

DIRECTED STUDY

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SECTION 5: WRITING TEST (OPTIONAL)

1 Essay Prompt

DIRECTIONS: You have 30 minutes to plan and write an essay. Read the prompt carefully and make sure you understand the instructions. A successful essay will have the following features: it will take a position on the issue presented in the writing prompt; it will maintain a

consistent focus on the topic; it will use logical reasoning and provide supporting ideas; it will present ideas in an organized manner; and, finally, it will include clear and effective language in accordance with the conventions of standard written English.

Writing Test Prompt

Some people believe that schools do not emphasize enough the concept of public service. They point out that volunteer service is a tradition in America and mention organizations such as the Girl and Boy Scouts, volunteer fire departments and rescue squads, and Big Brother and Sister. They believe that high schools should encourage volunteerism by offering students academic credit for such activities. They state that allowing academic credit would release students from studies to do volunteer work and further that such service would strengthen the sense of community. Other people say that volunteer service should be voluntary and that release time from school is a form of compensation for students. Students who receive such compensation would not really be doing volunteer work. Opponents of release time point out that students have opportunities to volunteer after school, on weekends, and during the summer months.

In your essay, take a position on this issue. You can write about either point of view presented here, or you can present a different point of view on this topic. Support your position with relevant reasons and/or examples from your own experience, observations, or reading.

Above Average Response

Volunteerism is an important American tradition, and schools should do more to encourage it. In today's world, most students are very busy. They attend classes for most of the day, and then may participate in one or two after school activities. Many students also manage to hold down part-time jobs such as working at a fast-food restaurant. Because they are so busy, most of them don't have time to volunteer to help others. Schools could encourage volunteering by giving students release time from school to participate in such activities.

In the first place, volunteerism is important. During emergencies, the Boy Scouts stuffing sandbags on the levee as the river rises are volunteers hoping to help their neighbors save their homes and businesses. The rescue workers the television shows walking through the woods all night with flashlights searching for a lost child are volunteers. The people who pass out cold drinks to marathon runners are volunteers. Without these

volunteers, these efforts could not take place. While students may not be eligible to fight fires, they can do many other jobs, and the way to get involved is to join an organization that helps out.

Unfortunately, many students find it difficult to find time to join. To really be of service in an emergency, you need to have some sort of training, and that means going to meetings and learning what role to play in a rescue or disaster. Less dramatic, you can join a group that does things like visit sick people or clean up roads. You need to be an active member of the club or organization that is doing the public service. But if your day is booked solid with classes, there may just not be time left over to do meaningful volunteer work. If schools gave one or two hours a week off, say Friday after lunch, then many other students could volunteer.

Some people might say that release time is not really volunteering because you get something for your effort. But having free time that has to be used for volunteering isn't good for anything else. If you are working to clean up a public park, then you can't be making money at your job. So you really are giving up something by volunteering.

There are many other reasons why release time would work. But the most important one is that it gives students time to do some volunteer work.

Position on issue: The writer clearly states a position in the first paragraph.

Topic development and essay organization: The essay has several features related to good topic development and essay organization. First, the essay includes an introductory paragraph with a clearly stated position. Second, the essay includes separate paragraphs for each separate point to be made. Third, these separate paragraphs begin with topic sentences that summarize or preview the contents of the paragraph.

At the same time, the essay does have some weaknesses. For example, the essay has a paragraph that mentions a possible objection to the argument being made. Specifically, the writer says some people might argue that volunteerism shouldn't involve "release time" because the latter is a form of compensation. The writer responds that "release time" is not compensation because, under the terms of a school-run volunteer program, it could not be used for anything except volunteer work. On the one hand, this is a legitimate point. On the other hand, this point does not fully address the objection raised in the prompt, namely that "release time" minimizes the sacrifice that one ordinarily associates and expects with volunteerism. A more successful essay would address this objection in greater detail.

The third paragraph is also under-developed. In general, it is just a restatement of the problem mentioned in the prompt (i.e., students may not have a lot of time to volunteer). It is unlikely that anyone would seriously dispute this point. No one has unlimited time, and everyone has many things they'd like to do. A more successful essay would introduce more substantial arguments in favor of "release time." For example, there is an ethical argument that could be made in favor of "release time"; in other words, the ethical benefits that would follow from increased volunteerism (i.e., the actual good that would be done in the world) outweigh any philosophical objections to be made against "release time."

Language usage, sentence structure, and punctuation: In general, the essay is free from any significant errors.

Summary and conclusions: This essay has several positive features: it clearly states a position in response to the prompt; it is well-organized; and, not unimportantly, it is free from any significant errors. At the same time, for the reasons mentioned above, it is somewhat under-developed and unoriginal. For these reasons, the essay would likely receive a "4."

Below Average Response

It is my opinion that they should let students ought of schooll, to do some volunteering. In America, volunteering is a good idea, and everyone should be ready, willing, and able to help other people. But you can't always help someone else if you're to busy helping yourself. One way of avoiding this problem is to give students time to help other people. Once students learn that they will be allowed to volunteer instead of going to class, they will volunteer more. And more volunteers will help people more.

Position on issue: The writer's position is stated in the first sentence. However, the first sentence also contains several errors related to spelling, punctuation, and clarity that prevent it from being a strong opening sentence.

Topic development and essay organization: This essay lacks any kind of development. In order to improve the essay, the writer would need to make several changes. First, a fully developed introductory paragraph is needed; in this paragraph, the writer would state his or her position and list the main points that will be advanced in support of this position. Second, separate paragraphs for the supporting points are needed; in these paragraphs, the writer would present arguments and details related to the supporting points. Finally, a conclusion is needed where the writer summarizes his or her argument and outlines the benefits of following a plan of action based on the argument just made. As currently written, the essay does not provide any of these features. As a result, the essay is underdeveloped and unconvincing.

Language usage, sentence structure, and punctuation: The essay contains several errors related to punctuation, spelling, and clarity. As a result, the essay does not flow well.

Summary and conclusions: This essay would likely receive a "1." It lacks organization and structure; it fails to include examples or details in support of the points to be made; and it includes multiple errors related to punctuation, spelling, and clarity.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
THE DIVISION OF THE PHYSICAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE
REVISION OF THE CURRICULUM
OF THE DIVISION OF THE PHYSICAL SCIENCES
FOR THE DEGREE OF PH.D.
IN CHEMISTRY

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