



TEST ASSESSING SECONDARY COMPLETION™

Scoring Guidance for the Informational Essay

TASC Test Assessing Secondary Completion™

The Writing Essay Component

The Writing subtest of the TASC Test Assessing Secondary Completion™ contains a writing essay component that takes examinees approximately 45 minutes to respond to. It typically contains one or more reading passages and requires the examinee to write either an informational or argumentative essay in response to a prompt related to the information in the passage(s). This document provides an example that requires the examinee to write an **informational** essay. The document contains a copy of the prompt and associated reading passages, the scoring rubric, and exemplars. Those planning to take the TASC Test can practice for the writing component using the prompt and they or their teachers can score the essay using the rubric and exemplars provided.

The Writing Prompt

Although rates vary with the economy, between 16 and 32 percent of high school students hold part-time jobs. Proponents of students in the workforce say that employment teaches time management and responsibility while providing income and useful experiences. Opponents say that mixing school and jobs adds stress and adult temptations to a student's life while reducing the time available for study and extracurricular activities. Is it possible to create a balance?

Read both texts and then write an informational essay detailing a plan that a high school student could use to balance school and a part-time job. Be sure to use information from both texts in your essay.

Before you begin planning and writing, read these two texts:

- 1: *Benefits of Part-time Work*
- 2: *Employment Disadvantages*

As you read the texts, think about what details from the texts you might use in your essay. You may take notes or highlight the details as you read.

After reading the texts, create a plan for your essay. Think about ideas, facts, definitions, details, and other information and examples you want to use. Think about how you will introduce your topic and what the main topic will be for each paragraph.

Now, write your informational essay. Be sure to:

- Use information from the two texts so that your essay includes important details from both texts.
- Introduce the topic clearly, provide a focus, and organize information in a way that makes sense.
- Develop the topic with facts, definitions, details, quotations, or other information and examples related to the topic.

- Use appropriate and varied transitions to create cohesion.
- Clarify the relationship among ideas and concepts.
- Use clear language and vocabulary to inform about the topic.
- Provide a conclusion that follows the information presented.

Benefits of Part-time Work

High school is a critical time for adolescents to obtain knowledge needed for post-secondary education and careers as well as a time to learn about themselves and their own goals. A part-time job while in school may teach meaningful job skills and life lessons in the areas of time and money management while increasing career readiness.

Most high school students plan to go to college or vocational training after graduation, and the majority will have to provide for some of their college expenses. Students who work during high school are already learning the skills necessary to balance work, school, study, family, and recreation. Working students learn time management skills that can help them attain their higher educational goals.

Students who work also experience concrete lessons in money management. They learn about taxes, realize the effort required to earn each dollar, and gain a greater sense of autonomy. Working students often pay some of their own expenses for items like clothing or entertainment and save a portion of their earnings towards future education.

A 2002 study of over 2,700 adolescents found that working teenagers had greater career maturity. Career maturity, as defined by this study, is the degree to which the teenager knows the career he or she wants, understands the skills and education necessary to obtain that career, and has formulated a plan for obtaining the skills and education needed to meet his or her goals. Job experience teaches students about their interests, strengths, and weaknesses, and it helps them plan better for future employment.

In addition to important academic subjects, high school students must learn how to cooperate with others who have different values, goals, and experiences. They must learn to manage their time and their finances. They are becoming more autonomous and learning to shoulder more responsibility. Working during the school year can increase the skills and confidence needed to achieve later in life.

Employment Disadvantages

The idea that employment during high school benefits the student may not be a valid presumption. Some studies indicate that the benefits of employment are outweighed by the stress a job places on the student and the reduction in time available for academic and social experiences. Students who work more than 20 hours per week during high school are more likely to drop out of school, drink alcohol, and exhibit delinquent behavior. They are also less likely to receive a college degree.

Students who work significant hours have less time for studying, extracurricular activities, and socializing with their peers. Teachers find working students are often tired or unprepared for class. High-work involvement undermines education as the central aspect of student life and is related to greater absenteeism and a higher dropout rate. Some psychologists believe that intense work schedules deny students the free time they need to develop a solid sense of identity. Work stress and difficulties with schoolwork can lead to depression, feelings of powerlessness, and a reduction in self-esteem.

Researchers found that as work hours increased, so did student alcohol use. Some theorize that as students spend more time in an adult world, they experience an early transition into adult life for which they are ill-equipped. Other researchers suspect that stress from the responsibilities of work and school drives students to alcohol as a coping mechanism. Students with intense work schedules tend to be more independent and experience less parental influence.

Although work may teach responsibility and useful job skills, an intense commitment to work during high school can negatively impact a student's success. The premature adoption of adult roles and responsibilities can create stress in a student's life, leading to poorer educational outcomes and impaired psychological development. With greater work hours, parental monitoring is usually decreased, and students have a higher likelihood of developing adult habits like alcohol use. Students who are highly invested in their jobs are less likely to attain a four-year degree. Students should consider these factors when deciding whether employment during the school year would provide a positive experience.

Scoring the Essay

The enclosed rubric and exemplars can be used to score the examinee's essay. These components are generally defined below and provided in detail in subsequent pages of this document.

Rubric:

The foundation of handscoring is the rubric. The rubric provides the descriptive requirements for each score point that can be awarded to an examinee's work and is the primary tool used in making scoring decisions. In scoring Writing prompts, the rubric will guide the scorer in how to look at the essay as a whole in order to determine a single score. The TASC Test Essay Scoring Rubric has a score range from 0-4. When taking the TASC Test, the essay score is doubled (for a maximum of 8 points) before becoming part of the official Writing Subtest score.

Exemplars:

For each score point in the rubric, the anchor paper is a response that best typifies the rubric. It is not a borderline paper but rather one that falls within the rubric-designated score point fairly clearly. The anchor sets the standard for that score point and is occasionally referred back to by the scorer in order to maintain consistency in scoring.

The Rubric

Score Point: 0

The response is completely irrelevant or incorrect, or there is no response.

Score Point: 1

The response provides evidence of an attempt to write an essay that examines a topic.

- May not introduce a topic, or topic must be inferred
- Provides minimal information to develop the topic
- May be too brief to demonstrate an organizational structure
- Uses words that are inappropriate, overly simple, or unclear
- Provides a minimal or no concluding statement or section
- Has errors in usage and conventions that interfere with meaning

Score Point: 2

The response is an incomplete or oversimplified essay that examines a topic.

- Attempts to introduce a topic
- Develops topic, sometimes unevenly, with mostly relevant information
- Attempts to use an organizational structure
- Uses simple language, which sometimes lacks clarity
- Provides a weak concluding statement or section
- May have errors in usage and conventions that interfere with meaning

Score Point: 3

The response is a complete essay that examines a topic and presents information.

- Clearly introduces the topic to be examined
- Uses multiple pieces of relevant information to develop topic
- Uses an organizational structure to group information
- Uses clear word choice
- Uses words and/or phrases to connect ideas
- Uses an appropriate tone
- Provides a concluding statement or section that follows from the ideas presented
- Has few, if any, errors in usage and conventions that interfere with meaning

Score Point: 4

The response is a well-developed essay that examines a topic and presents related information from both texts.

- Effectively introduces the topic to be examined
- Uses specific facts, details, definitions, examples, and/or other information to develop topic fully
- Uses an organizational strategy to present information effectively
- Uses precise and purposeful word choice
- Uses words, phrases, and/or clauses that effectively connect and show relationships among ideas
- Uses and maintains an appropriate tone
- Provides a strong concluding statement or section that logically follows from the ideas presented
- Has no errors in usage and conventions that interfere with meaning

The Exemplars

Score Point 4

One of the most important decisions a high school student can make is whether or not to take a part-time job while remaining a full-time student. Fortunately for those students thinking about taking a part-time job, there is an abundance of sound research on the subject to help guide their decision. That research, not surprisingly, indicates that there are potentially both positive and negative consequences when students choose to go to work. The critical factors that tip the scale in a positive direction are balance and planning.

Most high school students have at least some understanding of how important it is to create schedules that allow for a healthy balance of study, sleep, extracurricular activities, time spent with friends, and time spent with family. This juggling act is challenging, even when students do not work. When students do choose to take a part-time job, the juggling act becomes even more difficult. Research indicates that full-time students who work more than 20 hours a week are not successful in keeping that balance. While jobs certainly benefit students by providing income and important work experiences that help in career readiness, too many hours at work take away from the time needed to remain a successful student. In addition, too much time spent at work interferes with a high school student's connection to his or her peers and the important social growth that comes from that interaction.

Finally, according to the article "Employment Disadvantages," some studies even indicate that students who spend too much time at work may not make wise choices with the extra income and independence working brings. In fact, these students may fall into negative adult behaviors such as alcoholism. Additionally, the stress their out-of-balance lifestyles causes may lead to absenteeism from school, failing grades, lower graduation rates, increased worry, and lowered self-esteem. However, if students are aware of these pitfalls and create a realistically balanced schedule that includes working a few hours a week, they are in a much better position to benefit from a part-time job.

The second critical factor in getting the most out of the experience of working while still in high school is planning. Students should have a clear purpose in mind when they seek that first job. Part-time employment provides students with an excellent opportunity to learn about themselves and what kind of work they are suited to, or not. Students should try to select a job that helps them clarify their long-term career goals and better understand what type of training or education beyond high school they will need to be successful in that career. In addition, students should create a plan to manage their income. The practical experience of understanding how taxes work, creating a budget, setting funds aside for long-term goals can prove to be invaluable for working students and give them a head start in understanding what it means to manage money.

High school is a time when students begin to think seriously about their future lives as adults. It is natural, then, that many students consider taking a part-time job before they graduate from high school. The decision is an important one, and students must understand the possible benefits and pitfalls of their decision. If students first inform themselves and then create a realistic plan that allows them to balance school and job, work and play, they are in the best possible position to succeed.

Annotation sample from argument: This 4-point response is a well-developed essay that effectively focuses the topic and clearly presents relevant information to support the point that “If students first inform themselves and then create a realistic plan that allows them to balance school and job, work and play, they are in the best possible position to succeed.” The essay follows a clear organizational plan and the points addressed are fully developed and supported with relevant, text-based facts from both articles. The introduction and conclusion effectively frame the discussion. The ideas are well connected throughout the essay, and the connections are further enhanced by the variety of sentence structures employed by the writer. The precise word choice (“critical factors that tip the scale in a positive direction are balance and planning”; “a healthy balance of study, sleep, extracurricular activities, time spent with friends, and time spent with family”; “if students are aware of these pitfalls”; “practical experience of understanding how taxes work”) contributes to the essay’s formal, informative tone. There are no errors in usage or conventions that interfere with meaning.

Score Point 3

Many high school students are interested in starting to work part time while they are still in school. Whatever the reason it is important for students who want to mix work and school to make good plan so they can manage a balance in their responsibilities as well as have some time for fun and enjoying their high school years.

Students who take a part-time job obviously have the benefit of extra money in their pocket. While it is fun to think about the clothes and music they can buy with extra money it is also true that many students who are going on to college or technical school do actually save some of the money they earn to help with future expenses. This leads to a second benefit that the article “Benefits of Part-Time Work” points out. These students are learning about how to manage their money and plan for the future, and that helps them mature.

On the other hand there are definitely drawbacks to taking a job while still in high school. The important thing is that students do not try to work more hours than they can handle. Students who try to work more than 20 hours a week start to see less benefits and more problems according to the article “Employment Disadvantages.” Their grades may suffer, and some of them may even drop out of high school. Sometimes these students feel they are failing and their self-esteem suffers.

If a student really does want to work while in high school, they need to take all these things into consideration and create a workable plan that they can manage. Most important, they have to decide on how many hours they can devote to a job and still keep their focus on high school classes high. They also need positive ways to deal with the extra stress that adding another responsibility to their schedule will absolutely bring.

It is important for high school students to think carefully about the positive benefits and negative consequences that can come from taking a job while still in school. If they do, they can maximize the positives and avoid the problems.

Annotation sample from argument: This 3-point response is a complete essay that states and supports the point that working while in high school can have both “positive benefits and negative consequences” and that “it is important for students who want to mix work and school to make good plan so they can manage a balance.” The organizational structure of the essay is evident and points are developed with multiple pieces of relevant information from the source articles. The introduction and conclusion reinforce the central point of the essay. The ideas in the essay are connected both within paragraphs (“While it is fun to think about . . . it is also true,”) and between paragraphs (“On the other hand”; “they need to take all these things into consideration”). Overall, the word choice is simple but clear. There is some attempt to use more academic word choice, which contributes to an appropriate tone (“Whatever the reason”; “future expenses”; “take all these things into consideration and create a workable plan that they can manage”). There are a few errors in conventions (omitted commas after introductory elements: “Whatever the reason”; “While it is fun to think about the clothes and music they can buy with extra money”; “On the other hand” and the use of *less* when *fewer* would be grammatically correct: “less benefits and more problems”). The errors do not interfere with meaning.

Score Point 2

There are many things to consider if you are a high school student who wants a part-time job. Since the main focus needs to be on school at this time, it is important to not take on too much or grades, not to mention social life will probably suffer.

Even though many adolescents think they are mature enough to handle the extra responsibilities a job will bring, the facts show they may be wrong. Many possible negatives can happen when a student works more than 20 hours a week. First is just the stress of adding work hours to the day. If students aren’t realistic about what they can do, they can start to get lower grades in school leading sometimes to dropping out.

But, if a job workload is manageable, then students have things to gain from working. Money and independence as well as work experience gives the student more maturity. They can use the extra money to fund their entertainment, but they can also save for their futures.

Deciding whether or not to take a job while you are a high school student is just one of the difficult decisions that you will have to make.

Annotation sample from argument: This 2-point response is an over-simplified essay that develops the topic in a general way (“it is important to not take on too much or grades, not to mention social life will probably suffer”). The essay is based on both articles, though the writer addresses only a few relevant points from each. The paragraphs are simple and lack full development. The essay’s introduction

adequately addresses the points made in the second paragraph but does not prepare readers for the points made in the third paragraph. The conclusion is weak, providing neither a summation of the points discussed nor a sense of closure. Overall, the writer's word choice is simple and sometimes awkward ("Many possible negatives can happen"; "First is just the stress of adding work hours"). Errors throughout the essay (omitted and superfluous commas; confusion between *to* and *too*, *their* and *there*; spelling errors, for example, "managable," "maturaty"; shift to second-person point-of-view in the conclusion) indicate a lack of knowledge about usage and conventions, even though readers may still be able to determine the intended meaning.

Score Point 1

Things to do to balance a part time job and high school. The student should not work so much to cause stress and lack of studing. The student should plan to live a balanced life and save some of the money they are going to be making. I think the student can learn important things from a job if they keep a good atitude about still being in high school at the same time.

Annotation sample from argument: This 1-point response is a very weak attempt at writing an informative essay. The writer introduces the topic with a construction better suited as a heading for a list of notes on the subject matter. Minimal development results in a single paragraph lacking connections between ideas that are over-simplified, though they do come from both texts ("should not work so much to cause stress and lack of studing [sic]" and "can learn important things from a job"). There is no concluding statement. Errors throughout the essay (spelling errors for *studying* and *attitude*; lack of subject and pronoun agreement in "The student should plan . . . money they are going to be making" and "The student can learn . . . if they keep a good atitude [sic]") indicate a lack of knowledge about usage and conventions.

Score Point 0

I would like to be an enginear my cousin is an enginear an he like the job alot. I took a test that said I would be a good enginear.

Annotation: This 0-point response does not address the requirements of the prompt. It is only tangentially related to the subject matter and contains significant errors in grammar, usage, and conventions.

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