeth wear down. However, a beaver's teeth continue to grow, just like our fingernails.

The beaver has two kinds of paws. The front paws are like small hands. The back paws are webbed like a duck's feet. These webbed paws make the beaver a very fast swimmer. The beaver is not very fast on land because its webbed feet make it clumsy. Therefore, a beaver must sniff the air and listen carefully to keep itself safe when on land.

Beavers are very amazing, hard-working animals. They are interesting to learn about and watch.

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# Sample Narrative Writing Task—Grade 4

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The writing task below was field tested in 2001. Sample student and teacher commentaries follow on pages 13–16.

## Narrative Writing Task

### Presenting the Task

In this writing test, you will write a story. You will have 60 minutes to complete the test. Your writing will be scored on how well you:

- tell a story about an event or an experience;
- organize the story to have a beginning, a middle, and an end;
- use details to help the reader imagine the event or the experience; and
- use grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.

### Writing the Story

Imagine that you suddenly wake up and find yourself a player on your favorite sports team. Fans are cheering for you. Tell why they are cheering, and write a story about what happens next.

## Standard

### Writing Applications (Genres and Their Characteristics)

- 2.1 Write narratives:
- a. Relate ideas, observations, or recollections of an event or experience.
  - b. Provide a context to enable the reader to imagine the world of the event or experience.
  - c. Use concrete sensory details.
  - d. Provide insight into why the selected event or experience is memorable.

## Grade 4 Focus

For this task, students were expected to tell a complete story with a beginning, middle and end. Students who did well incorporated concrete details, established a clear point of view, and demonstrated a sound grasp of writing conventions. Effective narratives exhibited a range of strategies such as dialogue and use of descriptive detail.

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# Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 4 Narrative Writing Task

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## Score Point 4 Essay

### Student Work

"Whoa, what happened?" I asked myself. As I was thinking, I looked up to see something hurled at me. I was surprized to hear someone shouting, "Steerike one!" "I'm Mark Mcgwire," I thought, "So this is what it's like." The man in front of me ("He must be the pitcher") threw the ball. This time I lashed out at it with all my strength. The impact of the ball sent vibrations down my new spine. My brain knew what it had to do. The newly aquired muscular body of mine launched itself, as though out of a cannon, at first base. As I touched it, I looked for the ball. One of the outfielders was running towards it. It took me a while to realize that fans were screaming "my" name. I dashed onto second base amidst their cheering. "Almost there, Almost there!" I told myself. "Hey this is fun!" I touched second base. Time seemed to slow down. It was slowing down! Then the ball park around me glowed. The noise stopped, and everything grew black, except me. I was petrified with fear. Then it got light, and I felt like I was going backwards. "Oh boy, I'm on a roller coaster," but I found myself in bed, just as it should be. "It was a dream!" I exclaimed. "What a dream it was!" I went to baseball practice that day, and wished I could have retained McGwire's skill. I stepped up to home base and drew in my breath as I made contact with the ball. I sent it flying over the trees. Everybody got dizzy as they tried to keep it in sight. I had kept some of Mark Mcqwire's talent. It wasn't a dream after all.

### Commentary

This writer clearly addresses all parts of the writing task. The writer tells a story with a beginning, middle, and end, makes excellent use of descriptive detail, and generally uses correct grammar, capitalization, and punctuation. The essay demonstrates a consistent focus, moving smoothly through the dream to awakening. The writer suggests a central idea—surprise at suddenly possessing the skills of Mark McGuire—and develops it with vivid dialogue ("Steerike one!"), sensory details ("the impact of the ball sent vibrations down my new spine"), and active verbs ("hurled," "dashed"). The writer also conveys a dreamlike quality by describing time slowing and the ballpark glowing, becoming quiet, and growing dark.

The essay shows variety in sentence structure ("The newly aquired muscular body of mine launched itself, as though out of a cannon, at first base. As I touched it, I looked for the ball."), but for the most part the writer relies on short, direct sentences to suggest action. Focusing on one brief "at-bat" allows the writer to develop the topic fully in a short essay. The writer wisely avoids explanation, choosing instead to plunge quickly into the action and allowing detail and dialogue to convey meaning.

The writer displays outstanding knowledge of the conventions of English, especially for a fourth-grade student.

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# Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 4 Narrative Writing Task

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## Score Point 3 Essay

### Student Work

It was a nice Sunday morning. Then all of a sudden, I heard cheering all around me. When I opened my eyes I saw that I was on a field, a big field, a football field! I looked down and saw that I was wearing a silver and black Raiders uniform. I was playing with the Oakland Raiders!

I looked up at the score board. I saw that we only needed one more touchdown to win. I got to my feet and joined my teammates.

Later while we were playing the ball came to me! I knew what to do. I ran and ran I was going to score a touchdown! I looked behind me and saw that the other team was going to tackle me so I passed the ball to a teammate. He ran and ran, but also got tackled so he passed it to someone else. She ran and ran too but got tackled. Luckily I was to my feet by this time and standing nearby. She passed the ball to me and I ran as fast as I could. I got closer, and closer, and closer. Then finally, TOUCHDOWN! Our team had won!

I was so happy, my teammates cheering, the fans cheering, even the referee was cheering. All this was happening when all of a sudden, I was in my room, in my bed with a football in my hand, and cletes on my feet.

### Commentary

This writer addresses all parts of the writing task, providing a sequence of events, a beginning and ending, and some descriptive detail. The narrative demonstrates a general sense of purpose and mostly consistent organization. The narrative sequence is marred, however, by an unexpected reference to the writer getting up from the ground and by the transition “Later” early in the third paragraph that fails to effectively suggest intervening action. The essay has a central idea—that the writer performed exceptionally well in scoring a winning touchdown—but the third paragraph, where most of the action occurs, includes only some descriptive detail. Concrete description is confined primarily to the more static first and last paragraphs.

In places, the writer does an excellent job of supporting meaning with sentence structure. In paragraph 1, the writer conveys a growing clarity of mind through a sentence that focuses more sharply with each phrase: “When I opened my eyes I saw that I was on a field, a big field, a football field.” The last sentence suggests the writer’s dislocation after waking: “All this was happening when all of a sudden, I was in my room, in my bed with a football in my hand, and cletes on my feet.” Errors in writing conventions, primarily spelling, do not impede understanding.

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# Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 4 Narrative Writing Task

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## Score Point 2 Essay

### Student Work

One day, I woke up from my sleep and found my self in a field playing base ball. When I was playing I had fans cheering for me and I had no idea why. Then I knew I made a home fun and slamed it through the sky. I did see it go higher then I thought but I knew that it went high. I was playing for two hours when suddenly I got hungry. When I did I bought a hotdog and bit into it. Then I noticed it taste like everything that is delicious and tasty. Then I heard my team calling me for my turn. So I went and noticed I made a second home run. I ran as fast as two wolves and a hiena. I felt my fingers crack when I hit the ball but they didn't, I just thought they did. Suddenly I slipped like a dolphin in the water and bumped my head like nothing. After that I fell back to sleep. Suddenly somebody hit me and I woke. Then after I was just sitting in my desk day dreaming.

To Be continued.....

### Commentary

This writer addresses only part of the writing task. Although the essay has a beginning, middle, and end, the middle portion skips almost haphazardly from the height of a home run, to eating a hot dog, to a confusing discussion of a second home run, with little transition or control over organization. The writer suggests a central idea—that the writer has performed an extraordinary feat—but this is developed with limited detail. The writing is most vivid when the writer is running the bases “like two wolves and a hiena” and slipping “like a dolphin,” but these bits of description do not relate to the main idea. The inconsistent focus, rudimentary central idea, minimally developed sequence of events, and limited detail suggest that the writer has little understanding of purpose.

The sentences are marred by weak transitions such as “then” and “so.” The essay contains errors in spelling and sentence structure, some of which may impede understanding.

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# Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 4 Narrative Writing Task

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## Score Point 1 Essay

### Student Work

Then we scores and they start cheering for my team the majics and then the oder team scores and the they bu them and the oder team gets mad and then a kid pushes a kid from my team they let him get one free shot to mack a bascket and he macks it and then ther is olny 5 secens on the clock and the anaunser said thats it for the first qutersd and then new kids came in for the other kids and i was goin to sit Back and then the coach said i have to kep on playing then my them kep on soring and i was macking a lot of 3 pointer and tow poiters and Duncks and my friend meyed al most al the points and then the oder team was scoring alot of poits an the scor was tid 30 to 30 and then the guy said thasts it for seconed qoters then the coach I have to sit down.

### Commentary

The writer addresses only that part of the writing task that requires narration of a sequence of events. The narrative lacks a beginning, middle, and end and meanders with no sense of purpose. The essay shows no organizational structure or central idea and lacks descriptive language and sensory detail to help the reader visualize events. One element that identifies this response as a score point 1 is lack of control over sentence structure—the entire essay is a long series of clauses connected by “and then.” The essay contains numerous errors in spelling (“macks,” “oder” for other, “poiters” for pointers, “meyed” for made), subject-verb agreement (“we scores”), capitalization (“i” for I, “majics,” “Duncks”), and punctuation (“thats” for that’s) that interfere with the reader’s understanding.

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# Sample Response to Literature Writing Task—Grade 4

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The writing task below was field tested in 2001. Sample student essays and teacher commentaries follow on pages 19–21.

## Response to Literature Writing Task

### Directions:

- Read the following story.
- As you read, mark the story or make notes. Marks and notes will not be scored.
- After reading the story, write an essay. You have 60 minutes to read, plan, write, and proofread your work.
- You may reread or go back to the story at any time during the assessment.

### Scoring:

Your writing will be scored on how well you:

- show your understanding of the story;
- support your ideas by referring to the story and to what you already know; and
- use correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.

## The Pecan Tree A Story from Mexico

The pecan tree stood on Juanita's land, but many of its branches hung over the stone wall that separated her land from Pablo's land. For years Pablo had gathered the fallen nuts. He gave them to his mother, who made them into tasty pies and breads.

One stormy night, Pablo heard a terrible crack of lightning. It was immediately followed by booming thunder so loud that his little house shook. The next morning when he looked outside, he saw the pecan tree lying split and broken on the ground. Twisted branches lay across the top of the wall and on both sides of it. Pablo felt very sad. Juanita had lost her beautiful tree, and he and his mother would no longer enjoy the delicious gifts the tree had freely given them for so long.

*continued...*

Outside, Pablo bent down beside the stone wall. He searched through the fallen branches and gathered all of the pecans he could find. After a while they were all collected in a bucket. Pablo lowered it onto the ground on Juanita's side of the wall.

It was with a heavy heart that Pablo walked back to his house. A surprise met his eyes as he approached. There on the steps he saw a large basket. As he grew nearer, he could see that it was filled to the brim with pecans!

He looked over toward the stone wall and saw Juanita walking away in her flowing, colorful skirts and her red headscarf. Glancing back, she waved and brightly smiled at him. He returned both gestures. While he had been worrying about her, she had been thinking of him. As he watched her go, Pablo thought, "Pecan trees may come and go, but true friends are forever."

### Writing the Response to Literature

Write about your understanding of the story. Support your ideas by referring to the story and to what you already know.

Your writing will be scored on how well you:

- show your understanding of the story;
- support your ideas by referring to the story and to what you already know; and
- use correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.

## Standard

### Writing Applications (Genres and Their Characteristics)

2.2 Write responses to literature:

- a. Demonstrate an understanding of the literary work.
- b. Support judgments through references to both the text and prior knowledge.

## Grade 4 Focus

For this task, students were expected to demonstrate their understanding of a literary work. Students who did well provided an interpretation and supported their response with appropriate details from the literary work. Effective responses to literature interpret the meaning of a text, develop inferences about its characters, and synthesize earlier understanding and prior knowledge or experiences with new ideas that the text presents.

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# Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 4 Response to Literature Writing Task

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## Score Point 4 Essay

### Student Work

In this story, Juanita and Pablo learn something about being friends. Juanita had a pecan tree that separated her land from Pablo's land. Pablo gathered the nuts that had fallen for his mother. One night a storm approached and broke the pecan tree. It was a sad moment. The next morning, Pablo searched for pecans and put them in a bucket for Juanita. When Pablo came home he saw a bucket of pecans. He looked back and saw Juanita smiling at him.

Pablo and Juanita were both worried about each other instead of themselves. Pablo collected the nuts when the pecan tree fell. Instead of keeping them he gave them to her. When Juanita's pecan tree fell she gave the nuts on her side to Pablo. They both were doing the same thing that the other was without knowing it. They gave their pecans without expecting anything in return. They became better friends when the pecan tree fell than when it was alive.

### Commentary

This writer responds to all parts of the writing task and shows a clear understanding of the purpose of a response to literature. The first paragraph presents a concise summary of the story, first suggesting the story's theme and then stating the major events of the story with appropriate and relevant narrative details. This paragraph is followed by the writer's interpretation of the piece ("Pablo and Juanita were both worried about each other instead of themselves.") This observation is supported with a reference to the text (both Juanita and Pablo "were doing the same thing that the other was without knowing it" and "without expecting anything in return.") The writer extends this understanding by observing that Juanita and Pablo were "better friends when the pecan tree fell than when it was alive." This writer is able to fill gaps, express an insightful opinion, and support that opinion with references to the text.

There is a consistent organizational pattern that includes a summary of the text in the first paragraph, followed by a response to the passage in the second paragraph. Ideas are presented logically; the writer's language is plain and thoughtful, with direct statements that progress in a clear sequence through each paragraph.

Errors in the conventions of English are minimal.

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# Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 4 Response to Literature Writing Task

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## Score Point 3 Essay

### Student Work

When you care for somebody they will care for you. There is a pecan tree on Juanita's land but part of it is on Pablo's land. For a long time Pablo had been gathering nuts so his mom could make delicious pies and bread. One day they had a terrible storm. When Pablo took a look outside he saw the pecan tree split open on the ground. Pablo was very sad. He went outside and gathered all the pecans he could find and put them on Juanita's land. He walked slowly back to his house when he saw a basket on his porch. It was filled with pecans. All that time he had been worrying about her she had been carrying for him.

### Commentary

This essay shows clear understanding of the events of the story and addresses the writing task. The writer begins the essay by focusing on the overall message of the text, "When you care for somebody they will care for you," and then moves abruptly to a summary of the text to support this premise. The evidence is presented in a coherent manner with appropriate transitions and a consistent point of view. Unlike a paper representative of a higher performance, however, this essay adheres closely to the events in the story. The writer paraphrases the narrative plot line and uses relevant facts and details. Sentences are varied and include both simple and compound sentence types.

There are minimal errors in the conventions of English.

## Score Point 2 Essay

### Student Work

In the story there was a neighborhood where Juanita and Pablo lived. Right by their house was a Pecan tree. Every day nuts will fall down from the Pecan tree and Pablo would go and pick them up and bring them to Juanita so she could make them into pies and bread. Then there was a big storm. And the lightning was so strong that it shook their little house. When the storm was over the Pecan tree was split in half. Then Pablo would look threw the branches to find all the nuts as possible. Then Pablo walked back into the house. And on the steps there was a basket full of brim and peanuts. Then he looked over at the wall and Juanita was walking away with flowers and she was waving to Pablo.

### Commentary

This writer addresses only part of the writing task and demonstrates little understanding of the purpose of response to literature. The writer attempts to summarize the events of the story, but inaccuracies indicate a limited understanding of the literary work ("Juanita ... could make them into pies and bread" and "a basket full of brim and peanuts"). Further, the writer ends the piece abruptly, thus failing to convey any interpretation of the events of the story. Although the writer maintains a consistent organizational structure, sentence structures and transitions are repetitious and inappropriate ("then," "and"). The essay contains errors in the conventions of English that are distracting but do not interfere with the reader's understanding ("nuts will fall," "Then Pablo would look threw the branches...").

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# Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 4 Response to Literature Writing Task

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## Score Point 1 Essay

### Student Work

Once there two lands one is Junita's land. Then there was a land called Pablo's land. There was a stone wall beween Junita's land and Pablo's land. One night Pablo heard a terrible thunder. It crack the stone wall. Junita was opening up gifts that he got. Pablo went to call Junita for help. Pabol mother made bread for dinner. There was a big basket it was on the steps. There was her red headscarf.

### Commentary

This essay is representative of papers that fall in the lowest score point range. Although there is a focus of sorts (“Once there two lands”), there is no evidence that the writer understands the reading passage as a whole or the purpose of writing a response to literature. The paper presents a series of marginally related details (no reference is made to the pecan tree), along with a misreading (“Junita” is a “he”).

The essay contains serious errors in the conventions of English (“once there two lands,” “It crack the stone wall”) that tend to interfere with the reader’s understanding.

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# Grade 4 Scoring Rubric

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The scoring rubric that follows is used to assign scores to students' written responses on the grade 4 writing tests. This rubric includes two sets of criteria. The criteria under "the writing" are adapted from the English-language arts writing strategies and written conventions of English content standards. These criteria are used to evaluate written responses in all genres for their clarity of purpose, central idea, and organization, and for their use of supporting evidence, sentence variety, and writing conventions. The criteria under "narrative writing," "summary writing," and "response to literature writing," adapted from the grade 4 writing applications standards for these genres, are used to evaluate student writing in the specific genres to which they apply.

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## 4 The writing—

- *clearly* addresses all parts of the writing task.
- demonstrates a *clear* understanding of purpose.
- maintains a *consistent* point of view, focus, and organizational structure, including paragraphing when appropriate.
- includes a *clearly presented* central idea with *relevant* facts, details, and/or explanations.
- includes a *variety* of sentence types.
- contains *few, if any, errors* in the conventions of the English language (grammar, punctuation, capitalization, spelling). These errors do **not** interfere with the reader's understanding of the writing.

## Narrative writing—

- provides a *thoroughly developed* sequence of *significant* events to relate ideas, observations, and/or memories.
- includes *vivid* descriptive language and sensory details that enable the reader to visualize the events or experiences.

## Summary writing—

- is characterized by paraphrasing of the main idea(s) and *significant* details.

## Response to literature writing—

- demonstrates a *clear* understanding of the literary work.
- provides *effective* support for judgments through *specific* references to text and prior knowledge.

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## 3 The writing—

- addresses all parts of the writing task.
- demonstrates a *general* understanding of purpose.
- maintains a *mostly consistent* point of view, focus, and organizational structure, including paragraphing when appropriate.
- presents a central idea with *mostly* relevant facts, details, and/or explanations.
- includes a *variety* of sentence types.
- contains *some errors* in the conventions of the English language (grammar, punctuation, capitalization, spelling). These errors do **not** interfere with the reader's understanding of the writing.

## Narrative writing—

- provides an *adequately developed* sequence of significant events to relate ideas, observations, and/or memories.
- includes *some* descriptive language and sensory details that enable the reader to visualize the events or experiences.

## Summary writing—

- is characterized by paraphrasing of the main idea(s) and *significant* details.

## Response to literature writing—

- demonstrates an understanding of the literary work.
- provides *some* support for judgments through references to text and prior knowledge.

**2****The writing—**

- addresses *only parts* of the writing task.
- demonstrates *little* understanding of purpose.
- maintains an *inconsistent* point of view, focus, and/or organizational structure.
- *suggests* a central idea with *limited* facts, details, and/or explanations.
- includes *little* variety in sentence types.
- contains *several errors* in the conventions of the English language (grammar, punctuation, capitalization, spelling). These errors **may** interfere with the reader's understanding of the writing.

**Narrative writing—**

- provides a *minimally developed* sequence of events to relate ideas, observations, and/or memories.
- includes *limited* descriptive language and sensory details that enable the reader to visualize the events or experiences.

**Summary writing—**

- is characterized by *substantial* copying of key phrases and *minimal* paraphrasing.

**Response to literature writing—**

- demonstrates a *limited* understanding of the literary work.
- provides *weak* support for judgments.

**1****The writing—**

- addresses *only one part* of the writing task.
- demonstrates *no* understanding of purpose.
- *lacks* a clear point of view, focus, and/or organizational structure.
- *lacks* a central idea but may contain *marginally related* facts, details, and/or explanations.
- includes *no* sentence variety.
- contains *serious errors* in the conventions of the English language (grammar, punctuation, capitalization, spelling). These errors interfere with the reader's understanding of the writing.

**Narrative writing—**

- *lacks* a sequence of events to relate ideas, observations, and/or memories.
- *lacks* descriptive language and sensory details that enable the reader to visualize the events or experiences.

**Summary writing—**

- is characterized by substantial copying of *indiscriminately selected* phrases or sentences.

**Response to literature writing—**

- demonstrates little understanding of the literary work.
- *fails* to provide support for judgments.

**Condition Codes****B** = Blank**R** = Student refused to write**W** = Wrong prompt**C** = Prompt/Directions copied**I** = Illegible**L** = Language other than English**T** = Off topic

Student receives no credit for writing test and no California Standards Test English-Language Arts score.

Student receives 0 points for writing test but receives a California Standards Test English-Language Arts score.

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# Sample Response to Literature Writing Task—Grade 7

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The writing task below, which includes “To Sleep Under the Stars” as the prompt, was administered to students at grade 7 who took the California Writing Standards Test on March 27 or 28, 2001. The prompt “Ask Sam,” used for the May 8 and 9 administration, is shown on pages 32–33. Sample student essays and teacher commentaries are presented only for “To Sleep Under the Stars.”

## Response to Literature Writing Task

### Directions:

- Read the following story.
- As you read, you may mark the story or make notes. Marks and notes will not be scored.
- After reading the story, write an essay. You have 60 minutes to read, plan, write, and proofread.
- You may reread or go back to the story at any time during the assessment.

### Scoring:

Your writing will be scored on how well you write an essay that:

- shows your understanding of the author’s message and your insight into the characters and ideas presented in the story;
- is organized around several clear ideas and/or images from the story; and
- justifies your interpretation by giving examples and citing evidence from the text.

### To Sleep Under the Stars By Carol Shaw Graham

“But Mom, everybody’s going.”

“Cecilia, you know that isn’t true. All 300 kids in the 7th grade cannot be going.” Cecilia’s mother looked across the kitchen at her. “And I truly am sorry—but this is the only weekend your father has off until after Christmas. We’re going to your Grandmother’s. This is very important, Cecilia. Uncle Frank and Aunt Ellen have been taking care of Grandma ever since her surgery, but we need to help out too. There will be other class trips. This time, family has to come first.

*continued...*

“But . . .” Cecilia searched quickly for another reason to stay home.

“Cecilia. I’m disappointed in you. It is time to be unselfish.” Her mother turned sadly back to the sink.

Cecilia slowly left the kitchen and wandered out to the porch. “It’s not fair,” she thought. “My first class trip. I really wanted to see the planetarium.” She flopped into a chair and gave herself up to self-pity.

Cecilia was still unhappy when the time came to head for Grandma’s. The three-hour trip took the family east through beautiful farmland and several small towns. Usually Cecilia enjoyed the ride, but this time she didn’t. Her friends were on a bus heading three hours west towards the Bay City Planetarium.

Grandma looked tired, but she was so happy to see them that Cecilia felt a little better. “Stay and keep me company,” requested Grandma when Cecilia’s parents went to unpack. “You’ve grown so tall since the summer!” Grandma exclaimed. “Sit down here next to me—I’m getting a crick in my neck looking up at you! Now tell me, where do you buy the beauty cream you must put on your face every night? I need some!”

Cecilia laughed. “Oh, Grandma. You’re just saying that.”

Grandma smiled. “You are getting so grown-up and so busy. I’ve missed you. Your mother told me about your report card. Almost all A’s! That’s wonderful. What is your favorite subject this year?”

“Science, I guess. We’re doing astronomy.”

“I loved astronomy. The stars are fascinating. I still love to look up at the sky and find the constellations.”

“Really? Maybe I inherited it from you,” said Cecilia. “I wish I could sleep out under the stars. Mom says I’d freeze!”

Gran smiled. “I know a way you can sleep under the stars every night and still be warm. Help me down the hall to my room.”

Cecilia gently helped Gran stand. She seemed so frail. Together they slowly walked to Gran’s bedroom. Gran sank into the little chair in the corner with a sigh.

“Are you all right?” Cecilia asked anxiously.

“I’m feeling stronger every day! Now open the cedar chest there.”

Cecilia lifted the heavy lid, and then turned to Gran. “What’s in here, Gran?” she asked.

“Memories. Your mother’s baby shoes, a curl from your first haircut—all sorts of things.” Cecilia pulled out items one by one, and Gran told their stories. They laughed and cried and Cecilia learned about her family. Finally, Cecilia pulled out a big, cloth-wrapped bundle.

“A quilt! Oh Gran, did you make it?”

“A long time ago. When I was in high school, my mother became ill. The doctor sent her to the desert to avoid the cold winter weather. I went with her—I had to miss a year of high school. I was so disappointed at first. The teachers sent me work

*continued...*

through the mail, but I missed all the fun. But in the desert, I discovered that the stars seem to jump out of the sky. My mother and I worked this quilt that winter.” She shook the quilt open over her lap. White stars shone out of a dark blue background. A pearly moon hung in the corner.

“Gran, it’s beautiful,” said Cecilia, smoothing the quilt. “There’s Orion’s belt—and Cassiopeia.”

“We put all my favorites in. My mother and I really enjoyed those times together. I learned that winter how important family is. Now I want to pass the quilt on to you.”

Cecilia wrapped her arms around Grandma. “Oh, Gran. Thank you!” she said. “I’m so glad I came to see you, and I’ll love the quilt forever.”

### **Writing the Essay**

Write an essay in which you present your understanding of the characters and the overall meaning of the story. Support your ideas with examples and/or evidence from the text.

Your writing will be evaluated on how well you write an essay that:

- shows your understanding of the author’s message and your insight into the characters and ideas presented in the story;
- is organized around several clear ideas and/or images from the story; and
- justifies your interpretation by giving examples and citing evidence from the text.

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# Sample Response to Literature Writing Task—Grade 7

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For the response to literature, fictional or autobiographical narrative, persuasive, and summary tasks, student responses are scored using the Grade 7 Scoring Rubric shown on pages 54–55. This rubric incorporates portions of the English-language arts writing strategies and written conventions content standards that address writing in general and includes criteria specific to each genre.

## Standard

### Writing Applications (Genres and Their Characteristics)

- 2.2 Write responses to literature:
- a. Develop interpretations exhibiting careful reading, understanding, and insight.
  - b. Organize interpretations around several clear ideas, premises, or images from the literary work.
  - c. Justify interpretations through sustained use of examples and textual evidence.

## Grade 7 Focus

For this task, students were expected to show an understanding of the story by discussing how the main character comes to appreciate the importance of family. The most effective essays analyzed the characters, their interactions, and the story’s meaning and supported their interpretations with quotations, paraphrases, examples, and details. Essays with the highest scores made connections between the thesis and supporting evidence and demonstrated strong control of sentence structure.

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# Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 7 Response to Literature Writing Task

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## Score Point 4 Essay

### Student Work

"To Sleep Under the Stars," is a story about the value of familys. Even though friends are good to have, you sometimes have to let family come first.

Cecilia wanted to go on a school event to the planetarium, but her parents had other plans. Visiting grandma, who was very ill and needed care, was what they had in mind. While driving up through all the beautiful farmlands, Cecilia pouted and felt sorry for herself. When they arrived at grandma's home Cecilia felt different, especially when seeing the glow she brought to her grandma's face. Later grandma and Cecilia find out how much they have in common. Each of them enjoy astronomy. Cecilia's grandma shares stories of the family with her. Not only does she find they have the same dream, but that her grandma fulfilled hers, sleeping under the stars.

Cecilia's grandma and great-grandma constructed a symbol. The symbol stated two things; they are, family time, and stars. The construction was a quilt, full of swen on stars.

The author is stating that you should value your family. You can always learn new things from your elders, and even though her mother didn't approve of sleeping under the stars, her grandma tried to make it come true. Family will always be there for you, is mainly the whole lesson!

### Commentary

This essay represents a solid score point 4 response, even with a few mechanical errors ("familys," "different" instead of "differently"). The writer commands the reader's attention from the start with a compelling thesis statement: "To Sleep under the Stars' is a story about the value of familys. Even though friends are good to have, you sometimes have to let family come first." The writer develops this central idea with relevant facts, details, and explanation. Ideas are presented logically and related to one another with effective transitions. The interpretation is thoughtful and demonstrates a comprehensive grasp of both the characters and the story's overall meaning. This essay addresses all parts of the writing task and uses a variety of sentence structures.

Many papers scoring a 4 may be significantly superior to this essay in content, development, textual analysis, or writing style; however, this essay meets the rubric requirements for the top performance level. The writer presents an accurate and coherent interpretation of "To Sleep Under the Stars."

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# Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 7 Response to Literature Writing Task

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## Score Point 3 Essay

### Student Work

This story is about a young girl who misses her class feild trip to visit her grandmother. At first, Cecilia is obviously upsut she has to miss the class trip to the planetarium. By the time she gets there, she feels better because her grandmother is glad to see her, "Grandma looked tired, but she was so happy to see them that Cecilia felt a little better."—p. 2. The two began a conversation on how much they both enjoy astronomy, and Cecilia's grandmother gives her a quilt with a very special story behind it. Cecilia is glad she came to visit her grandmother and didn't go on the trip to the planetarium, "Cecilia wrapped her arms around her Grandma. 'Oh Gran. Thank you!' she said. 'I'm so glad I came to see you, and I'll love the quilt forever.'"—p. 3

At first I thought Cecilia was a selfish person. She sounded this way because she was arguing not to go to her grandmother's house on the only weekend they could go. As the story went on, I realized she was a more gentle person. She felt better just by looking at her grandmothers face, because she was so happy to see them. Cecilia's mother had every right to make Cecilia go, yet she still felt sad about it, "Cecilia, I'm dissapointed in you. It is time to be unselfish.' Her mother turned sadly back to the sink."—p. 2. The mother was very understanding of Cecilia's argument. And the grandmother was very kind and generous to give Cecilia the blanket.

### Commentary

This essay meets the minimum requirements for a score point 3 paper. It uses a discussion of the changes in Cecilia's character to demonstrate an understanding of the story, and it uses inferences about characters to convey the writer's understanding of the overall message. In this way, it addresses all parts of the writing task. The writer presents a clear central idea (that Cecilia has changed over the course of the story) and offers quotations from the text to support this premise. The evidence is presented in a mostly coherent manner with some appropriate transitions. An organizational weakness of this paper is the way the writer attaches a discussion of the mother to the end of the essay without a clear transition.

One feature that places this essay clearly in the score point 3 range is the writer's use of a variety of sentence types. This writer has an emerging command of complex sentence structure. This is demonstrated in the following sentence structure, which would not be found in essays scoring at 1 and 2: "Cecilia's mother had every right to make Cecilia go, yet she still felt sad about it, 'Cecilia, I'm dissapointed in you. It is time to be unselfish.'"

Though there are a few errors in the conventions of English ("feild," "dissapointed," and a missing possessive apostrophe), they do not interfere with the reader's understanding. These errors probably result from the first-draft nature of this essay.

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# Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 7 Response to Literature Writing Task

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## Score Point 2 Essay

### Student Work

This story was about this girl named, Cecilia. She didn't want to go to grandma's because she wanted to go to Planetarium. She later finds out how important it is to go to family before yourself. She was disappointed at first then they came together to learn a lot of things about her family. When she see's her grandma she cheers up. Also gets something very important to her family and she gets to do what she wants to do. She learned that you should think about others before you think about yourself. Also it talked about how that quilt came in to grandma's life and the memorys it will always carry with it.

The point that the author was trying to make is that if you think of others before your self there can be rewards. That is what happened in the story and she was rewarded with memoryies and a quilt from her grandma. She learned that you can do everything else but family another day. The mom taught a lesson and one was learned

### Commentary

This essay demonstrates a limited grasp of the text, retelling the events without analyzing the characters or the overall meaning in any depth. Errors in several sentences interfere with the reader's understanding: "She later finds out how important it is to go to family before yourself," and "Also gets something very important to her family and she gets to do what she wants to do." The writer offers few textual examples or details to support the interpretation.

The essay is sprinkled with punctuation and spelling errors ("see's," "memorys" and "memoryies," "taugh" for "taught"). The first sentence includes an unnecessary comma: "This story was about this girl named, Cecilia." Without a semicolon, the fourth sentence is a run-on. The paper is written with simple sentences, no sentence variety, and only the word "also" as a transitional device.

A lack of coherence places this paper clearly in the score point 2 range. The writer jumps from idea to idea without an overall organizational structure or plan.

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# Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 7 Response to Literature Writing Task

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## Score Point 1 Essay

### Student Work

There are lots of characters in the book, with different thoughts and feelings.

The first is Cecilia. Cecilia interest is the stars. She cares about this more than anything. She is mad at her mom in the story.

Another person is Grandma. She also likes the stars. She is very ill and is recovering. She is also happy Cecilia came over.

The last person is mom. She dosen't like the stars that much and loves here family a lot. She is sad because Cilicia can't go with her class.

I don't really understad the essay question but this is what I think I'm suposed to do.

This story shows that family is the most important thing in life.

### Commentary

Though this essay addresses both aspects of the prompt, it represents a score point 1 paper. The essay is undeveloped (just over 100 words long) and presents a series of marginally related details rather than a coherent analysis. The writer opens with a vague statement, “There are lots of characters in the book, with different thoughts and feelings,” that demonstrates no understanding of purpose or writing task. In the sentences that follow, the writer tells about the characters but does not interpret their behavior or refer to concrete examples or details. The statement that mom “dosen’t like the stars that much” is a misreading of the text.

This essay contains serious errors in the conventions of English: “dosen’t,” “understad,” “suposed,” and “here” instead of “her.” In the third sentence, “Cecilia” is missing the apostrophe “s” needed for a possessive. Given the brevity of this writing sample, these errors are unlikely to be the mistakes of a writer rushing against time. The writer employs no sentence variety, using only short, simple sentences such as “Another person is Grandma. She also likes the stars.” In many ways, this writing sample has more in common with an outline than an essay. Three of the six paragraphs are a single sentence in length.

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# Grade 7 Writing Task Administered on May 8 and 9, 2001

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The story below was the prompt for the writing task administered at grade 7 on May 8 and 9, 2001. The directions and information that preceded this prompt and the directions that followed it were the same as those for the prompt used on March 27 and 28, 2001. The same rubric was used for scoring. Student work and teacher commentaries are not included for this task.

## Ask Sam By Dolly Hasinbiller

Alan looked at the letter again. It was from Kris Bates. Kris was one of the nicest girls in school. She was writing to ASK SAM for help. ASK SAM was the advice column in the school paper. Alan was SAM. But no one but he and the teacher knew it.

Dear SAM:

I have a problem. Lots of boys like me, but the one I like doesn't even know I'm alive. He sits near me in math, if that's any help. He doesn't go out with anyone special. What can I do to get him to ask me out?

Kris Bates

Alan was surprised. He couldn't imagine any boy in the school who wouldn't like to go out with Kris. He would ask her himself if he wasn't afraid of being turned down. Who could he be? He thought maybe it was the new boy, Paul. Paul sat right in front of Alan. He was right across from Kris. Paul didn't know many people yet. He didn't go out with anyone special. It must be Paul.

Dear K.B.,

You do have a problem. You will have to talk to him first. I think it would be all right for you to: (1) Call him on the phone with any excuse. (2) Ask him to have a soda with you after school. (3) Walk him home. If none of this works, let me know.

SAM

*continued...*

He would keep an eye on Kris. Then he could see how well she was taking his advice. If it didn't work, he would know why.

The day the paper came out, there was a big math test. Every time he looked up, Kris was looking at Paul. Alan was sure that Paul was the one. After the test, Alan said, "Hey, Paul, how did you do on the test?"

"I should have done better," said Paul. "But I think I passed."

Kris spoke up. "How about you, Alan?"

Alan laughed. "I'm afraid I'm not too hot in math, either."

"Why, Alan." Kris said, "I will help you."

"Thanks," said Alan. "But why don't you help Paul? He probably could use the help too."

That night Alan got a phone call from Kris. "Alan, do you have Paul's number? I told him I would help him with math. I thought maybe we could meet after school tomorrow and have a soda first. Would you like to come?"

"No thanks," said Alan. "Three is a crowd. See you tomorrow."

So his advice was working. Kris was doing everything he had told her. SAM had done it again.

After school the next day, Alan met Kris standing all alone outside. "Hi," he said. "Where is Paul? I thought you were helping him."

Kris shrugged. "He couldn't make it. I don't think he needs any help anyway. Alan, can I ask you something?"

"Sure, go ahead." You know ASK SAM? I asked for some advice. But so far it isn't working at all. There's just one thing I haven't tried. But it would make me feel silly doing it."

Alan tried to think what that could be. He couldn't remember. "Well," he said, "you might as well try. What do you have to lose?"

Kris smiled. "Nothing, I guess. Come on. I'll walk you home."

[“Ask Sam” by Dolly Hasinbiller, from *Action: The Strange Notion and Other Stories*. Copyright (c) 1977 by Scholastic Magazines. Reprinted by permission of Scholastic Magazines.]

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# Sample Summary Writing Task—Grade 7

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The writing task below was field tested in 2001. Sample student essays and teacher commentaries follow on pages 37–40.

## Summary of an Article Writing Task

### Directions:

- Read the following informational article.
- As you read, you may mark the article or make notes. Marks and notes will not be scored.
- After reading the article, write a summary of what you have read. You have 60 minutes to read, plan, write, and proofread your essay.
- You may reread or go back to the article at any time during the test.

### Scoring:

Your writing will be scored on how well you:

- state the main ideas of the article;
- identify the most important details that support the main ideas;
- write your summary in your own words, except for quotations; and
- express the underlying meaning of the article, not just the superficial details.

## Bats

In the distant past, many people thought bats had magical powers, but times have changed. Today, many people believe that bats are rodents, that they cannot see, and that they are more likely than other animals to carry rabies. All of these beliefs are mistaken. Bats are not rodents, are not blind, and are no more likely than dogs and cats to transmit rabies. Bats, in fact, are among the least understood and least appreciated of animals.

Bats are not rodents with wings, contrary to popular belief. Like all rodents, bats are mammals, but they have a skeleton similar to the human skeleton. The bones in bat wings are much like those in arms and the human hand, with a thumb and four fingers. In bats, the bones of the arms and the four fingers of the hands are very long. This bone structure helps support the web of skin that stretches from the body to the ends of the fingers to form wings.

*continued...*

Although bats cannot see colors, they have good vision in both dim and bright light. Since most bats stay in darkness during the day and do their feeding at night, they do not use their vision to maneuver in the dark but use a process called echolocation. This process enables bats to emit sounds from their mouths that bounce off objects and allow them to avoid the objects when flying. They use this system to locate flying insects to feed on as well. Typically, insect-eating bats emerge at dusk and fly to streams or ponds where they feed. They catch the insects on their wingtip or tail membrane and fling them into their mouths while flying.

There are about 1,000 species of bat, ranging in size from the bumblebee bat, which is about an inch long, to the flying fox, which is 16 inches long and has a wingspan of five feet. Each type of bat has a specialized diet. For seventy percent of bats, the diet is insects. Other types of bats feed on flowers, pollen, nectar, and fruit or on small animals such as birds, mice, lizards, and frogs.

One species of bat feeds on the blood of large mammals. This is the common vampire bat, which lives only in Latin America and is probably best known for feeding on the blood of cattle. Unfortunately, in an attempt to control vampire bat populations, farmers have unintentionally killed thousands of beneficial fruit- and insect-eating bats as well.

Bats, in fact, perform a number of valuable functions. Their greatest economic value is in eliminating insect pests. Insect-eating bats can catch six hundred mosquitoes in an hour and eat half their body weight in insects every night. In many tropical rain forests, fruit-eating bats are the main means of spreading the seeds of tropical fruits. Nectar-feeding bats pollinate a number of tropical plants. If it were not for bats, we might not have peaches, bananas, mangoes, guavas, figs, or dates.

Today, the survival of many bat species is uncertain. Sixty percent of bats do not survive past infancy. Some are killed by predators such as owls, hawks, snakes and other meat-eating creatures, but most are victims of pesticides and other human intrusions. In Carlsbad Caverns, New Mexico, where there were once 8 million bats, there are now a quarter million. At Eagle Creek, Arizona, the bat population dropped from 30 million to 30 thousand in six years.

Bats often have been burdened with a bad reputation, perhaps because they are not the warm, cuddly sort of animal we love to love. However, their unusual physical features should not lead us to overestimate their harm or to underestimate their value.

### **Writing the Summary**

Write a summary of the article. Your writing will be scored on how well you:

- state the main ideas of the article;
- identify the most important details that support the main ideas;
- write your summary in your own words, except for quotations; and
- express the underlying meaning of the article, not just the superficial details.

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# Sample Summary Writing Task—Grade 7

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## **Standard**

### **Writing Applications (Genres and Their Characteristics)**

- 2.5 Write summaries of reading materials:
- a. Include the main ideas and most significant details.
  - b. Use the student’s own words, except for quotations.
  - c. Reflect underlying meaning, not just the superficial details.

## **Grade 7 Focus**

For this task, students were expected to use their own words to relate the main idea and most significant details of the selection. Students who did well included only information that was in the article and avoided extraneous commentary. Effective summaries were clearly organized and included transitions, where necessary, to achieve coherence.

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# Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 7 Summary Writing Task

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## Score Point 4 Essay

### Student Work

In contrast to some mistaken beliefs, bats are not blind rodents that usually have rabies. They have sight, are mammals, and are not especially likely to carry rabies. Bats are relatively misunderstood and unappreciated.

Bats have similar bone structure and skeletons to that of humans, so they are not winged rodents. They are color blind, so they use echolocation if there is not sufficient light. Otherwise, their sight is enough.

Species of bat total about a thousand, with different sizes and unique diets. Most eat insects, but some eat plant products and small animals.

Only vampire bats drink blood, which is harmful. Farmers have accidentally killed many innocent bats while trying to rid themselves of vampire bats.

Among their helpful actions, an important trait of bats is their ability to destroy many unwanted bugs. They also spread fruit seeds and pollinate plants.

Bat survival is not known, because many bats are killed by human disruptions and predators. The bat population has dropped steadily, and may continue to drop. Hopefully, we will realize that although bats look different than our favorite animals, we can learn to accept and admire their value and uniqueness.

### Commentary

This paper demonstrates a clear understanding of purpose and audience, maintaining a consistent focus on the purpose and a consistent level of generalization throughout. The writer fully addresses the task, covering the article in appropriate balance and suggesting connections between the main and subordinate ideas. The central idea is clearly stated and is supported with the most significant details.

The writer does an excellent job of paraphrasing, often summarizing in a concise phrase information that is explained in detail in the article. Although most sentences are not elaborate, the writing contains a mixture of sentence structures. The summary contains an occasional awkward phrase, but these do not impede understanding. The final sentence is an excellent example of summary that skillfully captures the meaning of the final paragraph and the article as a whole.

The writer uses transitions well within and between paragraphs and demonstrates outstanding knowledge of the conventions of English.

A ready vocabulary and skill at synthesizing detailed discussion into a word or phrase are the writer's greatest strengths. These enable the writer to express ideas at an appropriate level of generality and, for the most part, in the writer's own words.

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# Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 7 Summary Writing Task

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## Score Point 3 Essay

### Student Work

Bats are so misunderstood by people today. People think that bats are rodents, creatures that cannot see, and animals that have a higher chance of carrying rabies. This is all not true, people probably say it because bats are really not appreciated.

Bats are mammals and can see well. A bat's skeleton is similar to a human's. For example, the bat has a thumb and four fingers just like a human except that skin spreads out across the fingers to make the wing. Bats cannot see color but can still see during day or night. However, bats don't use their eyes at night, they use a method called echolocation. The way echolocation works is the bat makes a noise from its mouth that bounces off the object so the bat can avoid it. They also use echolocation to find flying insects to eat.

There are about 1,000 species of bats. They can vary in size, for example a flying fox is 16 inches long and has wings five feet wide. Also bats can vary in diet. Most bats eat insects while others eat flowers, pollen, nectar, and fruit or on small animals. There is one species that eats large animals, which is a vampire bat. The vampire bat mostly feeds on cattle.

Bats do many useful things. They kill insect pests, and fruit bats spread seeds. Unfortunately bats have been killed being mistaken for Vampire bats. "In Carlsbad Caverns, New Mexico, where there were once 8 million bats, there are now a quarter million.

Bats are actually good animals. We just believe things that are not true. Bats help us in many ways.

### Commentary

This writer addresses all parts of the task, covering the important ideas and including some details. The writer understands the purpose of the task, as indicated by a statement of the article's main idea in the opening paragraph and use of paraphrasing through most of the summary. The organizational structure is mostly consistent, and the writer demonstrates understanding of relationships among ideas by combining information from the article into three coherent body paragraphs. The summary contains a mixture of simple and more complex sentences. The writer demonstrates some effective use of transitions: "However, bats don't use their eyes to maneuver at night," and, to suggest contrast, "Bats are *actually* good animals."

One important difference between this and a score point 4 summary is the inclusion of inessential details. Rather than encapsulating information, this writer achieves a degree of brevity by omitting some details while retaining others. This is most apparent in the second paragraph where the writer includes nearly all details on echolocation except those in the final two sentences of the echolocation paragraph. In addition, this summary often does not suggest connections between details and the central idea. In the middle of the summary, for example, information is not clearly tied to the idea that bats are misunderstood.

This summary has some errors in sentence structure and mechanics, but most of these are probably first-draft in nature.

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# Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 7 Summary Writing Task

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## Score Point 2 Essay

### Student Work

There are about a 1,000 species of bat ranging in size from 1 inch to 16 inches. A long time ago people thought bats had magical powers, and were rodents. The people who thought that were wrong.

Bats are misunderstood because they are not warm and cuddly like the dogs and cats we all love. Although bats are color blind, they do have radar that enables them to see in the dark.

Each bat has there own personal diet that is specialized to fit there DNA. Most bats feed on flowers, pollen, necter, fruit, but mainly insects. Other bats feed on tropical fruit.

Farmers will kill bats because of there misunderstanding. Most farmers are affrid that they will destroy fruit orchards. Other farmers are affraid that the most common vampire bat will feed on the blood of there cattle.

In conclusion for the misunderstanding of the bats, people are often destroying the bat population.

### Commentary

Because this summary contains only some ideas from the article, it does not fully address the writing task. The gaps in information indicate the writer has little sense of the purpose of summary. The writer does not mention the benefits of bats, for example, which are important in supporting the article's thesis. Organization within paragraphs is weak. Several statements that bats are misunderstood indicate the writer understands the article, but information following these statements is not linked to this idea. Within the essay as a whole organization is weak as well, with paragraphs following one another in an almost haphazard manner. A lack of transitions exacerbates the sense of disorganization. Taken by themselves, sentences show competence, with the "Most...Other..." structure of consecutive sentences in paragraphs 3 and 4 suggesting the writer can exercise control over sentence structure. There are errors in the conventions of English, but these do not interfere with understanding.

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# Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 7 Summary Writing Task

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## Score Point 1 Essay

### Student Work

The main idea of thei story is that bats are misundstude. bats can see just as well as humans at night they use a tecnice called ecolocation. Ecolocation is where bats genarate a sound through thier mouth witch hits objects so they can avoid it wile flying.

There are about 1,000 specs of bats. bats come in all sizes and shapes from the bumblebee bats (smallest) to the flying foxes bats (largest).

bats can eat 50% of thier body wieght in insects every night. The way they eat insects is by scooping them up on their wing or tail membrain and flipping them in their mouth.

The bats skelitull stucture is alot like the humans.

### Commentary

The writer clearly states the idea that bats are misunderstood, but the rest of the summary fails to support this idea. The summary contains substantial gaps in information and after the first sentence focuses on details with no attempt to show how these support the main idea. The focus on facts unrelated to the article's thesis suggests the writer has little sense of the purpose of summary. The writer often paraphrases, but this typically consists of rewording rather than summarizing details. The writing is marred less by a lack of sentence variety than by run-on sentences, such as the second sentence in the first paragraph, and rambling sentences like the last sentence in the first paragraph. The summary contains errors in the conventions of English that interfere with understanding. These errors include lack of capitals at the beginning of sentences, lack of periods at ends of sentences, numerous misspellings, and improper noun-pronoun agreement.

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# Sample Fictional or Autobiographical Narrative Writing Task—Grade 7

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The writing task below was field tested in 2001. Sample student essays and teacher commentaries follow on pages 42–47.

## Fictional Narrative Writing Task

### Presenting the Task:

In this writing test, you will write a fictional story. You will have 60 minutes to complete the test. Your writing will be scored on how well you:

- tell a story about a fictional event;
- develop a plot with a beginning, middle, and end;
- develop a setting and characters; and
- use appropriate strategies such as action, descriptive detail, and, perhaps, dialogue to make your story interesting.

### Writing the Story:

Imagine that in the year 2005 the world’s technologies suddenly stop working. Write a story about a day in the life of a person if this occurred.

## Writing the Fictional Narrative

Write a fictional story. Your writing will be scored on how well you:

- tell a story about a fictional event;
- develop a plot with a beginning, middle, and end;
- develop a setting and characters; and
- use appropriate strategies such as action, descriptive detail, and, perhaps, dialogue to make your story interesting.

## Standard

### Writing Applications (Genres and Their Characteristics)

- 2.1 Write fictional or autobiographical narratives:
- a. Develop a standard plot line (having a beginning, conflict, rising action, climax, and denouement) and point of view.
  - b. Develop complex major and minor characters and a definite setting.
  - c. Use a range of appropriate strategies (e.g., dialogue; suspense; naming of specific narrative action, including movement, gestures, and expressions).

## Grade 7 Focus

For this task, students were expected to develop a distinct fictional plot line with a clear beginning, middle and end. Students who did well developed a consistent point of view and provided vivid details to create characters and setting. The most effective narratives used a variety of appropriate devices such as dialogue, concrete nouns, and active verbs.

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# Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 7 Fictional or Autobiographical Narrative Writing Task

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## Score Point 4 Essay

### Student Work

Dan Flecher woke up under his electric blanket. The only problem was that it was no longer electric. However, Flecher didn't think much about this until he got up to make a bowl of cereal. He opened his cupboard and reached for a box. Insead of the usual Grape Nuts box, he pulled out oatmeal. "That's weird," he thought. He continued without breakfast and got ready for work. He turned on the shower. It wasn't hot so Flecher shrugged and took a cold one. He continued out the door and saw more pedestrian traffic than usual. He jumped into his company car, a flying sport utility vehicle. He turned the key, but it didn't work. "Why do I have such bad luck all of the time?" he asked.

Flecher proceded by foot. He had a good forty minute walk ahead of him. When he arrived, he saw that everybody was sweaty.

"Danny boy! Been wanting to speak to you about this crisis. Don't tell me you didn't realize all of the technology is down!"

"Now that you say that, Boss, I did find oatmeal in the cupboard this morning." He shrugged and thought his boss was joking, until he reached his cubicle. His computer was off and his light didn't work. This must be a dream. He stood on his swivle chair and looked into the other cubicles. Everybody had whipped out typewriters and was typing away. "I must get to the bottom of this!" He ran into the elevator. . . bad idea. It didn't work so he jumped down the many flights of stairs and out of one of the doors of his office building. He ran to the city hall. Every one was waiting in front.

"The locks on the doors are electric." said a man. "We can't get in without triggering an alarm!"

### Commentary

This student clearly and cleverly addresses all parts of the writing task. Using strategies like humor ("Dan Flecher woke up under his electric blanket. The only problem was that it was no longer electric") and lively dialogue ("What's the matter with you?" Flecher cried. "Don't you know there's no technology anywhere?"), the writer holds the reader's interest throughout the story. The writer maintains and thoroughly develops the plot from beginning to end, making, for example, several references to Flecher's oatmeal. Also, by having the main character confront the loss of technology throughout the story—Flecher's trouble with his blanket, breakfast, shower, car, computer, light, elevator, and alarms—the writer demonstrates a consistent focus.

The writer uses transitions appropriately and uses a variety of sentence types ("He shrugged and thought his boss was joking, until he reached his cubicle. His computer was off and his light didn't work. This must be a dream.")

There are minimal errors in the conventions of English.

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# Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 7 Fictional or Autobiographical Narrative Writing Task

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## Score Point 4 Essay (continued)

### Student Work

"Umm, excuse me, sir, but the technology is down. . . THERE ARE NO ALARMS!" With that said he flung his briefcase at the glass doors. They shattered.

He ran up the staircase to the city Emergency Services offices. The workers were sitting around eating donuts. "What's the matter with you?" Flecher cried. "Don't you know there's no technology anywhere? Do something!"

"Hey, maybe we should press the Emergency Only switch," said one of the clerks. "I've been dying to push that for years, but I'm scared. I don't know what it will do."

"Well, I certainly don't intend to eat oatmeal and walk to work everyday," said Flecher. "I'll push it!"

He ran up the stair case and flipped a switch. Instantly, yellow taxis were moving again, and Flecher's oatmeal changed back to cereal. He ran down the stairs and out the front door and rushed past a ticket booth and a shopping mall. He turned into the newspaper office and announced loudly and proudly, "I am a hero, so send me to California! By plane, please, not covered wagon!"

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# Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 7 Fictional or Autobiographical Narrative Writing Task

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## Score Point 3 Essay

### Student Work

Did you ever imagine that you could not wake up in the morning and make a cup of coffee with a cup of filter or tap water? Well, thats what has happened. Just a few days ago, you would have tap or filtered water. Now in this day and age you cannot. Although we used to think that as years would go on we could have better technology, but it has gone the opposite.

I, Marilyn Sanders, will tell you about a persons daily life in the new non-technogical soci-ety. In the morning Marasha Gibbons used to wake up and brush her teeth. Now she gets up and uses a piece of wood and pulls out the food stuck in her teeth. Then she walks about a mile with three big white buckets. Then she picks berries in one, fills water from a river in the rest. Marasha picks out the dirty leaves and dead bugs from the water. With her neighbors she walks back home. When she reaches home at about six-thirty in the morning she makes a cup of tea for herself. First, she goes outside to her backyard and helps her husband cut off some wood from their trees. Second, she takes the wood and puts it on a flat surface and rubs two pieces of wood together until she gets some flames. Third, she gets one of her big buckets of water and makes the tea over the fire.

Marasha has three kids. Two girls and one boy. Jacob is the oldest. He is 6 years old. Jacob is very annoying, and has black short hair. Sally and Jessica are twins. They both are 3. Sally is 2 minutes older than Jessica. The both have brown hair and green eyes. At about seven forty-five Jacob wakes up.

"Mommy, Daddy where are you" He yells looking for them.

### Commentary

This essay demonstrates an understanding of purpose and audience, although this is not clearly conveyed in the first paragraph. After an engaging beginning ("Did you ever imagine that you could not wake up in the morning and make a cup of coffee...?"), the writer loses focus on the narrative purpose until the second paragraph ("I, Marilyn Sanders, will tell you about a persons daily life in the new non-technological society"). The remainder of the story generally maintains consistency in point of view, focus, and organization. The plot is adequate, consisting of a series of events in a family's day in the absence of modern conveniences.

Facts and explanations are mostly relevant. Realistic details such as dirty leaves and dead bugs in drinking water help create a credible picture of primitive conditions. The writer's decision to include certain details about the children ("Sally and Jessica are twins. They are both 3. Sally is 2 minutes older than Jessica.") is less effective, although this is clearly an effort to develop the characters. Despite some effective description, the story's pace is slowed by a step-by-step narrative approach, limited action, and simple sentences that, while suggesting the tedium of life in the nontechnological world, tend to limit the energy of the writing.

The difficulty of life in a world without technology—the narrative's main idea—is suggested in the final sentence: "As you can see this new life makes them very tired by the end of the day."

This story contains some errors in the conventions of English, but they do not interfere with the reader's understanding.

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# Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 7 Fictional or Autobiographical Narrative Writing Task

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## Score Point 3 Essay (continued)

### Student Work

"Where outside, pumpkin," Marasha replies  
He comes running outside and goes to hug his parents. Jacob has a glass of milk and a tomato for breakfast. The milk is delievered by a neighbor. It is not purified. The tomato comes from the farm Marasha's husband, Jose, works at. He eats and then goes off to his friend's house.

At about eleven o'clock Sally and Jessica wake up. They have a cup of milk and play tag outside. Jose goes off to his job on the farm. Marasha does some house work and later takes her kids to a portable toilet. It is not really a toilet. Instead, you can call it a bowl with a hole in it. After they get back the kids take a nap. Marasha takes the berries and takes the juice out of the berries to make berry juice.

Jose comes home at three with a basket of vegetables. Marasha cuts and cooks the vegetables. Jose has to go back to the farm. Marasha wakes up the kids and gives each of them a cup of berry juice and an apple. They eat it and Jacob and the twins play. Marasha finishes up cooking dinner.

Jose comes home between seven and eight. They all eat dinner and then wash the dishes. They wash the dishes with the water left over from the river. Then they all go off to the river again. There Marasha and Jose give the kids a shower and take one themselves. Then they go off to the portable toilet. Walking back home is a big project. Marasha holds the twins and Jose carries Jacob. When they reach home they put them off to sleep on the floor with a woven blanket over them. At about ten forty five they go to bed.

As you can see this new life makes them very tired by the end of the day.

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# Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 7 Fictional or Autobiographical Narrative Writing Task

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## Score Point 2 Essay

### Student Work

One day I went to the movie theater. Suddenly all of the movie theater shut down. Everybody was in shock. When the manager came out of his room he said, "the lights are out for awhile." We decided we would drive to Los Angeles it was really close by. When drove to my Grandma's house all the lights were off. We thought she wasn't there because she always had them on, but she was there.

When we went inside it was darki and cold. My grandma was standing in the kitchen with the window light hitting the table. She was looking at us and said "I heard the news and they said there was no light around the world, and the machines stopped working the technology." We were so shocked at what she just siad to us. Since it was so cold and the heater was not working we had to use the fire place. We didn't use the gas cause it didn't work we have used a match. All we have eaten for breakfast was cereal. We sat down and talked about how technology changed our lives.

Now we feel how it is like. We have to stay like this for like a month until they get it fixed. Technology is our need to use everyday. I still wonder how it's like for people on the other side. It might colder or hotter were they are at. Maybe they don't have food or water not even shelter. Black outs are very terrible.

The End!

### Commentary

This student addresses only part of the writing task. The writer attempts to engage the reader with a beginning that sets the scene and presents the problem: "Suddenly all of the movie theater shut down. Everybody was in shock." The focus is maintained in the second paragraph with a description of the grandmother standing in a cold house, where the only light comes from outside. The plot shows inconsistency, however, when the narrator is able to drive a car and the grandmother hears news on the radio. After an explanation that technology would be lost for a month, the plot is discarded and the writer begins to discuss the significance of technology.

Transitions are ineffective or awkward, especially in the second half of the story: "We have to stay like this for a month until they get it fixed. Technology is our need to use everyday."

Characters are undeveloped. There is an attempt to use sentence variety and dialogue to move the plot forward (Grandma says, "I heard the news and they said there was no light around the world, and the machines stopped working the technology"), but most sentences tend to be short and repetitive in their rhythms.

There is a central idea, but facts, details, and explanations are too limited to hold the reader's interest.

The story contains a number of errors in the conventions of English that may interfere with the reader's understanding.

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# Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 7 Fictional or Autobiographical Narrative Writing Task

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## Score Point 1 Essay

### Student Work

The Technology affected sports because nobody paid the bills just to keep a staidium. This all happened when all the owners were to lazy just to check their mail and pay the bills. That's wy there' are no electricity, water because a volcano erupt and hit the water and made it turn into steem. This would affect my life because I would not have any water to drink and if I did had food I would'nt eat because I could'nt see.

### Commentary

Within this score point 1 response, the writer discusses the loss of technology in a very limited way. The response lacks a plot line, presenting a series of barely related statements rather than a coherent story with a beginning, middle, and end. The writer makes no use of strategies such as dialogue, suspense, or narrative action to engage the reader. The essay sounds more like exposition than narration, suggesting that the writer does not grasp the purpose of narrative. The day-in-the-life dimension of the prompt is added only as an afterthought. The absence of a setting and the lack of transitions and organization indicate the writer has little, if any, sense of audience.

This essay offers little sentence variety. Its disjointed presentation and many errors in conventions seriously interfere with the reader's understanding.

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# Sample Persuasive Writing Task—Grade 7

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The writing task below was field tested in 2001. Sample student essays and teacher commentaries follow on pages 49–53.

## Persuasive Writing Task

### Presenting the Task

In this writing test, you will write a persuasive essay or letter. You will have 60 minutes to complete the test. Your writing will be scored on how well you:

- state your position on the topic;
- describe the points in support of your position, including examples and other evidence;
- anticipate and address readers’ concerns and arguments against your position; and
- use grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.

### Writing the Persuasive Essay or Letter

Your principal wants to reward your class by taking students on a field trip to some place in California. Think about what place you would choose for the students in your class to visit. Write a letter to your principal explaining why the place you have chosen is the best place to visit. Give convincing reasons that support your opinion and address the concerns of those who would argue against your position. Explain your reasons with specific details.

## Standard

### Writing Applications (Genres and Their Characteristics)

2.4 Write persuasive compositions:

- a. State a clear position or perspective in support of a proposition or proposal.
- b. Describe the points in support of the proposition, employing well-articulated evidence.
- c. Anticipate and address reader concerns and counterarguments.

## Grade 7 Focus

For this task, students were expected to state a clear position or perspective and support this position with well-articulated evidence. Students who did well used well-organized and relevant arguments to support their positions. The most effective persuasive compositions developed supporting evidence thoroughly and convincingly addressed readers’ concerns, biases, and expectations.

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# Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 7 Persuasive Writing Task

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## Score Point 4 Essay

### Student Work

Dear Mrs. Matias,

I understand you are looking for a place that will be fun to take our class and that is within the boundaries of California. I have a suggestion that will be fun and also physically active and educational. I suggest that we go to the Trinity Alps. The Trinity Alps are a big mountain range inland in Northern California. I, my family, and several of my friends, who attend this school, have been to the Alps many times. They are only about 90 minutes away traveling north. They are included in a National Park forest so they are quite safe.

My visits to the park have always been wonderful. The only people around are usually packers or hunters, if it is hunting season. When you get to the park, you travel up a dirt road to the trail head about half way up the mountain. This is where the physical activity begins. You have to carry your own belongings up the 4 mile trail. If you are carrying a full pack of clothes and food you can get fairly tired, but if you take your time you can easily make it. I know because my grandmother has hiked this trail with me and my family. All the hard work pays off when you get to your destination. From here on out it's all fun!

There are plenty of things to do in the wilderness. You can go swimming in a nearby lake where the water is so clear you can see the bottom even in the deepest spots. You can take day hikes up the mountains and get beautiful views of the surrounding range. You can relax in a soft warm meadow that's full of flowers during spring, and you can roast marshmallows around a campfire at night. The stars are so clear at night that they look like millions of diamonds sprinkled around the sky. All in all I think it's a wonderful experience for everyone.

### Commentary

This writer clearly addresses all aspects of the writing task. The writer recommends a place to visit, describes key points to support the recommendation, and addresses reader concerns. A paragraph is devoted to developing each supporting point—physical activity, fun, and education. These are elaborated with evidence and details and are tied to the writer's central idea, suggesting a clear understanding of purpose. A consistent tone indicates the writer has a clear understanding of audience.

In the fifth paragraph, the writer outlines possible reader concerns and discusses each. The response concludes with a personal appeal to the principal that reiterates and extends the thesis: "The Trinity Alps are a wonderful experience, and I want my peers to see it for themselves."

The response demonstrates good writing skills, with a variety of sentence types ranging from short sentences for impact to more complex structures to describe and explain. Transitions are generally effective, and the few errors in conventions do not interfere with the reader's understanding.

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# Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 7 Persuasive Writing Task

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## Score Point 4 Essay (continued)

### Student Work

There is lots of planning to do before you go, but this teaches the importance of preparing carefully. You will need warm clothes, because the mountains get very cold at night. You don't want to bring too much though, because your backpack might get too heavy, and you can always wear outfits more than once. You have to take food because you won't be able to find it in the wilderness. It's also a good idea to take a water filter, so you can pump fresh water from the lake. These are the base things you need to survive in the wilderness.

I understand that there are concerns about a place with dangers such as bears, cougars, bugs, and there is always a chance of getting lost. Bears are really harmless if you are cautious. They only attack if you make them angry. You can keep bears away by putting all your food in a safe place and burning sticky wrappers. Cougars have never been a problem for me. I've barely seen them in the places I've gone. Bugs are a problem if there are many of them at your campspot. My advice is to bring bug spray. I also understand that getting lost is an issue with so many kids to keep track of. We could solve this problem by having volunteer adults come to help us keep track of everyone. We could even supply children with compasses. I doubt anything would happen though, because the Alps are very safe and nothing has ever happened to our family before.

I hope you will take my suggestions into consideration because the Trinity Alps are a wonderful experience, and I want my peers to see it for themselves.

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# Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 7 Persuasive Writing Task

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## Score Point 3 Essay

### Student Work

Dear Principal,

Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I have a really great idea where my class should visit for our reward. We should visit the Pacific Ocean. Going to the beach would be fun and it would be a great learning experience.

One of the most exciting things we can do is rent a boat and watch for whales. I've done this before with my family and I know if you see a whale you'll be talking about it for a long time afterwards. We can also visit arts and craft shops near the beach, and there are some great musemes nearby. If the weather is nice we can go swimming.

All the kids in my class can bring about \$30.00 for food, boat renting, school bus and other expences that might come up. We should put together a permishon slip that might look something like this...

Dear Parents/Gardians,

We have put together a field trip to the Pacific Ocean to reward your students. We will meet at school at 6:00 am Friday, March 11th and will be returning at around 10:30 pm. Your student will need....

- \$30.00 (extra money if you want)
- swimming suit (optional)
- confortible walking shoes
- sack lunch (optional)
- towel (optional)
- transportation to and from school

Return this slip the day of the trip.

Thank You,  
Your Principal

### Commentary

This student addresses all parts of the writing task, recommending a place in California for a field trip and providing mostly relevant facts to support this recommendation. The writer maintains a mostly consistent focus, but wanders briefly from the writing task to provide a sample letter to parents. Moreover, while the evidence in the second paragraph is relevant to the thesis, it is general rather than precise, specific, and fully developed.

Near the end of the essay, the writer addresses reader concerns, but the discussion is brief rather than thorough and convincing.

The essay demonstrates some sentence variety, especially in the second paragraph. Errors in conventions relate mainly to spelling and do not interfere with the reader's understanding.

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# Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 7 Persuasive Writing Task

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## Score Point 3 Essay (continued)

### Student Work

That is just an example.

There are many places to visit in California, mountains, desserts, rivers, theme parks and many more. I chose the beach because it doesn't cost much, it's close by, fun, and very educational. Places like Magic Mountain are fun too, but they cost a lot and it's very easy to get lost in the crowd. It is also man made, and what can we learn from that?

I think that all around the beach is the best place to visit. I hope you consider my idea along with the other suggestions. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

## Score Point 2 Essay

### Student Work

Dear Mr. Kanean,

My class and I have chosen the best place to go on our field trip. We have chosen Magic Moutin. We have chosen this place for many reasons. One of course is that it is close so we won't have to drive that far. Another important reason is that it will be on a school day so it shouldn't be that crowded. Also my mom and some of her friends has agreed to come on the field trip to help keep an eye on the kids. So that way we can break the kids into groups making it easier to watch them. There's many rides there so it won't be boring at all. That way we can have fun that is safe and exiting. Also on the permission slips we should state that the kids should bring a lunch.

That we can keep inside lockers that are provided at the amussment park.

Sencerly,

### Commentary

This student addresses some parts of the writing task, identifying a choice for the field trip and presenting reasons supporting this selection. However, the writer does not anticipate reader concerns or objections. The writer suggests a central idea—that Magic Mountain would be a good destination—but reasons supporting this idea are simply listed without the elaboration necessary for effective persuasion.

Sentences typically consist of two relatively short clauses loosely connected by “so,” while the essay as a whole amounts to a series of such sentences attached to each other by “One,” “Another,” and “Also.”

There are several errors in the conventions of English, including misspelled words (“exiting”; “sencerly”), mistakes in agreement (“her friends has agreed”; “There’s many rides”), and sentence fragments, which may interfere with the reader’s understanding.

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# Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade 7 Persuasive Writing Task

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## Score Point 1 Essay

### Student Work

Dear, Mr. Conner

I desided that are should go to the muesume of natural history. It's a learning Place. Its a fun Place. Its big, Its wide and Its free. We would learn about other stuff.

The bad thing will be class will want to go defert ways. Or runaround the musem. Thats why I would need you and Mrs. Frank.

### Commentary

This writer addresses little of the writing task. The writer suggests a central idea, but this is not supported with reasons, evidence, or details. Although the writer raises a possible reader concern, this concern is not clearly addressed. The introduction and body seem to run together, and the essay stops rather than concludes. Content fluctuates between extreme vagueness (“other stuff”) and unexplained particulars (Mrs. Frank). Sentences are extremely simple. Errors in the conventions of English are numerous and may interfere with the reader’s understanding.

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# Grade 7 Scoring Rubric

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The scoring rubric that follows is used to assign scores to students' written responses on the grade 7 writing tests. This rubric includes two sets of criteria. The criteria under "the writing" are adapted from the English-language arts writing strategies and written conventions of English content standards. These criteria are used to evaluate written responses in all genres for their clarity of purpose, central idea, and organization; their coherence; and their use of supporting evidence, sentence variety, and writing conventions. The criteria under "fictional or autobiographical narrative writing," "response to literature writing," "persuasive writing," and "summary writing," adapted from the grade 7 writing applications standards for these genres, are used to evaluate student writing in the specific genres to which they apply.

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## 4 The writing—

- *clearly* addresses all parts of the writing task.
- demonstrates a *clear* understanding of purpose and audience.
- maintains a *consistent* point of view, focus, and organizational structure, including the *effective* use of transitions.
- includes a *clearly presented* central idea with *relevant* facts, details, and/or explanations.
- includes a *variety* of sentence types.
- contains *few, if any, errors* in the conventions of the English language (grammar, punctuation, capitalization, spelling). These errors do **not** interfere with the reader's understanding of the writing.

### Fictional or autobiographical narrative writing—

- provides a *thoroughly developed* plot line, including major and minor characters and a *definite* setting.
- includes *appropriate* strategies (e.g., dialogue; suspense; narrative action).

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## 3 The writing—

- addresses all parts of the writing task.
- demonstrates a *general* understanding of purpose and audience.
- maintains a *mostly consistent* point of view, focus, and organizational structure, including the *effective* use of some transitions.
- presents a central idea with *mostly relevant* facts, details, and/or explanations.
- includes a *variety* of sentence types.
- contains *some errors* in the conventions of the English language (grammar, punctuation, capitalization, spelling). These errors do **not** interfere with the reader's understanding of the writing.

### Fictional or autobiographical narrative writing—

- provides an *adequately developed* plot line, including major and minor characters and a *definite* setting.
- includes *appropriate* strategies (e.g., dialogue; suspense; narrative action).

### Response to literature writing—

- develops interpretations that demonstrate a *thoughtful*, comprehensive grasp of the text.
- organizes *accurate and coherent* interpretations around *clear* ideas, premises, or images from the literary work.
- provides *specific* textual examples and details to support the interpretations.

### Persuasive writing—

- *authoritatively* defends a position with precise and relevant evidence and *convincingly* addresses the reader's concerns, biases, and expectations.

### Summary writing—

- is characterized by paraphrasing of the main idea(s) and *significant* details.

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### Response to literature writing—

- develops interpretations that demonstrate a comprehensive grasp of the text.
- organizes accurate and *reasonably* coherent interpretations around *clear* ideas, premises, or images from the literary work.
- Provides textual examples and details to support the interpretations.

### Persuasive writing—

- *generally* defends a position with relevant evidence and addresses the reader's concerns, biases, and expectations.

### Summary writing—

- is characterized by paraphrasing of the main idea(s) and *significant* details.

**2****The writing—**

- addresses *only parts* of the writing task.
- demonstrates *little* understanding of purpose and audience.
- maintains an *inconsistent* point of view, focus, and/or organizational structure, which may include *ineffective or awkward* transitions that do not unify important ideas.
- *suggests* a central idea with *limited* facts, details, and/or explanations.
- includes *little* variety in sentence types.
- contains *several errors* in the conventions of the English language (grammar, punctuation, capitalization, spelling). These errors **may** interfere with the reader's understanding of the writing.

**Fictional or autobiographical narrative writing—**

- provides a *minimally developed* plot line, including characters and a setting.
- *attempts* to use strategies but with *minimal* effectiveness (e.g., dialogue; suspense; narrative action).

**Response to literature writing—**

- develops interpretations that demonstrate a *limited* grasp of the text.
- includes interpretations that *lack* accuracy or coherence as related to ideas, premises, or images from the literary work.
- provides *few, if any*, textual examples and details to support the interpretations.

**Persuasive writing—**

- defends a position with *little, if any*, evidence and *may* address the reader's concerns, biases, and expectations.

**Summary writing—**

- is characterized by *substantial* copying of key phrases and *minimal* paraphrasing.

**1****The writing—**

- addresses *only one part* of the writing task.
- demonstrates *no* understanding of purpose and audience.
- *lacks* a point of view, focus, organizational structure, and transitions that unify important ideas.
- *lacks* a central idea but may contain *marginally related* facts, details, and/or explanations.
- includes *no* sentence variety.
- contains *serious errors* in the conventions of the English language (grammar, punctuation, capitalization, spelling). These errors interfere with the reader's understanding of the writing.

**Fictional or autobiographical narrative writing—**

- *lacks* a developed plot line.
- *fails* to use strategies (e.g., dialogue; suspense; narrative action).

**Response to literature writing—**

- demonstrates *little* grasp of the text.
- *lacks* an interpretation or *may* be a simple retelling of the passage.
- *lacks* textual examples and details.

**Persuasive writing—**

- *fails* to defend a position with *any* evidence and *fails* to address the reader's concerns, biases, and expectations.

**Summary writing—**

- is characterized by substantial copying of *indiscriminately selected* phrases or sentences.

**Condition Codes****B** = Blank**R** = Student refused to write**W** = Wrong prompt**C** = Prompt/Directions copied**I** = Illegible**L** = Language other than English**T** = Off topic

Student receives no credit for writing test and no California Standards Test English-Language Arts score.

Student receives 0 points for writing test but receives a California Standards Test English-Language Arts score.