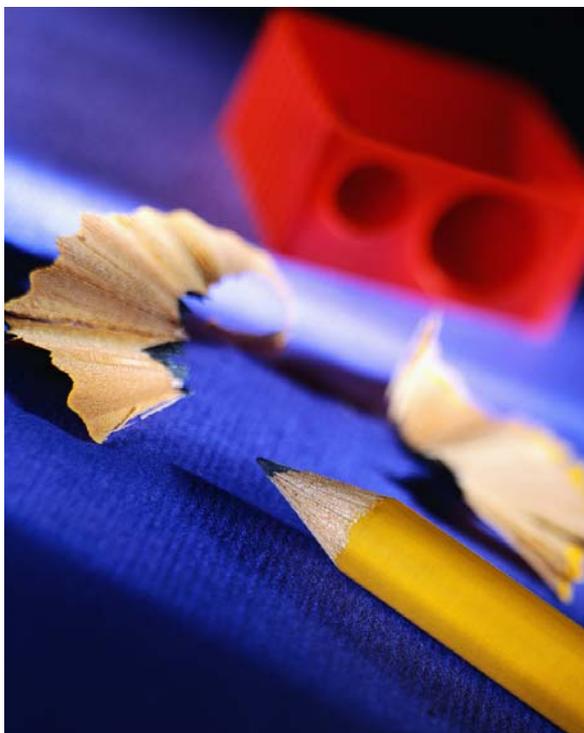


Sample Writing Prompts

Fall 2009



Released for classroom use

A Note about these prompts...

State writing prompts address experiences and interests relevant to the student's age level. Although prompts may encourage students to write from experience, they are not intended to intrude on personal feelings or call for discussion of personal values. They are designed to be free of stereotype—age, gender, geographic, ethnic, socioeconomic, religious, or physical disability.

Contained in this document are a series of sample prompts from previous state tests and field tests, arranged by grade level and mode. They may be used as class assignments or practice tests, as described in the introductory section.

The modes in which a student may write (narrative, expository, persuasive, and imaginative) are defined in the document *Writing Test Specifications and Blueprints*, which also can be found on the ODE website (<http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?id=496>).

Using Sample Writing Prompts

In addition to developing new topics to assign students and encouraging students to develop their own topics, teachers may assign topics from the sample prompts listed on the following pages.

Here are some suggestions for using sample prompts to help students practice writing. **Please note, however, that the classroom practices described here would not be allowable during administration of the statewide writing assessment**, which must be completed adhering to the procedures outlined in the Test Administration Manual (<http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?id=486>). Further, many of these practices would NOT be appropriate during the production of a required work sample, which should represent a student's original work.

For **classroom instruction**, teachers may find the following practices helpful:

- **Assign topic:** Teacher assigns a topic or supplies a short list of topics from which students can choose.
- **Brainstorm topic:** Students participate in one-on-one, small group, or classroom discussions as they choose and narrow their topics.
- **Pre-write:** Students prepare to write by mapping, webbing, outlining, word clustering, etc.
- **First draft:** Let thoughts flow (revising, editing and proofreading come later).
- **Peer response:** Students give each other specific feedback, using the student language version of

the scoring guide to provide meaningful comments. They may actually score papers, followed by one-on-one discussion. The teacher may circulate around the room during this time, also offering verbal feedback.

- **Second draft:** Using peer and teacher feedback, students revise their first draft, correcting conventions errors in particular. The second draft should represent the students' very best work, given everything they know about writing and the feedback they receive.
- **Scoring:** Teacher scores the second draft using scoring guide. Written comments point out specific characteristics (e.g., *Conclusion could be more developed*).
- **Revision:** Using written teacher feedback, students revise second draft, paying close attention to each trait and all written comments. Students correct all conventions errors that are pointed out, and respond to other suggestions. This is not just a proofreading exercise; students should engage in deep revision. The scoring guide can help with specific suggestions for revision.

As the state test approaches, teachers may create an environment for students similar to the actual test.

- Give students a choice of three prompts from the sample list that follows, and
- Require students to work independently to produce final essays of about two pages in length over the course of three class sessions.

Sample Writing Prompts

Elementary (Grades 3-4-5)

Narrative

Tell a true story about something fun or interesting you did on a summer afternoon.

An “adventure” could be any new experience that had some challenges. **Tell a true story** about an “adventure” you have had by yourself, with your family, or with a friend.

Tell a true story about a time or an event that you would like to remember.

Have you ever made someone happy—or given someone a good surprise? **Tell a true story** about a time when your actions had a positive effect on someone else.

Tell a true story about a time you really appreciated getting help from someone. You may have been given advice, given help with a project, been loaned something you needed, or given some other kind of help you appreciated.

Tell a true story about a time when you ate your favorite food.

Tell a true story about a time when you helped someone or someone helped you.

Tell a true story about a time when you felt proud because of something you did or something you made.

Expository

Fish have fins, birds have wings, turtles have shells, and slugs have slime. Think of an animal and **explain** the things that make it special.

Think of one important way your school or classroom could be improved. **Explain** what that change would be and why it is important.

If you could create the perfect parade for your town, what would it be like? **Explain** what the parade would celebrate and what it would include.

Think of an invention that you think would make a major improvement to the world’s future. **Explain** your invention and what effects it would have.

Many people have an activity or hobby they like. Choose one of your favorite activities and **explain** it to someone who doesn’t know much about it.

A new student has just joined your class. **Explain** some things that will help him or her get used to this new school and new class.

Think of a person who is one of the most interesting people you have ever met. **Explain** what this person is like.

Think about a character in a book that you would like to meet. **Explain** what makes this character someone you would like to know.

Sample Writing Prompts

All living things grow and change. Think of a living thing that you know about, and **explain** how it grows and changes.

Many of us have ordinary objects that are special to us. **Explain** the significance of the object that holds special meaning to you, but others might consider ordinary.

Imaginative

Imagine that you find a one-dollar bill on the street. As you look closely, you can see that a note has been written on it. **Make up a story** about what it says and what happens.

Imagine that you are at the beach or in the mountains or anywhere else. **Make up an imaginative story** about what happens there.

Make up a story about a drawing, painting, sculpture or statue that comes to life.

Writers sometimes give characters names that describe them like Pippi Longstocking, Sleepy, Bashful, and Grumpy. Create a name for a character and **make up a story** about something that happens to that character.

Suppose you could combine two animals. **Make up a story** that tells about this new animal's adventures.

Make up a character who might be in a cartoon, a comic book, a legend, or a myth. **Make up a story** about him or her.

Imagine you have done something that has been written up in a book called The Almanac of Amazing Things. **Make up a story** about the unusual thing you did.

The teacher placed a sack on the desk and left. It started to move. **Make up a story** about what happened.

Imagine that you are going to create a special dessert or treat for a family celebration. **Make up a story** about making that dessert or treat and then sharing it at the celebration.

Imagine that you are able to swim under water easily without having to come up for air. **Make up a story** in which you get to use that new swimming skill.

Decide on something fun or interesting that you would like to do with a grandparent or other relative. It could be anything. **Make up a story** about what you do with them.

Imagine you are a pet that talks. You are in a fancy restaurant with your owner. **Make up a story** about something that happens.

Sometimes when people look at clouds in the sky they think they can see the shapes of animals, people, objects or other figures. **Make up a story** about one of these shapes coming to life.

You find a pair of special glasses. When you put these on, wonderful things happen. **Make up a story** about an adventure wearing these glasses.

Sample Writing Prompts

Middle School (Grades 6-7-8)

Narrative

Oregon has had some extreme weather in the past few years. **Tell a true story** about a fun or challenging time you had during bad or extreme weather.

People often help each other. **Tell a true story** about a time when one person helped another, or when a group of people worked together to provide someone help.

Many people influence us. Sometimes they introduce us to a new interest or hobby, or sometimes they affect our views on things. Think of someone who has had a significant influence on you and **tell a true story** about it.

People learn things throughout their lives. **Tell a true story** about a time when you learned to do something.

You don't have to spend money to have a good time. **Tell a true story** about when you had a great time without spending a lot of money.

Walt Disney once said, "If you can dream it, you can do it." **Tell a true story** about a time when this was true for you or someone you know.

Lots of people try to give us advice—parents, friends, brothers or sisters, teachers, etc. **Tell a true story** about a time you were given or gave advice. Tell if the advice was followed or not and the results.

Expository

Bullying is a problem in many schools. **Write a paper to explain** what can be done about it.

Looking back over your years in school so far, **explain** what you would want to tell your teachers that might help them teach other students more effectively.

Think of an historical place or object that you have seen or read about. **Explain** what this place or object is and why it is interesting or important.

What do you think is the best thing to do when someone says, "Who wants to go first?" or "Does anyone want to volunteer?" Write a paper to **explain** what you think is the best approach when you hear those words.

Research shows that people communicate messages about who they are by the clothing they wear. **Explain** how and in what ways you think clothing sends messages to other people

Students sometimes question how things they learn will help them in their later lives. Think of a positive learning experience that you have had and **explain** how what you learned will be useful to you in the future.

Explain your dream home of the future and what would make it perfect for you.

Sample Writing Prompts

Persuasive

Your city or town would like to build something for the community to enjoy. **Write a paper to convince** your community that your idea of what to build is the one they should choose.

Create a new Olympic event. Write a paper to **convince** the Olympics Committee to accept this new event.

What are the qualities of a good leader? **Write a paper to convince** your class or team that you or someone you know has what it takes to be a leader.

People have mixed feelings about the good and bad points of zoos and aquariums. Take a stand on this issue and **convince** others to agree with you.

Playing video games has many pros and cons. Think about whether or not you, as a parent, would place a limit on the number of hours per day that your son or daughter could play video games. Take a position on this issue and **convince** other parents to agree with you.

Think of something you would like to have changed or added in your school. It could relate to a school policy, a facility or building, or course offerings. Take a position on one specific issue and **convince** others to agree with you.

People tell us that we need exercise to stay healthy. **Write a paper to convince** your reader to join you in an activity that will be fun as well as healthy.

Things change. Write a paper in which you **persuade your reader** that an old or new idea, product, machine, or way of doing things is better than the alternative.

What changes would you like to see in your school lunch program? **Write a paper to convince** your school to adopt your ideas.

Choose an issue from your community (such as a leash law, community service, teenage curfew, or anything else). Take a position on that issue and **write a paper to convince** your reader to agree with your point of view.

Write a paper to convince teenagers that they should make positive contributions to their families, schools, or communities.

Imaginative

Choose one of the following titles and **write an imaginative story**: “The Opened Window,” “The Hidden Shoebox,” or “The Messy Locker.”

Make up an imaginative story that uses one of the following titles: “The Wrong Key” or “The Faded Jeans” or “The Antique Trunk.”

Many people are dressing up their pets and taking them everywhere. Imagine you are a pet that has been dressed up by your owner and taken into an expensive restaurant or other public place where some people do not welcome pets. **Make up a story** about what happens.

Sample Writing Prompts

Suppose a person or family packed up for a vacation to one destination, but ended up somewhere else. **Write an imaginative story** about an event from a mixed-up vacation.

Make up a story about one of the following: “An Unexpected Gift” or “The Deserted Barn” or “The Old Hat.”

Write an imaginative story about what you would do if you could control time with a remote control: stop, rewind, fast forward, pause.

Pretend you saw or found something mysterious. **Write an imaginative story** about what you saw and what happened.

Imagine opening a door with a special key. **Write an imaginative story** about an adventure that begins when you open the door.

Make up a story about one of the following: “An Unexpected Gift” or “The Deserted Barn” or “The Broken Window.”

Make up a story using the following words as your topic: “Out of the star-filled sky...” or “If only I had read the directions...”

Pretend that you are an inanimate object such as a wastebasket, a windshield wiper or something else of your choice. **Make up a story** about what happens.

High School (Grades 9-10-11-12)

Narrative

Someone once said, “You can’t help a person uphill without getting closer to the top yourself.” **Tell a true story** about how you or someone you know learned this lesson.

Helen Keller once said, “Keep your face to the sunshine and you cannot see the shadow.” **Tell a true story** about a time when a positive outlook helped you or someone you know succeed.

Oregon has had some extreme weather in the past few years. **Tell a true story** about a fun or challenging time you had during bad or extreme weather.

American frontiersman and statesman Davy Crockett once said, “Be sure you’re right, and then go ahead.” **Tell a true story** about a time when you followed through on something you knew was right.

One quality of human beings is our ability to console others, to offer help or compassion when someone needs it. **Tell a true story** about a time in your life when you offered to help a person or when someone offered to help you.

Tell about something that has really happened to you or to someone you know that fits ONE of the following titles: “Seeking Independence” or “Invincible” or “They All Laughed” or “I’ll Never Do That Again.”

Sample Writing Prompts

Lots of people try to give us advice—parents, friends, brothers or sisters, teachers, etc. **Tell a true story** about a time you were given or gave advice. Tell if the advice was followed or not and the results.

Tell a true story based on one of the following quotations: “Absence makes the heart grow fonder” **or** “Familiarity breeds contempt” **or** “Honesty is the best policy.”

Life is full of choices. **Tell a true story** about a time when you or someone else had to make a choice.

Expository

Think of something that you learned outside of school. **Explain** what you learned clearly so that your reader will gain some new information.

Someone once said, “When the character of a person is not clear to you, look at his or her friends.” **Explain** how this quote relates to your or someone you know.

Parenthood is not easy. **Explain** some of your thoughts on what makes an effective parent.

Explain to an adult what it’s like to be a teenager today.

Research shows that people communicate messages about who they are by the clothing they wear. **Explain** how and in what ways you think clothing sends messages to other people.

Young children sometimes see things—in real life, on TV, in books, or in movies—which inspire them to make a quick decisions about what they want to be “when they grow up.” Sometimes the career is a realistic goal and sometimes it is not. Think of a time when this happened to you and **explain** why your career goals have or have not changed.

Think of a successful person. **Explain** by using specific examples the qualities, characteristics, behaviors, etc., that contribute to that person’s success.

Imagine for a moment that there are no budget problems that affect schools. **Explain** your idea of the best possible education that a school could offer to its students.

Write an explanation of one of the following. You may use some of your own experiences and those of others to clarify your explanation: “A weed is no more than a flower in disguise” (James R. Lowell), **or** “Imagination is more important than knowledge” (Albert Einstein), **or** “Mistakes are opportunities for learning” (Unknown).

People have many admirable character traits, such as courage, enthusiasm, compassion, integrity, friendliness, strength...the list could go on and on. Define a character trait, **explain** what makes it especially important, and tell how you see it expressed in yourself or others.

High school is an opportunity to grow and learn. **Explain** to an eighth grade student lessons you’ve learned about making high school a worthwhile experience.

Sample Writing Prompts

Students in school frequently ask, “Why do I need to know this?” **Explain** how you can use something you have learned in school.

Visitors from another country want to learn about your community, region, or country. **Explain** where you would take them and why.

Common fads or trends in music, clothing, and recreation come and go. Choose one fad or trend that is popular now and **explain** why it is popular and if you think its popularity will last.

Persuasive

Controversy surrounds the concept of Reality T.V., which has exploded in popularity as a form of entertainment. Take a stand on the merits of reality television programs, or television viewing in general, and **convince** your readers to agree with you.

Most people have favorite entertainers, sports teams, breeds of dogs or fast food restaurants. **Write a paper to persuade** someone else that your choice is great.

Take a position on an environmental issue (pollution, endangered species, recycling or anything else) and **convince** your reader to agree with you.

Your city or town would like to build something for the community to enjoy. **Write a paper to convince** your community that your idea of what to build is the one they should choose.

Some people feel that professional athletes and entertainers make too much money. Do you agree or disagree? Write a letter to the editor or an essay that would **convince** other people to feel the same way you do about this issue.

Geologists predict that a significant earthquake in the Pacific Northwest is inevitable, although of course no one knows when it will occur. **Write a paper to convince** local, state, or federal authorities to help your town or area be prepared for such an occurrence, or to convince your family to adopt an emergency plan that you propose and discuss.

Many people think that the media goes too far as reporters pursue celebrities and athletes for news stories. Others believe that these famous people should accept intrusions on their personal lives as the price of fame. Take a position on this issue and **write a paper to convince** others to agree with your point of view.

Your school is considering offering a new class. The New Course Committee wants to choose one that will be useful and interesting to high school students. What new course would you like to see taught? Propose a new class for your school and **convince** the committee that they should add this class.

Many people think that classic literature is no longer relevant while others insist that educated people read the classics. Take a stand and **write a paper to convince** your reader that students either should or shouldn't have to read classic literature.

Sample Writing Prompts

Imaginative

Write an imaginative story that incorporates one of the following ideas in some way: “The Passport,” “The Hole in the Wall,” or “The Play Station.”

Often stories are based on a character who is unusual in one dramatic way. The character’s behavior, beliefs, attitudes, or skills set up the main conflict of the story. Create a character with an unusual quality and **write an imaginative story** about this character.

Garage sales often include strange or unusual objects. **Make up an imaginative story** about something purchased at a garage sale.

You or someone else is standing in the middle of a stadium, concert hall, or auditorium. **Write an imaginative story** about what’s happening and how the person got there.

Make up a story that includes the line, “I knew I was making a mistake when I picked up the phone.”

The titles of many published works are so intriguing that their very names can suggest many images, ideas, or stories. **Make up a story** of your own inspired by one of the following published titles: (Be sure not to re-tell the original story!) “Great Expectations,” “Small Wonder,” or “Operating Instructions.”

You are given a chance to exchange places with one person (alive now or anytime in the past, or fictional) **Make up an imaginative story** about what happens.

Imagine that you suddenly had to go into hiding. **Write an imaginative story** telling why you have to hide and what belongings you would take and where you would go. Be sure to make your story original—not one you’ve heard before.

Write an imaginative story with ONE of these three titles: “A Rusty Bicycle” or “The Crumpled Paper” or “Nine Steps.”

What if you felt pain when you cut your hair or fingernails? What if animals and plants can think and feel emotions? What if fire hydrants were spies for a secret organization? **Make up a story** in which an ordinary thing or event turned out to be very different from what humans usually expect.

Technology has made huge changes in our lives. **Make up an imaginative story** about a person or family or group living today without the benefits of some modern convenience most of us depend on.

Write an imaginative story using one of the following titles: “Once bitten, twice shy” or “Don’t count your chickens before they are hatched” or “Once in a blue moon.”