Introduction to WritePlacer®

Accuplacer’s Essay Writing Test

Prompts within the ACCUPLACER® System do not require specialized knowledge but are designed to stimulate critical thinking. Students will be asked to draw on a broad range of experiences and ideas to support their point of view. Your essay will be given a holistic score that represents how clearly and effectively you expressed your position. Scores on WritePlacer range from 1 to 8. An essay that is too short, written on a different topic or written in another language scores a zero; otherwise, the following characteristics will be considered:

- **Purpose and Focus** - presenting information in a unified and coherent way focusing on the topic
- **Organization and Structure** - ordering and connecting ideas
- **Development and Support** - providing explanation and examples to make ideas clear
- **Sentence Variety and Style** - crafting sentences and paragraphs, vocabulary, voice, structure
- **Mechanical Conventions** - expressing ideas using Standard Written English
- **Critical Thinking** - communicating a point of view and demonstrating reasoned relationship of ideas

© 2008 The College Board. All rights reserved.

Additional Instructions from CCC’s English Department

Students taking the placement will randomly be assigned a writing task, called a prompt, from a selection that Accuplacer developed. Each prompt introduces a topic with a passage and then gives a specific question to answer. **Students can use the passage to help them think about the topic, but essays should focus on an answer to the question given.**

Students should attempt to write a brief **introductory paragraph** with a thesis that answers the question, **1-2 body paragraphs** that each gives one main reason to support the thesis with explanations and examples for their view, and end with a short **concluding paragraph** with a final thought on the topic. It is also important that students take time to find and **correct errors** in spelling, punctuation and word choices to the best of their abilities.

**Tips for Writing a Strong Essay—Take time to Plan & Proofread**

1. Read the question carefully, determine what it is asking and form your basic answer.
2. Take time to think about why this is your answer and use scrap paper to brainstorm supporting reasons and some specific situational examples. (free write, list ideas, cluster map).
3. Stop, take a breath, read over your ideas and ask which ones are directly answering the question. Throw out anything that is off-track from the main question’s topic.
4. Quickly sketch out a brief outline on your scrap paper.
   a. What is your thesis statement—your overall answer to the question, stated in a clear sentence. Remember your thesis establishes your focus and by the end of the essay, you should show your reader why you believe this.
   b. From your brainstorm, identify 2 main reasons that support your thesis/answer. These become focus topics for body paragraphs.
   c. Group your details. Which ideas explain each reason or give specific examples? These are used to build the body paragraph.
5. Write the essay, typing it into the computer.
6. Take time to read it over, make corrections to basic punctuation (capital letters, commas, apostrophes) and do your best to correct spelling.
Sample Prompt

Passage
An actor, when his cue came, was unable to move onto the stage. He said, “I can’t get in, the chair is in the way.” And the producer said, “Use the difficulty. If it’s a drama, pick the chair up and smash it. If it’s comedy, fall over it.” From this experience the actor concluded that in any situation in life that is negative, there is something positive you can do with it.

Adapted from Lawrence Eisenberg, “Caine Scrutiny.”

Assignment
Can any obstacle or disadvantage be turned into something good?

Sample Essays Signaling Weak Writing Skills

Essays earning scores of 1-3, indicates the student struggled with an inability to fully explain ideas or to organize thoughts into paragraphs. Typically there is also a variety of proofreading errors that the student was not able to correct, such as sentence fragments or run-ons and basic punctuation or spelling mistakes.

Sample Essay- Score of 2

This sentence is very good and right because you must believe that have a good and positive, something also in a bad situation. I you think so, you succeed in your life. also in a bad situation, you must think a good and be a good. I have 3, examples from my life:

1. I basketball player I have alot of games and tough games. I want a great player. I am alaways think good before every game and also before every practice. this thinking help me to succeed. If I lose a game I don’t cry I try to take the good things from the bad game, this is not help me if I cry all the time.

2. I had a important text before 3 years I remember this text all the time, because that I got a highscore, because I learned a lot before this text, this text all the time in my memory because the way was very difficult, I thought good before the text, and I succeeded all the time thought good and positive.

3. I didn’t succeed in the first, text driving. I didn’t cry, I tried to learn from my mistakes. In the second text driving I succeeded because I thought positive and I said to myself that I good driver and I will succeed.

From these examples I can to learn that I you think good and positive you succeed all the time. Also if you mistake or don’t succeed you must to take the good and the positive from your mistakes. I can to say to the end that if you thought good and positive and you learn to take all the positive things. You be enjoy and you will be fun and you succeed, all the time, you need to learn from the mistakes.

There aren’t perfect people!
Believe yourself!

Explanation of Score: This essay presents a point of view (. . . you must to take the good and the positive from your mistakes) but is unable to develop its ideas clearly. Although there is an attempt to organize the response around three examples, errors in word choice, usage, sentence structure, spelling, grammar and punctuation are so numerous and significant that meaning is obscured (I had a important text before 3 years . . . because I learned a lot before this text, this text all the time in my memory . . . and I succeeded all the time thought good and positive). The response demonstrates very little mastery and earns a score of 2.
Sample Essay- Score of 3:
Can any disadvantage turn into something good? Every person answers this question differently, and that is his way to live. Some are optimistic, some are pessimistic, either way, the way we answer this question is, in a way, our way of life.

Some people can look on something that to me it is wonderful and find it terrible, and other can cheer me up when something sad happens, and show me a nicer and cheerful way of looking on it. A good example is what happened today, this morning. I came to take this test from my home which is a few drive from the test center for different reasons I came in late in about ten minutes, but instead of being stressed because of it, I was (and still am) quite calm, and actually in very happy and satisfied with my approach to this in compare to my father who took it very hard.

I believe that the ability to look on the bright side, in both better and worse cases, is a recipe for a better and calmer life.

Explanation of Score: This essay answers the question “Can any disadvantage turn into something good?” with a vague discussion of optimistic and pessimistic approaches, demonstrating weak critical thinking. Despite providing only limited assertions and an insufficient example, the writer is able to arrive at a point of view, concluding that “the ability to look on the bright side...is a recipe for a better and calmer life.” However, flawed reasoning seriously impedes progression of ideas (Some people can look on something that to me it is wonderful and find it terrible, and other can cheer me up when something sad happens....A good example is what happen today....I came in late in about ten minutes, but instead of being stressed because of it, I was (and still am) quite calm). Vocabulary is limited and many errors in word choice, usage, and sentence structure occur. Demonstrating little mastery, this essay earns a score of 3.

Sample Essays Signaling Intermediate Writing Skills

Essays earning scores 4 or 5, show a clear central idea with basic organization and some explanation to support the thesis, although both could be refined. These ratings also indicate that the student has some error patterns in sentence structure, punctuation or word use.

Sample Essay- Score of 4
There are many things in life that may seem to have a difficult or depressing outlook but if you try some of those things can be turned into something outstanding. For example there may be certain people you may run into on a day to day basis that may seem to carry themselves in a bad way but you have to try to get to know them because you never know that can turn out to be one of the best people in the world.

Many people in our society look at things such as driving a car, to be a very hard obstacle because they feel that it’s something that is hard to do, but until they try they will never know. If we’d learn to look at the bright side of things instead of the negative then many things that we face in our life would turn out for the better. When you think you may have down all that is in your power to do to try to get the good out of something, believe me there is always someone who will be able to help you. I know that there are things that may seem too hard or difficult but if you put your mind to it everything will come out for the better. I know there have been some times in my life when I have been in some difficult situations such as the time I lost money out of my wallet and I didn’t know what I was going to do. But I stopped worrying about it and it wasn’t long before I had my money back. Whenever you come up on something in your life that you may think that there is no way of accomplishing, it is important to work to make the situation more positive.

Explanation of Score:
Demonstrating some critical thinking, this essay develops a point of view (If we’d learn to look at the bright side of things instead of the negative then many things that we face in our life would turn out for the better) but provides reasons and examples that are inadequate to support the position. Lapses in progression of ideas occur due to brief support and repetitive generalities (. . . believe me there is always someone who will be able to help you . . . . I lost money out of my wallet . . . . But I stopped worrying about it and it wasn’t long before I had my money back). Some errors in word choice and sentence structure are present (For example there may be certain people you may run into...that can turn out to be one of the best people in the world). Displaying developing mastery, this essay receives a score of 4.
Sample Essay Score of 5

In my lifetime, I have seen many ways an obstacle or disadvantage can be turned into a good thing. Sometimes when something bad happens, it can prepare you for the future obstacles to come. For example, if a person gets a serious burn they would panic and not know what to do. If the same thing happened again, the person would be more prepared and have knowledge from the previous experience.

If someone is on crutches, about to open the door, would you open the door for them? If you are the person on crutches you would be at a disadvantage to others. But this can be turned into a good thing. You now have someone to open the door for you, and this is a good way to meet people and make friends.

Sometimes when things aren’t going your way, you have to improvise a little. For example, before a basketball game you see that the other team is much taller than your team. The coach might have only made up plays for a short team. The other team is tall, but slow. You use your speed to win the game. In the blink of an eye, you’ve changed a disadvantage into a good thing.

The best comedians always turn an obstacle or disadvantage into a good thing. If the audience is not laughing at his performance, then he has to change what he’s doing. This obstacle about the audience not laughing he could make a joke about, then making the obstacle into a good thing.

Explanation of Score: This essay demonstrates competent critical thinking, providing adequate reasons and examples to support the claim that “an obstacle or disadvantage can be turned into a good thing.” Although the response offers a variety of adequate supporting examples, it demonstrates an occasional lack of progression of ideas as it jumps from one idea to the next (. . . if a person gets a serious burn . . . . If someone is on crutches . . . . The best comedians always turn an obstacle or disadvantage into a good thing). The essay demonstrates adequate but inconsistent control of language and features some minor errors (If the audience is not laughing . . . . This obstacle about the audience not laughing he could make a joke about, then making the obstacle into a good thing). Demonstrating adequate mastery, this essay receives a score of 5.

Sample Essays Signaling College Ready Skills

Essays earning scores of 6 -8, have a focused central idea to answer the prompt with clear organization and explanation of supporting points with specific examples and very few errors, mostly minor. Below are two sample essays, a score of 6 and 7.

Sample Essay- Score of 6

Obstacles and disadvantages are in our lives every second of the day. Whether it is a big test in school in an important subject or a traffic jam keeping us from getting to work on time, we can always count on something going a wry. However, even the biggest obstacles can be turned into something good if enough work is put into it.

Small obstacles, like the big test in school, can be overcome with hard work and determination. If you spend enough time studying beforehand, and doing practice questions to build your confidence, chances are you will do very well. On the other hand, if you procrastinate and do not prepare for the test until the night before it, chances are you will do poorly.

Large obstacles can be overcome with hard work and determination as well, but depending on the size of the obstacle, carefully planning, organization, and coordination are needed as well. For example, in World War II the Allied powers were fighting the Axis powers in battle after battle. The Allies needed to get into Western Europe through France and through a heavily fortified enemy. With careful planning, organization, and coordination, they launched the largest amphibious invasion in history and took the beaches of Normandy in what would be called D-day, and liberate France soon thereafter.

In conclusion, any obstacle can be overcome into something good. Tests can be studied for, traffic jams can be overted by detours, and wars can be won against impossible odds. Since obstacles confront us everyday of our lives, we need to be able to overcome them. If we could not, then life would not be enjoyable.

Explanation of Score: This essay effectively develops a point of view (. . . any obstacle can be overcome into something good) and provides generally appropriate examples of obstacles overcome with “hard work and determination,” demonstrating strong critical thinking. The response is well organized around its examples, exhibiting coherence and a logical progression of ideas (Small obstacles, like the big test in school, can be overcome with hard work and determination. If you spend enough time studying . . . chances are you will do very well). Control of language is consistent, and adequate sentence variety is evident throughout (With
careful planning, organization, and coordination, they launched the largest amphibious invasion in history). This essay displays reasonably consistent mastery and receives a score of 6.

Sample Essay- Score of 7
I believe that an obstacle or disadvantage can be turned into something good. Lance Armstrong, the most successful cyclist of all time, had to overcome cancer before achieving such greatness. Another possible example is Louis Armstrong. Louis was born to a single mother and lived a rough life. He was convicted of a crime and was sent to prison where he learned how to play the trumpet.

Before he was a seven time Tour de France champion, Lance Armstrong had to overcome cancer, a very extreme obstacle to overcome. Lance was diagnosed with testicular cancer and by the time the doctors found it, it had already spread to his brain, lungs, and other intrinsic organs. After numerous surgeries, Lance was given a fifty percent chance to live. Armstrong did not give up. After months of treatment and another surgery, the doctors found absolutely no cancer in his body. Within a year, Lance was back on the bike. He went on to win seven Tour de Frances in a row and he remains one of the greatest cyclists, if not the greatest cyclist of all time.

Louis Armstrong, one of the greatest Jazz trumpet players of all time, also had to overcome difficult obstacles in his life before achieving greatness. Louis was born to a single mother. They were poverty stricken, and were basically stuck with nothing. As a boy Louis was convicted of a crime and sent to prison. While serving his time, Louis learned how to play the trumpet from a fellow inmate. Louis immediately fell in love with music. He formed a jazz group when he was released from prison and they started playing at local clubs and bars. On one fateful day, a record company representative heard the group and immediately wanted to sign them. If it weren’t for prison Louis might not have ever even picked up a trumpet.

From these two examples, we can clearly see that obstacles or disadvantages can become something good. Both Louis and Lance overcame extremely difficult obstacles and became some of the best there ever was. They knew that anything was possible and were not discouraged by hardships.

Explanation of Score: This essay demonstrates outstanding critical thinking, effectively and insightfully developing the point of view that “an obstacle or disadvantage can be turned into something good” with two appropriate supporting examples. Well organized and focused, the essay displays clear coherence and a smooth progression of ideas as it explains how the Armstrongs, Lance and Louis, “overcame extremely difficult obstacles and became some of the best there ever was” (Louis was born to a single mother. They were poverty stricken. . . . He formed a jazz group when he was released from prison. . . . On one fateful day, a record company representative heard the group and immediately wanted to sign them). The essay displays appropriate language, using a varied and accurate vocabulary, and varied sentence structure appears throughout (Within a year, Lance was back on the bike. He went on to win seven Tour de Frances in a row and he remains one of the greatest cyclists, if not the greatest cyclist of all time). Demonstrating consistent mastery, this response merits a score of 7.