California Standards Tests

Teacher Guide for the 2008 California Writing Standards Test in Grade Seven

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Available on the STAR Program Resources Web page at http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sr/resources.asp

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For more information about the California Writing Standards Tests (CSTs in writing) or the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program, consult the STAR Program Resources Web page at http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sr/resources.asp or contact the Standards and Assessment Division of the California Department of Education by phone at 916-445-8765, by fax at 916-319-0969, or by e-mail at STAR@cde.ca.gov.

Acknowledgments

We wish to acknowledge the teachers in California's public schools who continue to promote good student writing in their classrooms. A special thanks goes to the many teachers and administrators who, over the past eight years, have contributed to the development of the teacher guides for the California Writing Standards Tests (CSTs in writing) in grades four and seven.

Introduction

In February 2000 the Governor signed legislation to add writing assessments to the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program's California Standards Tests (CSTs) to be administered at the elementary and middle grade levels. The California Writing Standards Tests (CSTs in writing) have been administered annually since 2001 in grades four and seven as a part of the California English–Language Arts Standards Tests (CSTs in English–language arts).

The CSTs in writing address the state Writing Application content standards for grades four and seven. In grade four these standards require students to produce four types of writing: narratives, summaries, information reports, and responses to literature. In grade seven these standards require students to produce five types of writing: narratives, persuasive essays, summaries, responses to literature, and research reports.

The CSTs in writing do not assess information reports in grade four or research reports in grade seven because these writing assignments require extended time for students to select research topics and gather information before writing can begin. In addition, the narrative writing tested in grades four and seven does not include personal or autobiographical narrative. Writing that would invite personal disclosure is not tested in any genre on the CSTs in writing.

The writing test in both of these grades may address any of the writing types identified as appropriate for testing at that grade level. In addition to the CSTs in writing, the 2008 CSTs in English–language arts in grades four and seven contained 75 multiple-choice questions. The CSTs in English–language arts in grades four and seven will continue to include a CST in writing and multiple-choice questions.

This document is the latest in a series of teacher guides for the CSTs in writing in grades four and seven that have been provided each year since writing assessments were added to the STAR Program's CSTs in English–language arts. Each guide features the writing tasks administered that year, sample student responses, teacher commentaries, and scoring rubrics used to score student responses. The guides for the CSTs in writing from 2005 through 2008 provide multiple sample student responses at each score point for all writing tasks administered. Teacher guides from previous years are available on the STAR Program Resources Web page at http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sr/resources.asp.

Writing Tasks and Scoring Rubric

The writing tasks for the 2008 CSTs in writing in grade seven are shown on pages 6 and 7 and pages 35 and 36. Students in schools, tracks, or programs in session on March 4, 2008, responded to the writing task administered on that date or on the makeup date, March 5. Students in schools, tracks, or programs not in session on March 4 or 5 responded to the writing task administered on April 29, 2008, or on the makeup date, April 30. Students had time to read the tasks and to plan, write, and edit their responses. The estimated administration time was 75 minutes, including time for directions.

Student responses to the writing tasks administered in 2008 were scored using a four-point holistic scoring rubric, with four being the highest score. Each student response was evaluated by one reader and assigned a score ranging from 1 to 4. Ten percent of the responses were evaluated by a second reader to ensure that the scores were accurate and reliable. The score from the second reader did not count toward the student's writing test score. The score the student received from the first reader was doubled to produce the student's overall score on the writing test. It is important to note that when readers score the CSTs in writing, they take into account that student responses are first-draft writings.

The scoring rubric for grade seven is shown on pages 62 and 63. On pages 64 through 71, the grade seven rubric is presented in a rearranged format to indicate how all of the scoring criteria are applied to student responses in each genre tested.

In 2008 each student's result on the grade seven writing task was reported as a separate Writing Applications score that could range from 2 to 8. This score was combined with the student's multiple-choice score on the CST in English–language arts to determine the student's overall English–language arts performance level. The total score possible for the CST in English–language arts was 83 points if students received the highest rating on the writing test and answered all of the multiple-choice questions correctly.

It is important to note that the score a student receives on the CST in writing does not equate to a performance level. A student can be said to have achieved at a particular performance level only when that student's performance-level result is based on results of the full CST in English–language arts (including the CST in writing).

In spring 2008, students in grade seven were required to write a persuasive essay. It should be noted, however, that the type of writing students may be asked to produce can change annually because other genres may be tested in this grade.

Sample Student Responses and Teacher Commentaries

Sample student responses to the writing tasks administered in grade seven on March 4 and 5, 2008, are shown on pages 9 through 34, along with teacher commentaries. Sample student responses to the tasks administered on April 29 and 30, 2008, are shown on pages 37 through 61, along with teacher commentaries. This guide contains three sample student responses that are typically at the mid-range of each score point for the two writing tasks administered in grade seven in 2008. Three responses for each score point are provided to illustrate the different types of responses that may receive the same score. Accompanying these student responses are teacher commentaries that illustrate how criteria for each score point were applied during the scoring process.

The sample responses are drawn from field tests and operational tests. Although there are three student responses for each score point, it should be remembered that the range of student work within any of the four score points is broader than even multiple examples can illustrate. Furthermore, responses demonstrate differing combinations of strengths and weaknesses within a given score point.

Suggested Uses for This Teacher Guide

The writing tasks, sample student responses, and teacher commentaries in this guide are intended to illustrate how the scoring rubric was used to score student responses on the 2008 CST in writing in grade seven. Teachers also can use the information provided as guidance in applying the rubric to their students' writing. Students can familiarize themselves with state content standards addressed on the writing test by using the rubric to score other students' writing. These suggested activities can enable teachers and students to use rubric-based scoring as a diagnostic tool to help identify areas of strength and weakness in student writing.

The list in the section that follows provides further suggestions for using the teacher guide to inform and improve the assessment and teaching of student writing.

Using the Teacher Guide for School District or School Assessments

Some suggestions for using the teacher guide to help improve school district or school assessments include the following activities:

- Use the contents of the guide to become familiar with the key components of writing assessments (i.e., writing tasks, scoring rubrics, student responses).

- Examine the released writing tasks to identify distinguishing elements of each writing genre.

- Examine the scoring rubric to ascertain critical features of a holistic rubric.

- Analyze sample student responses in conjunction with teacher commentaries and criteria in the scoring rubrics to determine grade-specific writing expectations. This information can inform decisions about areas of focus for writing programs.

- Compare the state writing tasks and scoring rubrics with those that accompany the school's existing curricular program. This information can help identify areas in writing programs that may need to be strengthened. It could be determined, for example, that a particular writing program may not provide students enough opportunities to write in a particular genre. It also could be determined that the characteristics of a writing genre in a particular curricular program do not align well with the characteristics of that genre as defined by the state content standards.

Using the Teacher Guide for Classroom Assessments

Some suggestions for using the teacher guide to help improve classroom assessments include, but are not limited to, the following activities:

- Use the writing tasks, sample student responses, teacher commentaries, and scoring rubrics to help teachers identify the knowledge and skills required by the specific state content standards that are the focus of the writing tests. This information can provide a focus for writing instruction.

- Use the writing tasks and scoring rubrics to help teachers understand the advantages and benefits of writing tests. The tasks and rubrics engage students in cognitively complex activities, and they give students an opportunity to create rather than select a response.

- Encourage teachers to study the scoring rubrics to understand the criteria that should be used to assess student writing.

- Encourage teachers to use the writing tasks, sample student responses, teacher commentaries, and scoring rubrics to help their students understand what is expected of them on the CST in writing.

Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on March 4 and 5, 2008

The writing task below was administered to students who took the CST in writing in grade seven on March 4 or 5, 2008. Sample student responses and teacher commentaries for this task are shown on pages 9 through 34.

Persuasive Writing Task

Directions:

- In this writing test, you will write a persuasive letter in response to the writing task on the following pages.
- You will have time to plan your letter and write a first draft with edits.
- Only what you write on the lined pages in this booklet will be scored.
- Use only a No. 2 pencil to write your response.

Scoring:

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
- address possible arguments against your position
- use correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. You may include a salutation and closing, but the format of the letter will not count as part of your score.

Read the following writing task. You must write a persuasive letter about this topic.

Writing the Persuasive Letter

Your school district is thinking about lengthening the school year by starting two weeks earlier. Do you think adding extra days to the school year will improve education? Write a letter to the editor of your school newspaper that will persuade others to accept your viewpoint. Be sure to address opposing viewpoints in your letter.

When you write your letter, remember

- to state your position on the topic
- to describe the points in support of your position, including examples and other evidence
- to address possible arguments against your position
- to use correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. You may include a salutation and closing, but the format of the letter will not count as part of your score.

Persuasive Writing Task—Grade Seven

The student responses shown on pages 9 through 34 and pages 37 through 61 were scored using the grade seven scoring rubric shown on pages 62 and 63. This rubric contains criteria adapted from California's Writing Applications content standards that speak to genres and their characteristics for grade seven, including the Writing Applications content standard for grade seven persuasive writing (shown below). In addition, this rubric incorporates portions of the English–language arts content standards for Writing Strategies and Written Conventions that address writing in general.

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 Seven Focus

The best student responses to the 2008 writing tasks exhibited the following characteristics:

- They maintained a consistent organizational structure. They contained an introduction that presented the points to be developed; a body that developed the points that were presented in the introduction; and a conclusion that went beyond a simple repetition of these points. They used effective transitional devices to bridge ideas between sentences and paragraphs.

- They presented a clear position with precise and pertinent ideas, details, or facts that supported that position. In contrast to the general and/or vague language that characterized writing at the lower score points, the best responses used concrete language that gave substance and individuality to the writing.

- They demonstrated an effective use of sentence variety throughout the response. Sentences ranged from simple to complex to compound. The simple sentences often contained multiple nouns, verbs, and/or modifying phrases. Sentences began in different ways. Some sentences started with subject-predicate, and others began with a subordinate clause or transitional phrase.

- They contained some errors in conventions, but these errors were those expected in first-draft writing in grade seven. The errors did not interfere with the effectiveness of the writing or with the reader's understanding of the writing.

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on March 4 and 5, 2008

Score Point 4 Response

Student Work Sample One

Dear Editor,

I am writing this letter to you stating what I think on the issue of lengthening the school year. I think the school district should not add two weeks of school because two weeks will not have a big impact on bettering our education.

First, we already spend the begining part of the school year reviewing and getting situated in our classes, so two weeks would only add more review. Students will also want to keep the current length of their summer because we deserve the break from school after being in it for so long. Students wouldn't be happy about going back early, so we would be cranky around school and not be happy about going back.

If you look at these two topics from the other viewpoint, people, mostly adults, would say that two extra weeks means you would be finished with review and on to new material by the time school would have started. I feel that is wrong because we forget a lot of what we learn over the summer, so why add more stuff for us students to have to remember! On the second topic, adults, mostly parents, would say that they want us kids to stop being lazy over summer, and for us to go and do stuff out of the house. Once again, I feel this is wrong because we get enough exercise over summer, and if we're annoying our parents, oh well, they can have us around all the time for a couple months since during school we're gone a lot.

Another topic up for debate is if we start earlier, teachers and office workers will go back earlier, but what if they have summer jobs? Many teachers will have different views on this matter. Some will want to start earlier while others won't. That's the same scenario for all issues that will pop up with lengthening the school year.

Commentary

This response clearly addresses the writing task and demonstrates a clear understanding of purpose and audience. The writer presents a position on lengthening the school year, provides arguments to support this position, and addresses readers' concerns, biases, and expectations.

The organizational structure is mostly consistent. The response presents arguments for and against the writer's viewpoint; however, these arguments could be grouped more coherently. Following an opening paragraph that voices the writer's opposition to a longer school year, the subsequent paragraph presents arguments that support this position. (The writer notes that two more weeks of school will only add two more weeks for review, and students will be irritable if their summer is shortened.) The next paragraph addresses objections to the writer's position. (The writer explains that students might learn more with a longer school year, but they would forget it over the summer, and parents probably would favor a shorter summer vacation, but they should accept the current school schedule.) The following paragraph switches back to another supporting argument. (The writer points out that two more weeks of school could interfere with teachers' summer jobs but concedes that adults would generally favor an early start while students would oppose it.) The subsequent paragraph presents a final supporting argument that more school will interfere with summer travel. The response concludes by recommending a vote on the issue.

Transitions are simple but generally effective. Transitional devices are used to begin paragraphs ("First, we already spend the begining part of the school year …"; "If you look at these two topics from the other viewpoint, …"; "Another reason for not starting earlier is …") and to connect sentences ("Students will also want to keep the current length of

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on March 4 and 5, 2008

Score Point 4 Response

Student Work Sample One (continued)

Most kids, I believe, will not want to start earlier, while most adults will.

Another reason for not starting earlier is that many kids go on vacation during summer. I know kids who go all over, even out of the country, during summer to vacation or visit family. If we start earlier, they would have less visiting time, and some people's plans might be gone because the time they were planning to travel would be the time school was starting.

So, in conclusion, I feel that we should take a vote. All the people in the school district should get to pick what they want done. I would encourge people to read my letter before voting or deciding what side they're on; so whoever is editing the paper, please put my letter in it for people to be able to see it!

Sincerely,

Commentary

their summer because …"; "Once again, I feel this is wrong because …").

The response includes a clearly presented central idea ("… the school district should not add two weeks of school because two weeks will not have a big impact on bettering our education.") with relevant explanations. (The writer notes that two more weeks of school will only encourage two more weeks of review; students will be irritable if school starts early; students will forget material learned during the two extra weeks; and more school might interfere with teachers' summer jobs.) Not all of the arguments, however, are equally relevant. The comments that parents should tolerate the current vacation structure and that summer travel would be affected are not especially pertinent to improving education.

The response includes sentence variety. In the fifth paragraph, for example, sentences range from a complex sentence to a long simple sentence to a compound-complex sentence ("Another reason for not starting earlier is that many kids go on vacation during summer. I know kids who go all over, even out of the country, during summer to vacation or visit family. If we start earlier, they would have less visiting time, and some people's plans might be gone because the time they were planning to travel would be the time school was starting."). Sentence variety and correct sentence construction are strengths of the response.

This response is nearly free of errors in the conventions of the English language. Two words are misspelled ("begining" and "encourge").

Strong sentences, effective transitions, a lack of convention errors, a clear central idea with generally relevant support, and a mostly consistent organization make this a score point 4 response.

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on March 4 and 5, 2008

Score Point 4 Response

Student Work Sample Two

Dear Editor,

I am writing a letter in responce to your suggestion about lengthening the school year. I think that you are right and that school should be lengthened for many different reasons.

The 1st reason why we should expand is that the students would have more time to understand new material. Some students have a different learning pace and some don't learn at a fast pace. If students were given more time they would be able to learn in depth and not just the basics. Because students grow as they move up, the work load for them just gets harder, so if they had more time they could have more time to do the homework.

My 2nd reason is that they will be able to grasp concepts and facts more easily and quickly. Because math and language are probably the hardest subjects they would get more time to grasp the concepts. Say if math facts are being taught they could learn them at a better pace. If one chapter in a subject is big, nothing would be cramped, they would have more time to learn.

My 3rd reason is that teachers would be able to expand the teachings and what they teach about. If teachers had more time they could do more then the surface. They could get into what really matters. Teachers could go more in depth and bring real life experinces to make things real. The students would have more time and would become better experienced with certain topics.

You might say that this is all good, well what could be bad about it.

You could say that instead of more days what about tutoring. Well with tutoring it would have to be before or after school and that would mean more work on the teachers part. They would have to give up their free time.

Commentary

This response clearly addresses the writing task by arguing that the school year should begin two weeks earlier and considering objections to this viewpoint. It demonstrates a clear understanding of purpose and audience by presenting arguments supporting the writer's position by developing them with detailed and relevant explanations.

The response maintains a consistent organizational structure. The opening paragraph states the writer's support for a longer school year, the next three paragraphs develop evidence for this position ("… students would have more time to understand new material."; "… they would get more time to grasp the concepts."; "… teachers would be able to expand the teachings and what they teach about."). The subsequent two paragraphs address possible objections. (The writer explains that tutoring could preclude the need for a longer school year and that the district could shorten vacations during the school year.) The final paragraph presents a concluding statement. Transitional devices guide the reader from paragraph to paragraph ("The 1st reason …"; "My 2nd reason …"; "My 3rd reason …") and signal the shift to an opposing argument ("You might say that this is all good, well what could be bad about it.").

The response includes a clearly presented central idea ("… school should be lengthened …") with relevant explanations, and it addresses the reader's concerns, biases, and expectations. The writer presents an argument from the students' point of view ("… students would have more time to understand new material.") and then provides an explanation ("… some don't learn at a fast pace. … they would be able to learn in depth … they could have more time to do the homework."). The writer then presents an argument from the teachers' point of view ("… teachers would be able to expand

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on March 4 and 5, 2008

Score Point 4 Response

Student Work Sample Two (continued)

You could also cut down on vacation, but that is a nice little break and some students may need that.

This is what I think. I hope that this can help you to an honest & true conclusion.

Sincerly,

Commentary

the teachings …") and provides an explanation ("Teachers could go more in depth and bring real life experinces to make things real."). The writer addresses the reader's concern that tutoring would be preferable to a longer school year ("… tutoring … would have to be before or after school and that would mean more work on the teachers part.").

The response includes sentence variety. The second paragraph, for example, contains compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences ("Some students have a different learning pace and some don't learn at a fast pace. If students were given more time they would be able to learn in depth and not just the basics. Because students grow as they move up, the work load for them just gets harder, so if they had more time they could have more time to do the homework.").

The response contains errors in the conventions of the English language. Errors include mistakes in spelling ("responce," "then" instead of "than"), usage (use of cardinal shortcuts [1st, 2nd, and so on] rather than ordinal numbers [first, second, and so on]), and punctuation (independent clauses joined by a comma splice and lacking a question mark ["You might say that this is all good, well what could be bad about it."]). These errors are to be expected in first-draft writing in grade seven and do not interfere with the reader's understanding.

A consistent focus and organizational structure, a clearly presented central idea supported with relevant evidence, good sentence variety, and few errors in written conventions make this a score point 4 response.

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on March 4 and 5, 2008

Score Point 4 Response

Student Work Sample Three

Fellow Students,

Our school district, (omitted) School District, is thinking about lengthening the school year by starting two weeks earlier than usual. I disagree with them, and you should too. It is true that we will have more time to learn, but think about how stressful it can get. More school means less summer vacation, more homework, more tests, and definenty more problems. Kids like us need lots of rest and vacation time to be able to do well in school. However, if the school district extends the school year by two weeks, that would mean less summer vacation, less fun, and less rest. That would result in a big problem.

You see, the school district thinks that they are helping us by giving us more opportunities to learn. But in reality, kids will start to loose interest. That could cause lower grades, more dropouts, or even increase the number of suicides. Kids these days cannot handle too much stress. There is always a limit to how much they can handle. Therefore, if school, grades, test, and homework begin earlier, it can do a lot of damage to the kids mentally and physically.

You may ask, "Wouldn't extra school improve education?" Well, my friends, the answer is "no." Sure, you may say, "But more school means you get more time to be educated, right?" Not necessarily. More time in school may give you more time to learn, but whether or not you get anything out of the lesson is another thing. Let me ask you now. Aside from how the students feel, what about the teachers? It's not that they dislike teaching, but they also have their own life. Some teachers have families and kids to feed. Others might just be tired of correcting things, as well as dealing with annoying students who drive them crazy. So, for the sake of the students and the teachers, we must not allow the school district to extend school.

Commentary

This response clearly addresses the writing task by presenting a clear position against lengthening the school year and considering possible objections. It demonstrates a clear understanding of purpose and audience by authoritatively defending the writer's position and by refuting an objection with relevant explanations.

The response maintains a consistent organizational structure. After an opening paragraph that states the writer's opposition to a longer school year, the second paragraph presents an argument supporting the writer's position. The third paragraph counters an objection to that position, and the fourth paragraph presents another argument supporting the writer's position. The concluding sentence reiterates that the school year should not be lengthened. Transitions move the reader effectively through the response ("However, if the school district extends the school year …"; "You see, the school district thinks that they are helping us …"; "Therefore, if school, grades, test, and homework begin earlier, …").

The response includes the clearly presented central idea that extending the school year would not improve education. This idea is supported with relevant explanations ("… kids will start to loose interest. That could cause lower grades, more dropouts, or even increase the number of suicides."; teachers might resist a longer school year because they "have their own life" and "might just be tired of correcting things, as well as dealing with annoying students who drive them crazy."). The reader's concerns are addressed with relevant evidence ("More time in school may give you more time to learn, but whether or not you get anything out of the lesson is another thing.").

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on March 4 and 5, 2008

Score Point 4 Response

Student Work Sample Three (continued)

Commentary

The response includes sentence variety. The opening paragraph contains sentences that range from simple to complex to compound and demonstrate varied lengths and structures ("Our school district, (omitted) School District, is thinking about lengthening the school year by starting two weeks earlier than usual. I disagree with them, and you should too. It is true that we will have more time to learn, but think about how stressful it can get. More school means less summer vacation, more homework, more tests, and definenty more problems."). The writer uses parallel structure for emphasis ("However, if the school district extends the school year by two weeks, that would mean less summer vacation, less fun, and less rest.").

This response contains few errors in the conventions of the English language. Errors include misspelled words ("definenty," "loose" for "lose") and a lack of agreement between nouns ("It's not that they dislike teaching, but they also have their own life."). These errors are to be expected in first-draft writing in grade seven and do not interfere with the reader's understanding.

A consistent organizational structure, a clearly presented central idea, strong sentences, and minimal errors in the conventions of English make this a score point 4 response.

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on March 4 and 5, 2008

Score Point 3 Response

Student Work Sample One

Dear district,

I don't think increasing the amount of days will improve our education. One reason I am apossed to this is because lengthening school would just make school more boring then it actually is. Kids would just try to get through it by not paying attention. If school cut into summer most kid would like to go to the beach. Some might even ditch. There are many more reasons school shouldn't start earlier.

For example do you think starting earlier will get us ready faster? It wouldn't because our summer would be shorter and kid would be too tired to buy supplies, get to the bus, get to class, even pay attention. If school started earlier for me I would be very grumpy. I wouldn't pay attention for the first two weeks anyway.

The school day should stay the same kids would be used to it and stay awake during classes. The school days were the same for many people who are now very bright. An example of what happened when school is extended is last year when we had to stay into our summer a week because of snow days.

Everyone was so excited no one payed attention the last week. We didn't learn anything that last week. The last week we played games and everything, it was just a waste of time.

This will be two weeks waste of time. No one will be ready. Everyone will be jumping around and no learning will happen. So I say for one last time, don't give us two more weeks before school.

Commentary

This response addresses most of the writing task by expressing a viewpoint on the proposal to lengthen the school year and by addressing an objection. It demonstrates a general understanding of purpose and audience by using a mostly consistent organizational structure and mostly relevant explanations to support the writer's viewpoint.

The mostly consistent organizational structure includes an introductory paragraph that states the writer's support for a longer school year, body paragraphs that address an objection and argue for the writer's position, and a concluding paragraph that reiterates that position. Within these paragraphs, however, there are some organizational inconsistencies. Rather than introducing the writer's viewpoint in the opening paragraph and presenting supporting evidence in subsequent paragraphs, the response presents the writer's viewpoint and supporting evidence in the same paragraph ("I don't think increasing the amount of days will improve our education. One reason I am apossed to this is because …"). After an objection is addressed in the second paragraph ("… do you think starting earlier will get us ready faster? It wouldn't because …"), the content in the third paragraph jumps from point to point without development ("The school day should stay the same kids would be used to it and stay awake during classes. The school days were the same for many people who are now very bright.").

The response contains transitional devices that indicate the purpose of subsequent information. The last sentence of the first paragraph, for example, suggests that subsequent paragraphs will present supporting information ("There are many more reasons school shouldn't start earlier."). The next topic sentence suggests that the paragraph will argue against starting school earlier ("For example do you

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on March 4 and 5, 2008

Score Point 3 Response

Student Work Sample One (continued)

Commentary

think starting earlier …"). The last sentence in the third paragraph suggests that subsequent information will provide a supporting example ("An example of what happened when school is extended is last year when …"), but it would have been more appropriate as the topic sentence of the following paragraph.

The response includes a central idea ("I don't think increasing the amount of days will improve our education.") supported with explanations. The explanations in the first two paragraphs are mostly relevant but repetitious. In the first paragraph, for example, the writer argues that if school were extended, students would "not [pay] attention," would think about "the beach," and "might even ditch." In the second paragraph, the writer addresses the reader's concern ("… do you think starting earlier will get us ready faster? It wouldn't because …") but presents arguments similar to those in the previous paragraph (students would "be too tired" and would not "pay attention"). The third paragraph makes an interesting point ("The school days were the same for many people who are now very bright.") but neglects to explain how this point supports the writer's argument. The argument in the fourth paragraph—that students would react to two weeks at the start of school as they did to an extra week at the end of school when "[w]e didn't learn anything …")—is marginally relevant.

Although this response contains run-on sentences, it includes sentence variety as well. The second paragraph, for example, contains a compound-complex sentence with parallel structuring as well as a complex and a simple sentence ("For example do you think starting earlier will get us ready faster? It wouldn't because our summer would be shorter and kid would be too tired to buy supplies, get to the bus, get to class, even pay attention. If school started

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on March 4 and 5, 2008

Score Point 3 Response

Student Work Sample One (continued)

Commentary

earlier for me I would be very grumpy. I wouldn't pay attention for the first two weeks anyway.").

The response contains several errors in the conventions of the English language. Errors include sentences in which independent clauses are combined without conjunctions or subordination ("The school day should stay the same kids would be used to it and stay awake during classes."; "The last week we played games and everything, it was just a waste of time."), the use of singular nouns where plural nouns are needed ("… summer would be shorter and kid would be too tired …"; "… most kid would like to go to the beach."), and misspelled words ("then" for "than," "payed," "apossed" for "opposed"). These errors may interfere with the reader's understanding of the writing.

A clear focus and a central idea supported by mostly relevant evidence, an attempt to address an opposing viewpoint, a mostly consistent organizational structure, and some sentence variety make this a score point 3 response.

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on March 4 and 5, 2008

Score Point 3 Response

Student Work Sample Two

I think that extending the school year might improve our education, but by a little bit. First of all if you started on a lesson you have the two weeks to finish that lesson. Maybe you might finish that lesson early and start a new one, that will extend our education. You could learn more in math since every lesson doesn't take that long.

Second of all you'll have more time in your electives. If you have typing, which I have by the way you could learn new keys. In history we never really finish all the pages in the book. We probably won't finish in two weeks, but we'll learn more.

Third of all if you have a bad grade in the class you'll have time to raise it up at least one grade. Maybe you might take a test and you could pass it and raise your percentage. Then from there you could just do all your homework and raise your grade.

Last in P.E. we have more time to finish playing a sport in one week then the next week you can just turn in your locks and do everything you do the last week of school. Also in Language Arts you can learn new things like new words. You can also raise your grade. Well that's how I think your education will improve.

Commentary

This response addresses most of the writing task by explaining why a longer school year would improve education, but it neglects to address opposing viewpoints. It demonstrates an understanding of purpose and audience by using a consistent organizational structure and relevant evidence to support the writer's position.

The response maintains a consistent organizational structure. The first sentence states the writer's qualified support for a longer school year, subsequent paragraphs present supporting evidence, and the final sentence provides closure ("Well that's how I think your education will improve."). Although the one-sentence introductory and concluding sentences could be considered structurally consistent, the structure would be strengthened if the introduction and conclusion were developed into full paragraphs with the supporting evidence presented in separate paragraphs. Information could be more consistent within paragraphs as well. In paragraph two, for example, the topic sentence appears to be "Second of all you'll have more time in your electives." Within the paragraph, however, the writer discusses Typing, an elective, but also History, presumably a required course. The topic sentence in paragraph three appears to be "Third of all if you have a bad grade in the class you'll have time to raise it up at least one grade," but the writer notes that "You can also raise your grade" in the fourth paragraph as well.

The response includes a clearly presented central idea ("I think that extending the school year might improve our education, but by a little bit.") that is supported with details and concrete examples. The writer notes, for example, that students could learn more in subjects like math, typing, and history and that students would have extra time to improve their grades by having more time to do their homework.

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on March 4 and 5, 2008

Score Point 3 Response

Student Work Sample Two (continued)

Commentary

Although the evidence demonstrates how a longer school year "might Improve our education…," it does not make clear why it would improve it "by [only] a little bit." Consequently, the response generally defends the writer's position with evidence relevant to the central idea and supports it with details and explanations that are mostly relevant.

The response contains sentence variety. The second paragraph, for example, contains simple, compound, and complex sentences ("Second of all you'll have more time in your electives. If you have typing, which I have by the way you could learn new keys. In history we never really finish all the pages in the book. We probably won't finish in two weeks, but we'll learn more.").

The response contains some errors in the conventions of the English language. Errors include comma splices ("Maybe you might finish that lesson early and start a new one, that will extend our education.") and independent clauses that run together without punctuation ("Last in PE we have more time to finish playing a sport in one week then the next week you can just turn in your locks and do everything you do…"). Additional errors include the lack of commas before introductory phrases ("First of all if you started on a lesson you have the two weeks to finish that lesson.") and to set off parenthetical phrases ("If you have typing, which I have by the way you could learn new keys."). These errors are to be expected in first-draft writing in grade seven and do not interfere with the reader's understanding.

A mostly consistent organizational structure, a central idea supported by mostly relevant evidence, sentence variety, and some errors in conventions make this a score point 3 response.

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on March 4 and 5, 2008

Score Point 3 Response

Student Work Sample Three

Dear School Students,

I am a middle school student, but right now I will tell you as a caring friend why the school district should lengthen the school year. I know most of you wont agree but once you finish reading this I hope most of you will change your minds too. I have three strong reasons I came up with. The strong reasons are 1. These two weeks can improve our education. 2. It wont hurt us if we lose two weeks of vacation. 3. Good for our health.

How can it improve our education? It can be improved because have you ever had a time when you didn't get something and couldn't get help because you wouldn't have time in school and the teachers wouldn't want to fall out of schedule. I think most of us, fall behind in school for the same reason we don't get something or teacher's didn't get to it because of the short school year. Do you have summer school and you hate it, well longer school years would mean shorter summer school or if you do great in school in long school years you wont have summer school.

Now you say it won't be fair to have less vacation right, wrong. There would be some of you that would agree with you, the teachers. They also would have to come sooner, even sooner than you to prepare. Something else are you like me that sometimes you get bored and feel like it's way to long? Well with less vacation you wont feel bored. Now the best news, do you miss a friend to play with or talk to but can't because they don't live near you? OK me too, but you will have more time to play with your friends.

How can longer school years help our health? Weird hugh! Well it's true you will get more time to do P.E. Also after school sports would be longer, sounds fun well my favorite thing in school are breaks or for elementary

Commentary

This response addresses the writing task and demonstrates an understanding of purpose and audience by recommending the school year be lengthened, supporting this recommendation with explanations, and addressing the reader's concerns.

The response maintains a mostly consistent organizational structure. It includes an introductory paragraph that presents the points to be covered, a body that develops these points in the order they appear in the introduction, and a concluding paragraph that reiterates the points and urges the reader's concurrence. Topic-transitional sentences, typically in the form of questions, guide the reader into the paragraphs ("How can [a longer school year] improve education?"; "Now you say it won't be fair to have less vacation right, wrong."; "How can longer school years improve our health?").

One organizational weakness is the lack of transition between the first half of paragraph three, which acknowledges that a shorter summer might be unfair, and the second half of the paragraph, which abruptly switches to an advantage of a shorter summer ("Now you say it won't be fair to have less vacation right, wrong. There would be some of you that would agree with you, the teachers. They also would have to come sooner, even sooner than you to prepare. Something else are you like me that sometimes you get bored and feel like it's way to long. Well with less vacation you wont feel bored."). Although the response does not lack transitions between sentences, many are imprecise (e.g., "well," "now," or "so") and do not effectively bridge ideas ("Do you have summer school and you hate it, well longer school years …"; "Now you say it won't be …"; "Well it's true you will get more time to do P.E. Also after school sports would be longer, sounds fun well my favorite … So you see why …").

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on March 4 and 5, 2008

Score Point 3 Response

Student Work Sample Three (continued)

students recess!

So you see why I strongly agree with the idea of lengthening school years. Now I hope that with these three reasons, improve education, won't hurt us, and help our health you would gladly change your mind.

Sincerely,

(omitted)

Commentary

The response presents the central idea that the school year should be lengthened and provides mostly relevant support. Two supporting arguments—that students could learn better with a longer school year and that student health might improve with more time for physical education classes—are relevant to improving education. The third argument—that summer vacation would be less boring if it were shorter and that students can see their friends in school—is less relevant. The writer acknowledges the objection that a shorter summer might be unfair by noting that teachers would agree, but this acknowledgment does not effectively counter the objection. Generally the response defends the writer's position with relevant evidence.

The response includes sentences of varied lengths and structures, mostly in the opening paragraph ("I am a middle school student, but right now I will tell you as a caring friend why the school district should lengthen the school year. I know most of you wont agree but once you finish reading this I hope most of you will change your minds too. I have three strong reasons I came up with. The strong reasons are…"). In subsequent paragraphs, loose constructions, run-ons, and comma splices are more common ("It can be improved because have you ever had a time when you didn't get something and couldn't get help because you wouldn't have time in school and the teachers wouldn't want to fall out of schedule.… Do you have summer school and you hate it, well longer school years would mean shorter summer school or if you do great in school in long school years you wont have summer school.… Something else are you like me that sometimes you get bored…").

The response contains errors in the conventions of the English language. In addition to the sentence errors noted above, the errors include the lack of

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on March 4 and 5, 2008

Score Point 3 Response

Student Work Sample Three (continued)

Commentary

question marks following questions ("Now you say it won't be fair to have less vacation right, wrong."; "Do you have summer school and you hate it, well…"), an occasional lack of apostrophes in contractions ("It wont hurt us if we lose two weeks of vacation."; "…you wont have summer school."), and the lack of commas after certain transitions ("Well it's true …"; "…well longer school years…"). Some of these errors may interfere with the reader's understanding of the writing.

A mostly consistent organizational structure, a central idea supported by explanation, and some sentence variety make this a score point 3 response.

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on March 4 and 5, 2008

Score Point 2 Response

Student Work Sample One

Sometimes school is really boring because some teachers just sit and do nothing. But then again we get to talk. Some teachers get up all in your kool-Aid for example every day some teacher tells you tuck in your shirt or when your running because your late to class they'll tell you "slow down young man!

You guys should make school shorter because I never get to see my parents during all the days we have school I never hardly get to see them. The only time I really get to see them is in the summer. I've always wanted to go fishing but I never had because of school and the summer's are short. So please don't make school longer make it shorter for I can see my mom and my dad.

Commentary

This response addresses some of the writing task because it suggests a position on lengthening the school year, but it does not consider whether a longer school year would improve education. It demonstrates little understanding of purpose and audience because it does not provide evidence to support the writer's position or provide a clear organization.

This response maintains an inconsistent focus and organization. Rather than presenting a position on the school district proposal, the first paragraph presents a meandering indictment of school ("Sometimes school is really boring because some teachers just sit and do nothing. But then again we get to talk. … every day some teacher tells you tuck in your shirt or … 'slow down young man!"). The beginning of the second paragraph sounds more like an introduction ("You guys should make school shorter because …"), and the subsequent sentences present reasons school should be shortened (The current school year prevents the writer from seeing his or her parents—a point this paragraph makes repeatedly—and the writer would like more time for fishing.). The concluding paragraph attempts to summarize the writer's arguments but fails to include the point about fishing ("So please don't make school longer make it shorter for I can see my mom and my dad.").

The response suggests a central idea ("You guys should make school shorter …") but provides only marginal support because it does not consider whether more school would improve education. The writer argues only that the current school year is inconvenient ("… I never get to see my parents during all the days we have school … I've always wanted to go fishing but I never had because of school …"). The response does not address the reader's concerns, biases, or expectations.

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on March 4 and 5, 2008

Score Point 2 Response

Student Work Sample One (continued)

Commentary

The response includes some sentence variety. It contains a simple sentence followed by a compound-complex sentence ("The only time I really get to see them is in the summer. I've always wanted to go fishing but I never had because of school and the summer's are short.") and a complex sentence followed by a simple sentence ("Sometimes school is really boring because some teachers just sit and do nothing. But then again we get to talk."). The remaining sentences are independent clauses strung together without conjunctions, subordination, or punctuation ("Some teachers get up all in your kool-Aid for example every day some teacher tells you tuck in your shirt…"; "So please don't make school longer make it shorter for I can see my mom and my dad.").

The response contains many errors in the conventions of the English language. In addition to run-on sentences, errors include the use of possessive pronouns where personal pronouns and verbs are required ("…when your running late because your late to class…"), the use of a double negative ("…I never hardly get to see them."), inappropriate verb tense ("I've always wanted to go fishing but I never had because of school…"), and an unnecessary apostrophe ("summer's are short."). These errors may interfere with the reader's understanding of the writing.

An inconsistent organizational structure, a central idea supported by marginal evidence, numerous sentence errors, and many errors in conventions make this a score point 2 response.

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on March 4 and 5, 2008

Score Point 2 Response

Student Work Sample Two

My school district is thinking about lengthening the school year by starting two weeks earlier. I think that it would not do aney difference because if kids knew about school starting early They would be upset about it.

I Also think that it would Be better for some kids to get a head start. If some kids like school it will be no problem to them. Some kids need more summer to play or they probly would play in class whyle other kids are trying to consintrate on there work.

My Ancer would be no because I think kids need more freedom in there lifes. So they Don't stress about aney thing. Thats what I think about starting school earlier.

THE END

Commentary

This response addresses most of the writing task. The writer argues against a longer school year and attempts to persuade readers by presenting supporting arguments and by addressing an objection. The response demonstrates little understanding of purpose and audience by suggesting only a vague central idea with little evidence to support it.

The response demonstrates an inconsistent organizational structure. Following an opening paragraph that suggests opposition to a longer school year, the writer begins a new paragraph that acknowledges an opposing viewpoint ("I Also think that it would Be better for some kids to get a head start."). The purpose of the paragraph is unclear because the transition "also" misleadingly suggests that subsequent information will support rather than oppose the writer's position. Moreover, the next sentence in the paragraph suddenly shifts to support for the writer's viewpoint ("Some kids need more summer to play or they probly would play in class whyle other kids are trying to consintrate on there work."). Without a transition to indicate this shift, the purpose of this sentence is confusing as well. Although the final paragraph achieves closure by reiterating the writer's overall viewpoint ("My Ancer would be no … "), it also contains new information that belongs in the body ("… I think kids need more freedom in there lifes. So they Don't stress about aney thing.").

The writer suggests a central idea ("… [a longer school year] would not do eney difference because if kids knew about school starting early They would be upset about it.") but provides little supporting evidence. Immediately after stating this idea, for example, the writer begins the paragraph that addresses an opposing viewpoint without having explained why students "would be upset about" a longer school year ("I Also think that it would Be better for some kids to

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on March 4 and 5, 2008

Score Point 2 Response

Student Work Sample Two (continued)

Commentary

get a head start. If some kids like school [a longer school year] will be no problem to them.”). The second paragraph includes general statements supporting the writer’s position (“Some kids need more summer to play or they probly would play in class whyle other kids are trying to consintrate on there work.”), and the final paragraph presents more generalizations that deserve more detailed discussion (“… kids need more freedom in there lifes. So they Don’t stress about aney thing.”).

The response includes sentence variety. The second paragraph, for example, consists of a simple, a complex, and a compound sentence (“I Also think that it would Be better for some kids to get a head start. If some kids like school [a longer school year] will be no problem to them. Some kids need more summer to play or they probly would play in class whyle other kids are trying to consintrate on there work.”). The shift in ideas in these sentences, however, is disorienting.

This response contains many errors in the conventions of the English language. Errors include a sentence fragment (“So they Don’t stress about aney thing.”), the failure to use a possessive pronoun and an incorrect noun form (“… kids need more freedom in there lifes.”), inappropriate capitalization (“I Also think that it would Be better …”; “So they Don’t stress about aney thing.”), the lack of an apostrophe to indicate the possessive form (“Thats what I think …”), and numerous misspellings (“aney” for “any,” “probly,” “whyle,” “consintrate,” “Ancer”). These errors may interfere with the reader’s understanding the writing.

An inconsistent organizational structure, limited evidence to support the central idea, and numerous errors in conventions make this a score point 2 response.

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on March 4 and 5, 2008

Score Point 2 Response

Student Work Sample Three

My Letter

I think we shouldn't start school earlier, because it takes part of our vacations off, and I don't think we will improve or any thing else that will make us go to school.

If they would make us come two weeks earlier to school. I would say, "I don't want to" but I would still have to come. Its not if I want to, it means I half to. but I wouldint want to start school earlier and probably other kids wouldint want to eathier.

If would make ower vacations shorter and school longer. We wont get to go to the places we wanted to stay at the

Commentary

This response addresses some of the writing task by arguing for a longer school year but neglecting to consider opposing viewpoints. It demonstrates little understanding of purpose and audience by presenting limited evidence to support a position.

The response maintains an inconsistent organizational structure. The opening paragraph states the writer's opposition to a longer school year, the second paragraph discusses one reason for this opposition, and the third paragraph presents a second reason. The third paragraph is unfinished, however, and the response lacks a conclusion. In addition, the one completed body paragraph, the second paragraph, is developed through repetition rather than by providing evidence to support the central idea ("If they would make us come two weeks earlier to school. I would say, 'I don't want to' … Its not if I want to, it means I half to. but I wouldint want to start school earlier …").

Although the response contains a central idea ("I think we shouldn't start school earlier, because it takes part of our vacations off, and I don't think we will improve …"), this idea is supported with limited evidence. The second paragraph, for example, does not support the writer's statement that "I don't think we will improve" but argues simply that "I don't want" two more weeks of school. The third paragraph begins to support the statement that more school "takes part of our vacations off, …" but does so with fragmented evidence ("If would make ower vacations shorter and school longer. We wont get to go to the places we wanted to stay at the"). The response does not address the reader's concerns, biases, or expectations.

The response includes some sentence variety. Although the opening sentence lapses into

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on March 4 and 5, 2008

Score Point 2 Response

Student Work Sample Three (continued)

Commentary

incomprehensibility, it is a compound-complex sentence ("I think we shouldn't start school earlier, because it takes part of our vacations off, and I don't think we will improve or any thing else that will make us go to school."). Another sentence is compound ("Its not if I want to, it means I half to."), and another is simple ("If would make ower vacations shorter and school longer."). Because the writer tends to use sentence fragments, it is difficult to know whether the last "sentence" in paragraph two, for example, can be considered compound or whether it is a fragment ("Its not if I want to, it means I half to. but I wouldint want to start school earlier and probably other kids wouldint want to eathier.").

The response contains many errors in the conventions of the English language. Errors include the use of sentence fragments noted above, the lack of capitalization to start a sentence ("but I wouldint want to start school earlier …"), the lack of apostrophes in contractions ("Its not if I want to, …; We wont get to go …"), and misspellings ("half" for "have," "eathier," "wouldint"). Some of these errors interfere with the reader's understanding of the writing.

Limited support for the central idea, inconsistencies in the organizational structure, the lack of control over sentences, and errors in the conventions of English make this a score point 2 response.

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on March 4 and 5, 2008

Score Point 1 Response

Student Work Sample One

yes because the reason they want to start the school earlier. is because they like the school. end the other reason is because they get boring on they houses end that why they want to go back to school earlier.

End the others things they want to go back to school is. because they like the school end they want to learn. end go to the high school end then go to college end get a better job

Commentary

This response fails to address the writing task because it explains why supporters of a longer school year favor the proposal rather than presenting the writer's own viewpoint and supporting it. The response demonstrates little understanding of audience because it plunges abruptly into the supporters' motivations without providing an introduction or conclusion.

This limited response demonstrates little organizational structure. Although it appropriately presents supporters' personal reasons for wanting more school in one paragraph ("… they like the school. end … they get boring on they houses …") and their academic reasons in another paragraph ("… they want to learn" and can then "go to college end get a better job"), the response lacks an introduction or conclusion.

The response lacks a central idea. It explains why supporters favor the school district proposal ("… the reason they want to start the school year earlier. is because they like the school. end the other reason is because they get boring on they houses…. End the others things they want to go back to school is. because they like the school end they want to learn. …" and they can "… go to college end get a better job"). These explanations are only marginally related because the response does not state a position on the proposal. The response fails to address the reader's concerns, biases, and expectations.

The response does not include sentence variety. It consists mostly of sentence fragments ("yes because the reason they want to start the school earlier. is because they like the school."). The clauses and phrases are typically connected by "end" [and] ("end the other reason is because they get boring on they

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on March 4 and 5, 2008

Score Point 1 Response

Student Work Sample One (continued)

Commentary

houses end that why they want …"; "end go to the high school end then go to college end get a better job").

The response contains serious errors in the conventions of the English language. Errors include the sentence fragments noted above; inappropriate forms of adjectives, prepositions, and possessive pronouns ("… the other reason is they get *boring on they* houses …"); and the lack of capitalization at beginnings of sentences ("yes because the reason they want to start the school earlier."; "end the other reason is because they get boring …"). These errors interfere with the reader's understanding of the writing.

A failure to address the writing task, a lack of understanding of purpose, the lack of a central idea, a lack of sentence variety, and serious conventions errors make this a score point 1 response.

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on March 4 and 5, 2008

Score Point 1 Response

Student Work Sample Two

I think thas good to the district put two weeks couse the childrens. Can practice and have to prononse the worls then people can not spick Inglish and thase good can the boys can play afterd then go to the school and they can doo the Homework if they have homework or practice the things they do and the last year and they can by inteyigents.

Commentary

Although this response addresses one part of the writing task by suggesting why lengthening the school year would improve education, it does not consider opposing viewpoints. It demonstrates some understanding of purpose and audience by attempting to support the writer's viewpoint with explanations, but these explanations are unclear.

The response focuses consistently on why the longer school year would improve learning but lacks an organizational structure. It begins by suggesting how second language students would benefit from the longer year ("… the childrens. Can practice and have to prononse the worls then people can not spick Inglish …") but drifts into a discussion of what students in general would gain ("… they can doo the Homework if they have homework or practice the things they do and the last year and they can by inteyigents.").

The response attempts to present a central idea in support of a longer school year ("I think thas good to the district put two weeks …"), but the writer fails to defend this position because the supporting explanations are unclear ("… the childrens. Can practice and have to prononse the worls then people can not spick Inglish and thase good can the boys can play afterd then go to the school …"). The response seems to present two main reasons more school would improve education—it would help second language students, and it would give all students more time for homework and other activities—but it is not clear how time for other activities would improve education ("… or practice the things they do …"). The response does not address the reader's concerns, biases, and expectations.

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on March 4 and 5, 2008

Score Point 1 Response

Student Work Sample Two (continued)

Commentary

The response demonstrates no sentence variety. It consists of one long sentence fragment and a run-on sentence .

The response contains serious errors in the conventions of the English language. Errors include the sentence structure mistakes noted above, inappropriate prepositions ("I think thas good to the district…"), the use of a plural noun where a singular noun is required ("…couse the childrens. Can practice…"), grammar and usage errors ("…then people can not spick Inglish and thase good can the boys can play afterd…"), and numerous spelling errors ("doo" for "do," "worls" for "words," "by" for "be," "inteyigents"). These errors interfere with the reader's understanding of the writing.

The lack of organizational structure, the lack of clear support for a central idea, and serious sentence and conventions errors make this a score point 1 response.

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on March 4 and 5, 2008

Score Point 1 Response

Student Work Sample Three

We have to leaner in school and work herd. And we get good grades in class too. And have good teachers in class too. And go to high school to. And get a good job in your live. And have a good live too. And get a good famaily. And do your Homework all day and nigh.

Commentary

This response does not address the writing task because it does not consider whether a longer school year would improve education. It demonstrates little understanding of audience and purpose. Rather than arguing for or against more school, it vaguely suggests that success in school is important.

This brief response demonstrates a minimal organizational structure by listing students' academic responsibilities in the first half of the response and the potential rewards of schooling in the second half (a good job, a good life, a good family). The response lacks an introduction and conclusion, and transitions consist exclusively of "And" to start sentences.

Although the response vaguely suggests that students' adult lives will be better if they are conscientious in school, it lacks any central idea regarding a longer school year. Consequently, the writer's encouragements to work hard in school, get good grades, attend high school, and get a good job are marginal to the writing task. Lacking a central idea, the response fails to defend a position, and it does not address the reader's concerns, biases, and expectations.

The response includes no sentence variety. Except for two initial simple sentences, all the sentences in the response are fragments that lack a subject ("And have good teachers in class too. And go to high school to. And get a good job in your live. …").

The response contains serious errors in the conventions of the English language. Most errors consist of the sentence fragments noted above. Others include misspellings ("leaner" for "learn," "live" for "life," "family," "herd" for "hard") and incorrect capitalization ("… do your Homework …"). These

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on March 4 and 5, 2008

Score Point 1 Response

Student Work Sample Three (continued)

Commentary

errors interfere with the reader's understanding of the writing.

A weak organization, the lack of a central idea and supporting evidence, and numerous sentence errors make this a score point 1 response.

Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on April 29 and 30, 2008

The writing task below was administered to students who took the CST in writing on April 29 or 30, 2008. Sample student responses and teacher commentaries are presented on pages 37 through 61.

Persuasive Writing Task

Directions:

- In this writing test, you will write a persuasive letter in response to the writing task on the following pages.
- You will have time to plan your letter and write a first draft with edits.
- Only what you write on the lined pages in this booklet will be scored.
- Use only a No. 2 pencil to write your response.

Scoring:

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
- address possible arguments against your position
- use correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. You may include a salutation and closing, but the format of the letter will not count as part of your score.

Read the following writing task. You must write a persuasive letter about this topic.

Writing the Persuasive Letter

The school district is going to give your principal a certain amount of money to make improvements to your school. Your principal is thinking about spending the money in one of three areas: 1) plants, paint, and other materials to help beautify your school; 2) computers and books for your school library; or 3) new equipment for the school's sports teams. Where do you think the money should be spent? Choose one side of the issue and write a persuasive letter to your principal explaining which one of the three choices you think would be best for your school. Include specific reasons and details in support of your position. Be sure to address opposing viewpoints in your letter.

When you write your letter, remember

- to state your position on the topic
- to describe the points in support of your position, including examples and other evidence
- to address possible arguments against your position
- to use correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. You may include a salutation and closing, but the format of the letter will not count as part of your score.

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on April 29 and 30, 2008

Score Point 4 Response

Student Work Sample One

Dear Mr. (omitted).

I, (omitted) , an 8th grader, believe you should use the money you recieve to buy computers and books for the school library. They will help students get information quickly and easily, books will help students get better scores on reading tests, and computers will help those students who don't have one at home to do homework. Many people underestimate the power of libraries but I know you aren't one.

Books and computers will definitely help students get the information they need quickly. Many people need information for projects for school and they wouldn't need to walk very far. Contradictors may say that students can go to their public libraries but, many have sports or something else going on in their lives. It's very hard to run to the public library to get research. With a school library with so many books and computers, students can get books and research when they need it.

Many times test results show that reading more books helps students understand the concept of reading. When students understand that, they can get better test scores on reading tests. Most reading tests ask questions to find out how well a student can understand a book or short story so students need to read more to understand that. If a library had more variety of books, then students may come in more because they find something interesting that wasn't there before. Contradictors may think that students don't have time to read. Well, what about just before bed or even in the car?

More computers would help students get homework typed up before or after class. Many students have handwriting that's almost impossible to read. If students type up their homework more often, there would be no such problem at all. Contradictors could say that many

Commentary

This response clearly addresses the writing task and demonstrates a clear understanding of purpose and audience. The writer explains with specific reasons and details why school district money should be spent on books and computers and addresses opposing viewpoints.

The response maintains a consistent focus on proving that school district money should be spent on books and computers for the school library. It also maintains an impressively consistent organizational structure. The opening paragraph leads effectively into the body by stating a position ("… you should use the money you recieve to buy computers and books for the school library."), presenting the supporting points to be discussed in the body ("They will help students get information quickly and easily, books will help students get better scores on reading tests, and computers will help those students who don't have one at home do homework."), and including a transitional sentence that leads smoothly into the body ("Many people underestimate the power of libraries but I know you aren't one."). The points introduced in the opening paragraph are developed in the body. One paragraph is devoted to each point, and objections against each point are addressed. In the concluding paragraph, the writer explains why alternative uses for the school district money are not desirable and urges the reader to follow the advice presented in the response.

Structural consistency performs much of the transitional work in this response without the need for transitional words or phrases. The writer devotes separate paragraphs to each supporting point and develops each point in the order it appears in the opening paragraph. The first body paragraph explains, for example, why books and computers will help students get information easily, the second

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on April 29 and 30, 2008

Score Point 4 Response

Student Work Sample One (continued)

people have computers at home. Sure, but many more don't.

Beautifying our school doesn't need to be done, since there isn't much trash anyway. New equipment for sports teams can be donated and students can always use their own anyway. Mr. (omitted) , please think about my arguement and thank you for taking the time to read it. Much more can be done for this school than you know.

Sincerely,

(omitted)

Commentary

explains how new books will help students score better on reading tests, and the third explains how computers will help students who don't have them. It is clear how each paragraph fits into the writer's argument without the need for other transitional devices.

This response includes the clearly presented central idea that school district money should be spent on computers and books rather than on beautification and sports equipment. This idea is supported with relevant, well-developed points (e.g., "Many times test results show that reading more books helps students understand the concept of reading. When students understand that, they can get better test scores on reading tests. Most reading tests ask questions to find out how well a student can understand a book or short story so students need to read more to understand that. If a library had more variety of books, then students may come in more because they find something interesting that wasn't there before."). Thoroughly developed supporting points and careful consideration of objections produce an authoritative defense of the writer's position.

The response includes sentence variety. In the second paragraph, for example, the writer mixes sentence lengths and types to move the reader along smoothly ("Books and computers will definitely help students get the information they need quickly.… Contradictors may say that students can go to their public libraries but, many have sports or something else going on in their lives. It's very hard to run to the public library to get research. With a school library with so many books and computers, students can get books and research when they need it.").

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on April 29 and 30, 2008

Score Point 4 Response

Student Work Sample One (continued)

Commentary

The response contains few errors in the conventions of the English language. Errors include a comma after rather than before a conjunction connecting two independent clauses ("Contradictors may say that students can go to their public libraries but, many have sports or something else going on in their lives."), an occasional lack of a comma between independent clauses ("Many people underestimate the power of libraries but I know you aren't one."), and an occasional misspelled word ("recieve," "arguement"). These errors are to be expected in first-draft writing in grade seven and do not interfere with the reader's understanding.

A clear and consistent organization, a central idea supported with well-developed arguments, and clear and varied sentences make this a score point 4 response.

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on April 29 and 30, 2008

Score Point 4 Response

Student Work Sample Two

Dear Mr.(omitted),

It has come to my attention that you were given money to spend on the school. I feel that you should spend the money on plants, paint, and other materials to make our school look good. Paint will brighten up the breezway, the classrooms, lockers, and the walls. Plants will bring beauty to the plain, drab planters. Buying plants, paint, and other materials is the right decision to make the school a better place.

Firstly, plants bring fresh air to the school, and with all the people here, it will bring much needed freshness. Plants will brighten up the quad, colorful flowers and trees will make the quad a wonderful place to be. The paint on the walls will put a smile on everyone's face if it is bright and welcoming. If we put color into the breezeway it won't look so dull. Before, it looked mystical and fun, now the breezeway just looks plain, like a jail cell. We don't want children to feel like they are in jail, we want them to feel like they are in a safe, healthy environment. With the school re-done, it will look warm and inviting. Parents, from tours, will think, "This campus looks very nice, if they can take care of plants, they can take care of my child." "I think I'll send them here, not (omitted) ." We always want new children.

In addition to paint and plants to beautify the school, we should also invest in better lunch benches. Most lunch benches are bent, scratched, and broken from years past. If we bought new ones, the students would respect them more. We could get padding in them, just a little bit, so they would be more comfortable.

You may have a few questions and concerns, Mr. (omitted), but I am sure I can sort them out for you. You may be saying to yourself, "Why should I buy plants and paint, when I can have new sports equipment." Well, sports equipment would help our school, but we

Commentary

This response clearly addresses the writing task by arguing that school district money should be used to buy plants, paint, and other materials to beautify the school and by convincingly addressing reader objections. It demonstrates a clear understanding of purpose by using precise and relevant evidence to defend the writer's position.

The response maintains a consistent organizational structure with an introduction that presents a clear position on how the school district's money should be spent, a body that supports that position and addresses objections, and a conclusion that expands on the position. The well-developed introduction leads into the body with a statement that the writer will subsequently develop ("Buying plants, paint, and other materials is the right decision to make the school a better place."). The three body paragraphs support this statement by arguing that plants, paint, and lunch benches would improve student attitudes and parent confidence, and the concluding paragraph reiterates the advantages of school beautification.

The writer supports the clearly stated central idea with detailed and relevant information ("Plants will brighten up the quad, colorful flowers and trees will make the quad a wonderful place to be. The paint on the walls will put a smile on everyone's face if it is bright and welcoming. … Parents, from tours, will think, 'This campus looks very nice, if they can take care of plants, they can take care of my child.' … We could get padding in [the benches], … so they would be more comfortable.") and convincingly addresses reader concerns with concrete information ("… sports equipment would help our school, but we already do have sports equipment. We have basketballs, softballs, soccer balls, footballs, and many more. We also have flags for flag football, …"). The detailed

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on April 29 and 30, 2008

Score Point 4 Response

Student Work Sample Two (continued)

already do have sports equipment. We have basketballs, softballs, soccer balls, footballs, and many more. We also have flags for flag football, bats for softball, and nets for volleyball. Many people love to play sports, but a tiny percent actually make it to the professionalls. You might also say, "Why buy plants when I can buy computers and books." Computers are wonderful, but we already have many. They also cost much more than paint or plants. Computers with all their new gadgets and other things, it is hard to understand let alone install. Books are great, I love books, but we already have so many we would have to make the library bigger. Plants and paint is the best choice.

The choice is plain and simple, products that will beautify our school, is what we should spend our money on. (omitted) is a great school and should look like it too. We want students to be excited to come here, not dreading it. I think we owe it to our students, staff, and our great school to make it beautiful.

Commentary

evidence provides an authoritative defense of the writer's position.

The response includes sentence variety. In the third paragraph, for example, a mix of simple and complex sentences with varied beginnings and parallel phrasing moves the reader smoothly through the paragraph ("In addition to paint and plants to beautify the school, we should also invest in better lunch benches. Most lunch benches are bent, scratched, and broken from years past. If we bought new ones, the students would respect them more. We could get padding in them, just a little bit, so they would be more comfortable.").

The response contains some errors in the conventions of the English language. The one repeated error is comma splices ("'This campus looks very nice, if they can take care of plants, they can take care of my child.'"; "Before, it looked mystical and fun, now the breezeway just looks plain, like a jail cell."). These errors are to be expected in first-draft writing in grade seven and do not interfere with the reader's understanding.

A clear organization, ample information to support the writer's position and to refute objections, and concrete details rather than generalities make this a score point 4 response.

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on April 29 and 30, 2008

Score Point 4 Response

Student Work Sample Three

Dear Mr. Principal,

Once while I was at home doing my homework, the power went out in my house, so I couldn't use the computer for my homework! The money that the school district has provided should be spent on new books and computers for the school library. This would help the students at the school immensely for the following reasons: First, having new books would give the students more of a variety of reading material. Second, it would be giving the students an exellent place to do their homework. Third, it would help the students study better.

First of all, the kids would have a large selection of books to read, whether it was school books or chapter books. Because no two kids are the same, all students like to read about different topics. If the library had only limited amounts of stories, not many people would be visiting the library. Also, more books in the library would allow the kids to broaden their minds. They would not be learning much if they were exposed to the same vocabulary every day. More books gives them a chance to learn new words and build a better imagination. Although reading just for pleasure is fun, students need to work, too.

Next, if the library had books and computers, it would be an ideal place for students to get their work done. Many of the students at school have a sport or another kind of activity after school. Many times they finish with their sport and are tired, so they don't want to or have time to do their homework. If the library was stocked with homework books and computers, the kids could get their work finished during lunch break. They would not be tired and could think better, which results with a better grade. Besides thinking better, the computers in the library would be a great addition. The students would be allowed to

Commentary

This response addresses most of the writing task and demonstrates an understanding of purpose and audience by recommending that school district money be used for books and computers for the school library and by defending this recommendation with relevant evidence. The response does not clearly address the reader's concerns, biases, and expectations.

The response maintains a consistent organizational structure. The introductory paragraph presents the writer's position and introduces supporting points developed later in the response. The body develops the supporting points, and the conclusion reiterates these points and summarizes the writer's position ("If the library had books and computers everyone would benifit in some way."). Transitions are used effectively both within paragraphs ("First, having new books … Second, it would be giving … Third, it would help the students …") and between paragraphs ("First of all, the kids would have a large selection of books … Next, if the library had books and computers … Lastly, having their homework books and computers to type with …").

The response includes a clearly presented central idea with relevant explanations. The central idea is presented in the opening paragraph ("The money that the school district has provided should be spent on new books and computers for the school library."). Supporting points are developed in subsequent paragraphs. The writer notes that new books would allow students "to broaden their minds … learn new words and build a better imagination."; that a library with books and computers would provide a convenient place for students to "get their work finished during lunch break. …" and a good place "… to finish tough essays …"; and that library books and computers would allow students to do homework without the worry of "los[ing] their books" at home and without the distraction of "… younger siblings making so much

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on April 29 and 30, 2008

Score Point 4 Response

Student Work Sample Three (continued)

finish tough essays at school, and do the easier work at home. That would mean they would have time to play or talk with friends, because they finish faster.

Lastly, having their homework books and computers to type with in the library would help by letting the students use it at a convenient time. Some of the kids lose their books, so they can't use them for homework. If books were in the library, they wouldn't have to be stressed or worried over their work. Also, the computers would really help all of the students, because they could have a quiet environment to type essays that need time to think. At some kid's homes, they may have younger siblings making so much noise they would not be able to concentrate. If they were able to go to the library, they would work more efficiently and be relaxed.

In all, the money givin by the school district should be spent on library books and computers. It would be helping everyone by having different things to read, a nice area to do their homework, and being able to study better and more often. If the library had books and computers, everyone would benifit in some way.

Sincerely,

(omitted)

Commentary

noise…" These explanations provide an authoritative defense of the writer's position, though they do not address reader objections.

The response includes sentence variety. The third paragraph, for example, includes simple, complex, and compound sentences and sentences that begin with a variety of main and subordinate clauses ("Next, if the library had books and computers, it would be an ideal place for students to get their work done. Many of the students at school have a sport or another kind of activity after school. Many times they finish with their sport and are tired, so they don't want to or have time to do their homework. If the library was stocked with homework books and computers, the kids could get their work finished during lunch break. They would not be tired and could think better, which results with a better grade. Besides thinking better, the computers in the library would be a great addition.").

The response contains some errors in the conventions of the English language. Errors include incorrect verb tense ("If the library was stocked with homework books…"), an unjustified shift in verb tense and an incorrect preposition ("They would not be tired and could think better, which results with a better grade."), a dangling modifying phrase ("If books were in the library, they wouldn't have to be stressed or worried over their work."), and spelling errors ("benifit," "givin"). These errors are to be expected in first-draft writing in grade seven and do not interfere with the reader's understanding of the writing.

A clear organizational structure, a central idea supported with concrete examples, and good sentence variety are among the qualities that make this a score point 4 response.

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on April 29 and 30, 2008

Score Point 3 Response

Student Work Sample One

Dear Principal,

I heard that the district is giving the school some money and I thought that we could use it to help our school library. As a reader I have many tastes in books. Most of the books in our library are falling apart and students find them boring. With some of the money though we could buy better books and maybe some hardcovers. Our textbook all have writing in them and the covers are falling off but we can change all that if you give the library money. The computers we have are also slow and don't work well. We could buy new and better computers with more AR tests. I have read many books but most aren't in the computers. That's what I think we should do with the money.

Sincerely,

(omitted)

Commentary

This response addresses most of the writing task by arguing for the purchase of books and computers with school district money but does not consider opposing viewpoints. It demonstrates a general understanding of purpose and audience by generally defending a position with relevant evidence.

The response maintains a mostly consistent organizational structure. The writer states a position in the opening sentence, provides supporting information in subsequent sentences, and includes a concluding idea in the final sentence. The introduction, body, and conclusion are combined into a single paragraph, but given the brevity of the introduction and conclusion, paragraph breaks may seem extraneous. The introduction and, especially, the brief conclusion ("That's what I think we should do with the money.") would both benefit from further development. Modifying phrases lead smoothly into sentences ("As a reader I have many tastes…"), and transitional devices are used appropriately ("With some of the money though we could buy better books…"; "The computers we have are also slow…").

The response includes a central idea ("…the district is giving the school some money and I thought that we could use it to help our school library."), which is supported with explanations that, though relevant, are general rather than detailed or precise ("…most of the books in our library…students find…boring. With some of the money…we could buy better books.… The computers we have are also slow and don't work well.…I have read many books but most aren't in the computers.").

The response includes some sentence variety. Sentences near the beginning are somewhat varied in structure and length and flow fairly effectively ("I

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on April 29 and 30, 2008

Score Point 3 Response

Student Work Sample One (continued)

Commentary

have heard that the district is giving the school some money and I thought that we could use it to help our school library. As a reader I have many tastes in books. Most of the books in our library are falling apart and students find them boring. With some of the money though we could buy better books and maybe some hardcovers.”). Sentences toward the end of the response are short, simple, and consequently choppy.

The response contains few errors in the conventions of the English language. Errors include use of a singular noun where a plural is needed (“Our textbook all have writing in them…”) and the lack of commas between independent clauses (“textbook all have writing in them and the covers are falling off but we can change all that…”). These errors are to be expected in first-draft writing in grade seven and do not interfere with the reader’s understanding.

A central idea supported by general explanations, some sentence variety, and few errors in conventions make this a score point 3 response.

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on April 29 and 30, 2008

Score Point 3 Response

Student Work Sample Two

Dear Mr. (omitted),

You should use the certain amount of money to improve the computers and books for the schools library. It will give people knowledge and they will do better in testes. If the students do better in tests they will do better in the SAT which therefore will bring up the schools test scores and enhance the schools reputation. We do not have to beautify our school since it is a learning place. Others may argue that the money should be spended on other things like sports equipment but I say learning is a more important matter in school. I hope you read this and take it to full consideration and choose books and computers as your choice.

You student,

(omitted)

Commentary

This response addresses the writing task by arguing that school district money should be used for books and computers for the school library and by addressing reader concerns. It demonstrates a general understanding of purpose and audience by presenting a clear organization and by providing general explanations to support the writer's position.

The response maintains a consistent organizational structure. It begins with a sentence that states the writer's position, follows with support for that position, addresses an objection by explaining why school district money should not be spent on beautification or sports equipment, and finishes with a summary statement intended to persuade the school principal. The argument may be more effective with paragraph breaks to provide transitions between the introduction, body, and conclusion. Given the brevity of each of these sections, however, paragraphing may be extraneous. Moreover, the clarity of the organizational structure helps identify the steps in the writer's argument even without paragraph breaks. The response would benefit from clearer transitions between arguments for and arguments against the writer's position.

The response includes a central idea ("You should use the certain amount of money to improve the computers and books for the schools library.") that is supported by a logical, though somewhat narrow, explanation ("It will give people knowledge and they will do better in testes. If the students do better in tests they will do better in the SAT which therefore will bring up the schools test scores and enhance the schools reputation."). One possible reader objection is countered with a logical argument ("We do not have to beautify our school since it is a learning place."), and another is countered with a similar argument that is less effectively phrased ("Others may argue

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on April 29 and 30, 2008

Score Point 3 Response

Student Work Sample Two (continued)

Commentary

that the money should be spended on other things like sports equipment but I say learning is a more important matter in school.”). The arguments would be strengthened with more concrete language and detail throughout the response.

Although many sentences tend to be long and sometimes loose, they vary from simple (“You should use the certain amount of money to improve the computers and books for the schools library.”) to complex (“We do not have to beautify our school since it is a learning place.”) to compound (“It will give people knowledge and they will do better in testes.”).

The response contains errors in the conventions of the English language. Errors include a lack of commas between subordinate and independent clauses (“If the students do better in tests they will do better in the SAT which therefore will bring up the schools test scores and enhance the schools reputation.”) and in front of conjunctions between pairs of independent clauses (“Others may argue that the money should be spended on other things like sports equipment but I say learning is a more important matter in school.”), a lack of apostrophes to indicate possessive nouns (“… enhance the schools reputation.”), an incorrect verb form (“spended”), and a spelling error (“testes”) . These errors are to be expected in first-draft writing in grade seven and do not interfere with the reader’s understanding.

A clear organizational structure and a central idea supported by reasonable arguments are among the qualities that make this a score point 3 response.

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on April 29 and 30, 2008

Score Point 3 Response

Student Work Sample Three

Dear. Mr. (omitted),

I think you should spend the money on computers and books for our library. We need books and computers to be able to research more. Sports supplies and plants won't make us smarter. Here are some of the reasons why I think computers and books are important.

Our school needs computers and books because it's important to have resources for reports. Computers and books will also expand our knowledge. New books are also good because it provides us with new information. We can use computers and books to do other things too. Computers can print out information and provide educational games.

New sports supply and plants are not as important as computers and books. They don't help us learn anything. Sure, sports supply would be good and new plants would be nice, but our education is more important. Everyone can use the computers and books too. Sports and how the school looks nice doesn't help you with your education.

So now I hope you understand why I think computers and books are important. Computers and books will help us learn new things and expand our knowledge. Now I hope you understand why I think you should get computers and books instead of sports supplies and things to make our school look nicer.

Commentary

This response addresses the writing task and demonstrates an understanding of purpose and audience by arguing that school district money should be used to buy computers and books for the school library. The writer supports this argument with explanations and addresses reader objections.

The response maintains a mostly consistent organizational structure. The introductory paragraph presents the writer's position (the school district money should be spent on books and computers), outlines supporting points (computers and books provide educational resources while sports equipment and plants do not), and includes a sentence that leads into the body ("Here are some of the reasons why I think computers and books are important."). Transitional sentences like the lead-in sentence noted above and the first sentence of the concluding paragraph ("So now I hope you understand why I think computers and books are important.") move the reader from one paragraph to another. An effective organizational structure also serves as a transitional device. A transitional sentence is unnecessary between the second and third paragraphs, for example, because these paragraphs discuss supporting points in the order in which the opening paragraph indicates they would be discussed. The one organizational flaw is a sentence in paragraph three ("Everyone can use the computers and books too."), which seems to belong in the previous paragraph.

The response presents a central idea with explanations that, though relevant, are repetitious. In the second paragraph, for example, the writer suggests that providing "resources for reports," "expand[ing] our knowledge," and furnishing "us with new information" represent three reasons for acquiring books and computers. These explanations,

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on April 29 and 30, 2008

Score Point 3 Response

Student Work Sample Three (continued)

Commentary

however, appear to be three versions of a single reason. The supporting points also are stated in very general language. Although the response counters objections to the writer's position, for example, the general language in which counterarguments are presented weakens their effectiveness ("New sports supply and plants are not as important as computers and books. They don't help us learn anything. Sure, sports supply would be good and new plants would be nice, but our education is more important.").

Although the response contains passages in which simple, short sentences produce repetitious rhythms ("I think you should spend the money on computers and books for our library. We need books and computers to be able to research more. Sports supplies and plants won't make us smarter."), it demonstrates some sentence variety ("Our school needs computers and books because it's important to have resources for reports."; "Sure, sports supply would be good and new plants would be nice, but our education is more important.").

The response contains very few errors in the conventions of the English language. One error is a lack of agreement between a noun and pronoun ("New books are also good because it provides us with new information."). This type of error is to be expected in first-draft writing in grade seven and does not interfere with the reader's understanding.

A mostly consistent organizational structure, a central idea with general supporting arguments, and a lack of errors in conventions make this a score point 3 response.

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on April 29 and 30, 2008

Score Point 2 Response

Student Work Sample One

Dear. Mr. (omitted),

You should spend the money on what you think is going to keep this school from failing in every thing we have acomplished. I think we should spend it in very important matariels that will help the whowl school get better grades.

To get our team uniforms better then they always where. Maybe even change colors to like green or white. But the best choice there will be it will be your's. So make the best choice.

Then starte to buy new table to eat in because the old ones are trashed. Please make a good choice. I also think to chang the color of the school to give it more style.

We should change the restrooms way they look, because most of the people don't flush and just leave it there. I think they will give it more respect. Please do this for us the students.

Commentary

This response addresses some of the writing task by arguing that school district money should be spent to make sure that students get better grades. It demonstrates little understanding of purpose and audience by failing to provide evidence to support the writer's argument and by failing to address opposing viewpoints.

This response demonstrates an inconsistent focus. The opening paragraph vaguely suggests that the school district money should be spent to improve student grades, but subsequent paragraphs do not support this argument. Rather, the argument is directed toward better school uniforms, better lunch tables, a more colorful building, and cleaner restrooms. The response lacks transitional devices to shift the reader smoothly between paragraphs.

This response suggests a central idea ("…we should spend [the district money] in very important matariels that will help the whowl school get better grades."), and the ensuing paragraphs apparently are intended to support this idea. As presented, however, the supporting information seems only marginally related to the central idea. It is unclear how better school uniforms, better lunch tables, a more colorful building, and cleaner restrooms could improve student grades without further explanation. The response does not address opposing viewpoints.

The introductory paragraph demonstrates some sentence control ("You should spend the money on what you think is going to keep this school from failing every thing we have acomplished. I think we should spend it in very important matariels that will help the whowl school get better grades."). Much of the response that follows, however, is characterized by sentence fragments ("To get our team uniforms better than they always where. Maybe even change

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on April 29 and 30, 2008

Score Point 2 Response

Student Work Sample One (continued)

Commentary

colors to like green or white.") and awkward sentence structure ("I also think to chang the color of the school to give it more style.").

The response contains many errors in the conventions of the English language. In addition to the problems in sentence structure noted above, errors include the use of "then" where "than" is needed ("To get our team uniforms better then they always…"), the use of a singular noun where a plural noun is needed ("Then starte to buy new table to eat in…"), spelling errors ("matariels," "whowl," "acomplished"), and the inclusion of an unnecessary apostrophe ("…it will be your's."). These errors interfere with the reader's understanding of the writing.

A weak focus, lack of transitions between paragraphs, errors in sentence structure, and errors in conventions are among the qualities that make this a score point 2 response.

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on April 29 and 30, 2008

Score Point 2 Response

Student Work Sample Two

I would reccomened to spend it on sports because you see All these kids playing different sports. I know kids would be wanting to play football and basketball. The principal is going to be wanting to buy uniforms for (school name) Basketball and Football. It's fun playing any kind of sports unless you just sit and don't do anything at all. You should know that almost everyone at (school name) is going to try out for Basketball. Once they pick the people to play for Mustangs then there going to try to get the torphy for (school name) basketball and be number one team in middle school. Everyone going to be like yes were number one in (school name) Mustangs school. I'm just asking you please buy for the sports for the kids chance to that there the best one to beat the other schools

Commentary

This response addresses some of the writing task by arguing that school district money should be spent for sports equipment, but it neglects to address possible objections. It demonstrates little understanding of purpose and audience by presenting little evidence to support the writer's position.

The response maintains an inconsistent focus and organizational structure. The opening sentence presents an abrupt recommendation that the school spend the school district's money on football and basketball equipment. Subsequent sentences attempt to support this recommendation, and the final sentence makes an appeal to the reader and provides a sense of conclusion. Much of the information intended to support the writer's recommendation, however, is marginally relevant. The statements that "It's fun playing any kind of sports unless you just sit and don't do anything at all" and that the school's basketball team will try to beat other schools' teams do not appear to pertain directly to the writer's argument. The response also would be strengthened by paragraph divisions to help provide transitions within the single, solid block of text.

The response presents the central idea that the school district's money should be spent on sports "because you see All these kids playing different sports," specifically "football and basketball." The response, however, presents limited support for this idea. It first suggests that the money should be spent on "uniforms for … Basketball and Football" but then drifts into a discussion of the school's efforts in basketball. Rather than explaining why sports equipment would be a worthwhile purchase, the writer speculates on the prospects for the school's basketball team. The concluding sentence attempts to refocus on the central idea but does so with limited success ("I'm just asking you please buy for the

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on April 29 and 30, 2008

Score Point 2 Response

Student Work Sample Two (continued)

Commentary

sports for the kids chance to that there the best one to beat the other schools"). The response does not address possible opposing viewpoints.

The response includes some sentence variety with simple sentences ("I know kids would be wanting to play football and basketball.") and complex sentences ("I would reccomened to spend it on sports because you see All these kids playing different sports."; "Once they pick the people to play for Mustangs then there going to try to get the torphy for [school name] basketball and be number one team in middle school"). The sentences, however, seem repetitive because of the consistent subject-verb beginnings ("I would reccomened … I know kids … The principal is going to … It's fun playing any kind of sports … You should know that …").

The response contains many errors in the conventions of the English language. Errors include the lack of agreement between the noun and the object of the preposition ("It's fun playing any kind of sports …"), the lack of articles where they are needed ("… get the torphy for [school name] basketball and be number one team …"), a confusion about correct word form ("… then there going to try to get …"), the failure to use an apostrophe to form a contraction ("… yes were number one …), and occasional spelling errors ("torphy," "reccomened"). These errors do not interfere with the reader's understanding of the writing.

A lack of focus and convincing support for the central idea, repetitive sentence structures, and errors in conventions make this a score point 2 response.

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on April 29 and 30, 2008

Score Point 2 Response

Student Work Sample Three

I think the school needs more desk, almost every class have mixed up desk. They just need to buy the same desk for every classroom. Allow us to use them when we need it. Use them to write on but earse it after we are done.

We also need lockers – so we can use them when needed. Like when we carry our book at the beginning of the year when we have to check them out and at the end of the year when we have to turn them back in. It will be easier so we don't have to miss school because were sore. You guy should think about that.

There's people that like football you guy should bring in tackle football or maybe flag but people tackle better. I hear people saying we got a football field but no football team. Charge like 70 bucks for outfits. I don't know how much they cost.

I see that you guys started painting the school but you stop for some reason. Instead of making the school white and brown make it the the original colors green and yellow. But I don't know how its going to look but it's the school colors.

Now, let talk about nets for the basketball court for lunch. You should also get better hoops to. There's a big glob of silly puddy on the hoop outside at lease get that off. You got net for the gyms court now gets some for lunch.

The table for lunch is just nasty filled with bird dookey, gum, and other things. Who want's to eat on tables filled with crap like that rather clean the table or just buy some new ones. We need some new computer for the classroom or laptops wich ever ones better.

Commentary

This response addresses some of the writing task by arguing that the writer's school needs new materials of various kinds, but the list of materials ranges from computers to sports equipment to paint and other items. It demonstrates some understanding of purpose by identifying specific improvements for the school, but it fails to address opposing viewpoints.

This response maintains an inconsistent focus and organizational structure. Rather than providing an introduction that outlines where the school district's money should be spent, the response plunges immediately into specific uses for the money. These uses, however, meander from beautification to sports equipment to computers. The response also lacks a conclusion.

Transitional devices help link some paragraphs ("We also need lockers – so we …"; "Now, let talk about nets for the basketball court …"), but most paragraphs begin abruptly without transitions. The lack of transitions produces incoherence within paragraphs as well. The third paragraph advocates buying equipment for football, for example, but without adequate transitions the topic seems to shift from purchasing materials for recreational football to fielding a school football team to buying football uniforms ("There's people that like football you guy should bring in tackle football or maybe flag but people tackle better. I hear people saying we got a football field but no football team. Charge like 70 bucks for outfits.").

The response lacks a central idea, except for the suggestion that the school district's money be spent for various purposes. Because the writer does not support one of the three school-improvement areas proposed in the writing task, the writer is not able to defend a position or address the reader's concerns. One strength of the response is the specificity of areas the

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on April 29 and 30, 2008

Score Point 2 Response

Student Work Sample Three (continued)

Commentary

writer identifies for improvement ("We … need lockers – so we can use them when … we carry our book … Instead of making the school white and brown make it the original colors green and yellow. … nets for the basketball court" and "better hoops …").

Sentences vary from simple ("I don't know how much they cost.") to complex ("It will be easier so we don't have to miss school because were sore.") to compound ("I see that you guys started painting the school but you stop for some reason."). Many sentences are poorly structured, however, and many contain independent clauses that are run together without punctuation ("There's people that like football you guys should bring tackle football or maybe flag but people tackle better.") or that contain comma splices ("I think the school needs more desk, almost every class have mixed up desk."). One sentence is a long fragment ("Like when we carry our book at the beginning of the year when we have to check them out and at the end of the year when we have to turn them back in.").

The response contains many errors in the conventions of the English language. In addition to the sentence problems noted above, errors include a mistaken verb tense ("… you guys started painting the school but you stop for some reason."), the use of a singular noun where a plural noun is needed ("I think the school needs more desk, almost every class have mixed up desk."; "You guy should think about that."), the lack of apostrophes in contractions ("… so we don't have to miss school because were sore."), the use of the colloquial term "guy," and spelling mistakes ("to" for "too," "lease" for "least," "earse"). These errors may interfere with the reader's understanding of the writing.

Weaknesses in focus and organizational structure, the lack of a central idea, and numerous sentence problems make this a score point 2 response.

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on April 29 and 30, 2008

Score Point 1 Response

Student Work Sample One

Dear, Mr. Principal if you could spend the money. To get some new computers lab for the school with cool game and some cool stuff. You could spend som paint for it could look good. And I have pearents to come and see what did the principal did to look better in school is. To get some new book for the library. like some new once of library like Goose bumps of scare your pants. To get some new sports thing For people want to go to the new sports game. even to plant rose on the grass lot of different of flowrs. some people like lot of rose. For it could lot better out of school. or when you go inside it would look even better. some other materials want what the kinds want on the campess or stuff for they could have fun with that stuff. Spend the money of the swmming pool get a new that is so big have cool sutff. get diffent staff for kids lot of stuff.

The end of this story is to get better some lot of book from the library for the could have fun with Goose bumps to sare your pants off.

Commentary

This response addresses one part of the writing task by arguing that the school district's money should be spent on improvements to the school. It does not identify in which of the three areas the money should be spent, nor does it address opposing viewpoints. The response demonstrates little understanding of purpose and audience because while it proposes specific uses for the money, it does so in a haphazard manner.

This response lacks a focus on the specific area in which the school district's money should be used. It proposes, rather, that the money be spent on all three areas identified in the writing task. The response also lacks an organizational structure. It argues that the money should be used for computers, a new paint job, books, roses and other flowers, unnamed "other materials," and improvements to the swimming pool, in that order. The concluding paragraph, however, states that the money should be spent specifically on books.

The response does not present an explicit central idea but leaves it to the reader to infer that money should be spent on all three areas identified in the writing task. Because the response lacks a clear central idea, the proposals for improvement may be considered only marginally related to the persuasive purpose of the writing task. The response occasionally presents specific recommendations (plant roses in the grass, buy the Goosebumps stories), but it typically fails to defend its proposals because it is vague in describing where the money should be spent and why (e.g., spending money on computers would provide "cool game and some cool stuff," spending money on a "new sports thing" [would entertain people who want to watch a sport event?], "other material" and other "stuff" would allow kids to "have fun," a bigger swimming pool would have "cool stuff.").

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on April 29 and 30, 2008

Score Point 1 Response

Student Work Sample One (continued)

Commentary

The response contains few comprehensible sentences. It contains numerous sentence fragments ("Dear, Mr. Principal if you could spend the money. To get some new computers lab for the school with cool game and some cool stuff. … To get some new book for the library.") and, even more frequently, sentences marred by mistaken verb placements ("And I have pearents to come and see what did the principal did to look better in school is."). Verbs are sometimes omitted ("For it could lot better out of school.") as are pronouns ("To get some new sports thing For people want to go to …") and nouns ("Spend the money of the swimming pool get a new that is so big …"). Prepositions are sometimes used incorrectly ("You could spend som paint for it could look good."; "like some new once of library like Goose bumps of scare your pants.").

This response contains serious errors in the conventions of the English language. In addition to the errors noted above, errors include the lack of an "s" to make nouns plural ("… computers lab for the school with cool game …"; "even to plant rose on the grass … some people like lot of rose.") and mistakes in spelling ("once" for "ones," "flowrs," "camp pess" for "campus," "som" for "some"). These errors interfere with the reader's understanding of the writing.

A lack of organization and serious errors in sentence structure and the conventions of English are among the qualities that make this a score point 1 response.

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on April 29 and 30, 2008

Score Point 1 Response

Student Work Sample Two

The child to help the to read a book. The teacher to help the computers. The book to help us. The help us. The thing to know about the thing to the us. The teacher and the child to know the book and computers. Book to helps the child to read was. Computers to know about the thing to read the thing. Book and computers to helping to the child teacher. The do child kown to reading was. The teacher to the helping was to the book and computers

Commentary

This response fails to address the writing task by neglecting to propose a use for the school district's money and by failing to address opposing viewpoints. It demonstrates no understanding of purpose and audience by presenting information in scattered fragments rather than organizing it for a persuasive purpose.

The response lacks an organizational structure. Although it attempts to differentiate between the value of books and the value of computers (books help children learn to read, computers help them find information, and both books and computers help teachers), the response presents these differentiations through a series of fragments ("Book to helps the child to read was. Computers to know about the thing to read the thing. Books and computers to helping to the child teacher. The do child kown to reading was."). The response does not include an introduction, body, or conclusion, and it lacks transitions.

Although the response implies that the school district's money should be used for books and computers, it does not present or even suggest a central idea. Rather, it opens and continues throughout the writing with concrete details ("The child to help the to read a book. The teacher to help the computers."). Lacking an overarching idea to support, the information provided in the response is marginal. Without a position to defend, the response cannot address objections.

The response consists almost exclusively of sentence fragments. Most of these fragments seem to result from a misconception that the infinitive form of a verb can act as the verb in a sentence ("The teacher to help the computers. The book to help us. … The thing to know about the thing to the us. The teacher and the child to know the book and computers.").

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on April 29 and 30, 2008

Score Point 1 Response

Student Work Sample Two (continued)

Commentary

The response contains serious errors in the conventions of the English language. Errors include the misuse of infinitives noted above and other misunderstandings about verb placement, tense, and form ("Book to helps the child to read was. … Book and computers to helping to the child teacher. The do child kown to reading was.").

Lacking an organizational structure, a central idea with supporting evidence, and complete and comprehensible sentences, this is a score point 1 response.

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on April 29 and 30, 2008

Score Point 1 Response

Student Work Sample Three

The school is get money from the district to the principal. The principal wanted the school to look nice. The thinking spenting money on three area first area is some plants. Next area is paint so the can look colorful. Last area is matercipal to look beautify and books for the library. New equipment for the school teams.

Commentary

This response does not address the writing task because it does not recommend a specific use for the school district's money. It does not demonstrate an understanding of purpose because it does not attempt to persuade the reader. The presence of transitions indicates some understanding of audience.

The response lacks an organizational structure appropriate for persuasion. Instead, this short response appears to repeat the information from the prompt in the order it is presented in the prompt. The writer first states that the school district is considering giving money to the student's school, then that the money can be used for beautification, then that it can be used for books, and finally that it can be used for sports equipment. The response does contain transitions ("… first area is some plants. Next area is … Last area is …").

The response lacks a central idea because it does not advocate using the school district's money for one of the purposes identified in the prompt. It recognizes that the money could be used for beautification, books, and sports equipment, but it does not argue for use of funds in these three areas, much less in one of the areas as the prompt specifies. The response appears to simply restate the prompt ("The thinking spenting money on three area first area is some plants. Next area is paint so the can look colorful. Last area is matercipal to look beautify and books for the library. New equipment for the school teams."). Lacking a position to defend, information provided in the response is marginal. The response does not address the reader's concerns, biases, or expectations.

The response includes little sentence variety. Although it contains simple sentences and rudimentary complex sentences, run-on sentences

Sample Student Work and Teacher Commentaries for Grade Seven Persuasive Writing Task Administered on April 29 and 30, 2008

Score Point 1 Response

Student Work Sample Three (continued)

Commentary

and sentence fragments impede readability. ("The principal wanted the school to look nice. The thinking spenting money on three area first area is some plants. Next area is paint so the can look colorful. Last area is matercipal to look beautify and books for the library. New equipment for the school teams.").

The response contains serious errors in the conventions of the English language. Sentence fragments result from an absence of nouns or verbs where they are needed ("The thinking spenting money on three area…"; "New equipment for the school teams."). Other errors include incorrect verb forms ("The school is get money from…"), unnecessary changes in verb tense ("The school is get money from the district to the principal. The principal wanted the school to look nice."), and incorrect spelling and modifiers ("Last area is matercipal to look beautify…"). These errors interfere with the reader's understanding of the writing.

A failure to understand purpose, the lack of organization and a central idea, and serious errors in sentence structure and conventions make this a score point 1 response.

2008 Grade Seven Scoring Rubric

The scoring rubric that follows is used to assign scores to students' written responses on the grade seven writing tests. This rubric includes two sets of criteria. The criteria under "The writing" are adapted from the state English–language arts content standards for Writing Strategies and Written Conventions of English. These criteria are used to evaluate on-demand, first-draft written responses in all genres. Student responses are evaluated on their clarity of purpose, central idea, and organization; their coherence; and their use of supporting evidence, sentence variety, and written conventions. The criteria under "Fictional or autobiographical narrative writing," "Response to literature writing," "Persuasive writing," and "Summary writing," adapted from the grade seven content standards for Writing Applications for these genres, are used to evaluate student writing in the specific genres to which they apply.

On pages 64 through 71, the grade seven scoring rubric is presented in a rearranged format to indicate how all the scoring criteria are applied to student responses in each genre tested.

4

The writing—

- *Clearly* addresses 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 sentence variety.
- 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 a *thoroughly 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 clear position with precise and relevant evidence and *convincingly* addresses the reader's concerns, biases, and expectations.

Summary writing—

- Summarizes text with clear identification of the main idea(s) and most significant details, in the student's own words, and clearly reflects underlying meaning.

3

The writing—

- Addresses most of the writing task.
- Demonstrates a *general* understanding of purpose and audience.
- Maintains a *mostly consistent* point of view, focus, and organizational structure, including use of isolated and/or single word transitions.
- Presents a central idea with *mostly relevant* facts, details, and/or explanations.
- Includes some sentence variety.
- Contains *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 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—

- Summarizes text with the main idea(s) and important details, mostly in the student's own words, and generally reflects underlying meaning.

2

The writing—

- Addresses *some* 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* sentence variety.
- Contains *many 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—

- Summarizes text with some of the main idea(s) and details, which may be superficial, minimal use of the student's own words and minimal reflection of underlying meaning.

1

The writing—

- Addresses *only one part, if any,* 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—

- Summarizes text with few, if any, of the main ideas and/or details, little or no use of the student's own words, little or no reflection of underlying meaning.

Grade Seven Scoring Rubric in Rearranged Format

In the following charts, the grade seven scoring rubric is presented in a rearranged format to indicate how all the scoring criteria in the rubric—those derived from California's content standards for Writing Strategies and Written Conventions as well as those derived from the content standards for Writing Applications—are applied to student responses in each genre tested.

The column under "Genre" contains the scoring criteria derived from the grade seven content standards for Writing Applications. The column under "Organization and Focus" contains scoring criteria derived from the subset of Organization and Focus standards within the grade seven content standards for Writing Strategies. The column under "Sentence Structure" contains the scoring criterion derived from the Sentence Structure standard within the grade six content standards for Written and Oral English Language Conventions. The column under "Conventions" contains the scoring criteria derived from the subsets of Grammar, Punctuation, Capitalization, and Spelling standards within the grade seven content standards for Written and Oral English Language Conventions. Although some columns contain more bullets than others, this is not meant to imply that columns with more bullets are more important in the scoring than the other columns. References to the writing content standards from which each scoring criterion is derived are presented in coded form following each criterion for score point 4.

2008 Grade Seven Scoring Rubric: Fictional or Autobiographical Narrative Writing

	Genre (Fictional Narrative Writing)	*Organization and Focus*	*Sentence Structure*	*Conventions*
4	■ Provides a *thoroughly developed* plot line, including major and minor characters and a *definite* setting. (Gr. 7 WA 2.1 a, b) ■ Includes *appropriate* strategies (e.g., dialogue; suspense; narrative action). (Gr. 7 WA 2.1 c)	■ *Clearly* addresses 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. (Gr. 7 WS 1.1) ■ Includes a *clearly presented* central idea with *relevant* facts, details, and/or explanations. (Gr. 7 WS 1.2)	■ Includes sentence *variety*. (Gr. 6 WC 1.1)	■ 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. (Gr. 7 WC 1.1; 1.2; 1.4–1.7)

* Because this criterion addresses requirements of the writing test rather than a content standard, it does not include a standards reference.
† This criterion is based on content standards for previous grade levels that students must learn in order to write more complex responses required in grade seven.

WA: Writing Applications standards **WS:** Writing Strategies standards **WC:** Written Conventions standards

	Genre (Fictional Narrative Writing)	Organization and Focus	Sentence Structure	Conventions
3	■ Provides an *adequately developed* plot line, including major and minor characters and a *definite* setting. ■ Includes *appropriate* strategies (e.g., dialogue; suspense; narrative action).	■ Addresses most of the writing task. ■ Demonstrates a *general* understanding of purpose and audience. ■ Maintains a *mostly consistent* point of view, focus, and organizational structure, including use of isolated and/or single word transitions. ■ Presents a central idea with *mostly relevant* facts, details, and/or explanations.	■ Includes some sentence *variety*.	■ Contains *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.
2	■ 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).	■ Addresses *some* 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* sentence variety.	■ Contains *many errors* in the conventions of the English language (grammar, punctuation, capitalization, spelling). These errors **may** interfere with the reader's understanding of the writing.
1	■ *Lacks* a developed plot line. ■ *Fails* to use strategies (e.g., dialogue; suspense; narrative action).	■ Addresses *only one* part, if any, 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.

2008 Grade Seven Scoring Rubric: Response to Literature Writing

	Genre (Response to Literature Writing)	Organization and Focus	Sentence Structure	Conventions
4	■ Develops interpretations that demonstrate a *thoughtful*, comprehensive grasp of the text. (Gr. 7 WA 2.2 a) ■ Organizes *accurate* and *coherent* interpretations around *clear* ideas, premises, or images from the literary work. (Gr. 7 WA 2.2 b) ■ Provides *specific* textual examples and details to support the interpretations. (Gr. 7 WA 2.2 c)	■ *Clearly* addresses 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. (Gr. 7 WS 1.1) ■ Includes a *clearly presented* central idea with *relevant* facts, details, and/or explanations. (Gr. 7 WS 1.2)	■ Includes sentence *variety*. (Gr. 6 WC 1.1)	■ 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. (Gr. 7 WC 1.1; 1.2; 1.4–1.7)
3	■ 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.	■ Addresses most of the writing task. ■ Demonstrates a *general* understanding of purpose and audience. ■ Maintains a *mostly consistent* point of view, focus, and organizational structure, including use of isolated and/or single word transitions. ■ Presents a central idea with *mostly relevant* facts, details, and/or explanations.	■ Includes some sentence *variety*.	■ Contains *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.
2	■ 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.	■ Addresses *some* 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* sentence variety.	■ Contains *many errors* in the conventions of the English language (grammar, punctuation, capitalization, spelling). These errors **may** interfere with the reader's understanding of the writing.

* Because this criterion addresses requirements of the writing test rather than a content standard, it does not include a standards reference.
† This criterion is based on content standards for previous grade levels that students must learn in order to write more complex responses required in grade seven.

WA: Writing Applications standards **WS:** Writing Strategies standards **WC:** Written Conventions standards

	Genre (Response to Literature Writing)	Organization and Focus	Sentence Structure	Conventions
1	■ Demonstrates *little* grasp of the text. ■ *Lacks* an interpretation or *may* be a simple retelling of the passage. ■ *Lacks* textual examples and details.	■ Addresses *only one* part, if any, 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.

2008 Grade Seven Scoring Rubric: Persuasive Writing

	Genre (Persuasive Writing)	Organization and Focus	Sentence Structure	Conventions
4	■ *Authoritatively* defends a clear position with precise and relevant evidence and *convincingly* addresses the reader's concerns, biases, and expectations. (Gr. 7 WA 2.4 a, b, c)	■ *Clearly* addresses 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. (Gr. 7 WS 1.1) ■ Includes a *clearly presented* central idea with *relevant* facts, details, and/or explanations. (Gr. 7 WS 1.2)	■ Includes sentence *variety*. (Gr. 6 WC 1.1)	■ 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. (Gr. 7 WC 1.1; 1.2; 1.4–1.7)
3	■ *Generally* defends a position with relevant evidence and addresses the reader's concerns, biases, and expectations.	■ Addresses most of the writing task. ■ Demonstrates a *general* understanding of purpose and audience. ■ Maintains a *mostly consistent* point of view, focus, and organizational structure, including use of isolated and/or single word transitions. ■ Presents a central idea with *mostly relevant* facts, details, and/or explanations.	■ Includes some sentence *variety*.	■ Contains *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.
2	■ Defends a position with *little, if any*, evidence and *may* address the reader's concerns, biases, and expectations.	■ Addresses *some* 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* sentence variety.	■ Contains *many errors* in the conventions of the English language (grammar, punctuation, capitalization, spelling). These errors **may** interfere with the reader's understanding of the writing.

* Because this criterion addresses requirements of the writing test rather than a content standard, it does not include a standards reference.

† This criterion is based on content standards for previous grade levels that students must learn in order to write more complex responses required in grade seven.

WA: Writing Applications standards **WS:** Writing Strategies standards **WC:** Written Conventions standards

	Genre (Persuasive Writing)	Organization and Focus	Sentence Structure	Conventions
1	■ *Fails* to defend a position with *any* evidence and *fails* to address the reader's concerns, biases, and expectations.	■ Addresses *only one* part, if any, 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.

2008 Grade Seven Scoring Rubric: Summary Writing

	Genre (Summary Writing)	Organization and Focus	Sentence Structure	Conventions
4	■ Summarizes text with clear identification of the main idea(s) and most significant details, in the student's own words, and clearly reflects underlying meaning. (Gr. 7 WA 2.5 a, b, c)	■ *Clearly* addresses 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. (Gr. 7 WS 1.1) ■ Includes a *clearly presented* central idea with *relevant* facts, details, and/or explanations. (Gr. 7 WS 1.2)	■ Includes sentence *variety*. (Gr. 6 WC 1.1)	■ 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. (Gr. 7 WC 1.1; 1.2; 1.4–1.7)
3	■ Summarizes text with the main idea(s) and important details, mostly in the student's own words, and generally reflects underlying meaning.	■ Addresses most of the writing task. ■ Demonstrates a *general* understanding of purpose and audience. ■ Maintains a *mostly consistent* point of view, focus, and organizational structure, including use of isolated and/or single word transitions. ■ Presents a central idea with *mostly relevant* facts, details, and/or explanations.	■ Includes some sentence *variety*.	■ Contains *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.
2	■ Summarizes text with some of the main idea(s) and details, which may be superficial, minimal use of the student's own words, and minimal reflection of underlying meaning.	■ Addresses *some* 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* sentence variety.	■ Contains *many errors* in the conventions of the English language (grammar, punctuation, capitalization, spelling). These errors **may** interfere with the reader's understanding of the writing.

* Because this criterion addresses requirements of the writing test rather than a content standard, it does not include a standards reference.
† This criterion is based on content standards for previous grade levels that students must learn in order to write more complex responses required in grade seven.

WA: Writing Applications standards **WS:** Writing Strategies standards **WC:** Written Conventions standards

	Genre (Summary Writing)	Organization and Focus	Sentence Structure	Conventions
1	■ Summarizes text with few, if any, of the main ideas and/or details, little or no use of the student's own words, little or no reflection of underlying meaning.	■ Addresses *only one* part, if any, 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.