

STATE OF TEXAS ASSESSMENTS OF ACADEMIC READINESS (STAAR™)

Grades 4 and 7 Writing

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Writing Test Design

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- **Two-day test; time limit of 4 hours per day**
- **Make-up testing opportunities for writing**
- **Students taking STAAR grade 7 writing may use dictionaries for the entire test (multiple-choice section and written compositions)**
- **One page—a maximum of 26 lines for each composition (25 “light lines” plus the heavy “border line” at the bottom of the writing space); no “double-lining” allowed**
- **Dictionary policy expanded at grade 7 and high school to include bilingual and handheld non-internet-capable electronic dictionaries**

Grade 4 Writing Test Design

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- **Assessment split evenly over 2 days**
 - **Day 1: First half of multiple-choice questions and first prompt**
 - **Day 2: Second half of multiple-choice questions and second prompt**
- **Field-test questions: multiple choice embedded; there will be a “mini” stand-alone field test every three years to try out new writing prompts.**
- **For each day’s test session, students can work through the test in any order: composition first or multiple-choice questions first.**

Grade 7 Writing Test Design

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- **Assessment split over two days**
 - **Day 1—All multiple-choice questions and first composition.**
 - **Day 2—Second and third compositions**
- **Students have the latitude to work through each day's test in any order**
- **Field testing**
 - **Both multiple-choice questions and composition embedded**
 - **Placement of field-test prompt may vary from year to year**

Revision and Editing

Grades 4 and 7 and High School

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- **Revision and editing assessed separately, with increased focus on revision as students become more experienced and skilled writers**
- **For Grade 4, 32% of multiple-choice score from revision (9 items) and 68% of score from editing (19 items)**
- **For Grade 7, 40% of multiple-choice score from revision (16 items) and 60% of score from editing (24 items)**
- **For English I, II, and III, 50% of multiple-choice score from revision (15 items) and 50% of score from editing (15 items)**

STAAR Written Compositions

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- **Broader measure of writing at each grade by requiring students to write two compositions addressing different purposes**
- **Grade 4–personal narrative and expository**
- **Grade 7–personal narrative (with extension) and expository**
- **Essays weighted equally**
- **No “gatekeeper” (no automatic fail of the writing test for receiving a score of 1 on a composition)**

STAAR Writing Performance

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- **Score Point 1—VERY LIMITED**
- **Score Point 2—BASIC**
- **Score Point 3—SATISFACTORY**
- **Score Point 4—ACCOMPLISHED**

STAAR Writing Prompts—Scaffolding Expository

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- **Read:** A short synopsis of some kind or a quotation
- ↓
- **Think:** The synopsis or quotation generalized and reworded
- ↓
- **Write:** A focused charge statement
- ↓
- **Be Sure to:** 4–5 bullets (state a central or controlling idea, organize your writing, develop your writing/ explanation, choose your words carefully, a reminder to proofread for correct spelling, etc.)

STAAR Writing Prompts

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Expository prompts contain a stimulus and are scaffolded:

Read, Think, Write, Be Sure to –

Purpose: to help students “build” a concept of what they might write about and to provide students with important reminders that will help them be successful on the writing task

Expository Writing

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- Prompts focus on issues/questions that don't require students to bring particular background knowledge or facts to the table in order to write a good essay
- Task requires students to clearly explain what they think about something
- Students may use 1st person; in fact, prompts are written to elicit an explanatory response that reflects students' own thinking about their lives and the world

STAAR Expository Prompt

Grade 4

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READ the information in the box below.

There are people in our lives who are special to us. Sometimes this person is a teacher or coach, a parent, a brother or sister, or even a friend.

THINK about the people you care about.

WRITE about one person who has been important to you. Explain what makes this person special.

Be sure to–

- clearly state your central idea
- organize your writing
- develop your writing in detail
- choose your words carefully
- use correct spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and sentences

Grade 4 Expository Writing

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Score Point 2

“Yay! We finally finished. Thank you so much for your help, Mike. I bet we’re gonna win 1st place in my project.”

My brother Mike is really nice. He helps me in almost everything. When I told him I needed to do a big project, he got so into it. Anyway, he is so nice and I don’t know why. He’s usually all grumpy and stuff. Now he’s helping me, and he makes me some delicious food.

Even though he’s nice, he can be kind of mean and rude. I tried to tell him I had to participate too, but he kept going. He said, “You’ll ruin your project

Grade 4 Expository Writing

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you do it.” Sometimes I want to watch a movie with him, but he says to leave him alone. How rude. I’m telling you, my brother can be nice sometimes.

I don’t really care if my brother is nice or rude to me. All I care about is that he’s my brother. I know my brother is special and important to me.

(This composition was handwritten on 22 lines.)

Grade 4 Expository Writing

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Score Point 2

One sunny day I saw a sister and a brother standing close to a Apple Tree. It reminded me of my special my little brother. He's like the cherry to my heart, the drop to my lung, the butter to my finger, and the tip of my nail. But most of all he's my little brother. I care for him he cares for me. Let me tell you how he's special to me.

“Wake up wake up!”, my brother yelled. When I opened my eyes my room was sparking clean. “I cleaned your room for you while you were asleep,” he said. I was just so thankful to have a brother that will clean for me. When I got off the bed I saw

Grade 4 Expository Writing

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everything put away. My clothes in my chest and my shoes in the closet I saw everything put away.

Then my brother followed me into the kitchen. I got a glass of milk and he did the same thing. I was so glad that he wanted to learn what I was doing. He made me feel so special in my heart. I wanted to do more stuff to teach him. He made me feel so alive it was so important to me.

I learned that people don't have to give something huge for it to be special. My little brother just gave me a clean room and a teacher to teach him. My brother is special to me. He's like the cherry to my heart.

(This composition was handwritten on 22 lines.)

Grade 4 Expository Writing

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Score Point 3

My Dad is a very important man in my family. He is important because he cares about me and would do anything for me. My father is a hard worker he is also a great role model to me. He teaches me how to rebuild a car, broken pipe, a fan, door, and a broken chair. If I get in trouble he will always forgive me, but he will give me a punishment for what I did. When I need help he is there like Superman to the rescue. Say I need help with my math homework he will help me, even if he has something important to do. When I don't have time to do my work like wash dishes, wash the dogs, set up dinner, and fold and wash cloths, my dad will do it for me and that shows that he takes good care of me. That's why I love my Dad, and that's why he is important to me. (This composition was handwritten on 18 lines.)

Grade 4 Expository Writing

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Score Point 4

One person who is important or special in my life is my older sister, Elizabeth. She is fantastically wonderful in very many different ways. Whenever I need advice on something, I can talk to her and she'll be very helpful. If I'm ever upset, she will always try her best to cheer me up and usually Elizabeth will at least make me grin or giggle. If I have homework or need to study but I'm confused and don't understand it, she will explain it and teach it to me even though she normally has a stack of school work or something else she needs to finish. Every once in a while, when I'm dying of boredom, Elizabeth will do something fun with me like play a game or take me to the mall to see a

Grade 4 Expository Writing

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movie with her and some of her friends. If I ever have a contest or competition, she'll get me ready for it, cheer me on, and afterwards congratulate me no matter if I won or not. My sister also shares a lot of things with me. She'll let me use her laptop if my computer isn't working, let me borrow her calculator or other school supplies, let me use her extra chair, borrow one of her backpacks, she gives me any clothes that she's grown out of, and let's me try some food that she made. Elizabeth sort of goes with the flow even if something is bothering her. She is nice, smart, considerate, helpful, caring, patient, and, above all, an awesome sister!

(This composition was handwritten on 22 lines.)

STAAR Expository Prompt

Grade 7

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READ the following quotation.

A famous businessman once said, “Players win games; teams win championships.”

THINK carefully about the following statement.

Sometimes you can accomplish good things by yourself but better things with other people.

WRITE an essay explaining whether it is better to work by yourself or with a group.

Be sure to—

- clearly state your controlling idea
- organize and develop your explanation effectively
- choose your words carefully
- use correct spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and sentences

Grade 7 Expository Writing

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Score Point 2

Well it could go either way, but I would go with other people because they will help you when you need it. Like a football game they can block your opponent from tackling you, but if you have no teammates Boom! Tackled and on the floor. See that's why you need teammates for all sports and jobs. These are some examples of sports: soccer, tennis, basketball, volleyball and football. Here are some of jobs: policemen, firemen, astronaut, and teachers. The main point is that all of the sports and jobs there like a family. They see each other everyday. Family and teammates are alike because they both support you, help you, and give you tips on how to get better A+ in a sport or a job that you're doing. Sometimes you can help them

Grade 7 Expository Writing

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and be a teammate. Even when you are just hanging out you can play video games, one on one matches and not complain about losing or glote a lot of time because that could jeperdise both of your friendships. Be nice play nice. That's why I choose teamwork over by yourself.

(This composition was handwritten on 26 lines.)

Grade 7 Expository Writing

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Score Point 3

When you are on a team it is fun to compete against other teams. When your alone you don't have that much fun and excitement as you would when you're on a team. Teams are much more fun to be on.

When you are on a team you meet new people. The people you meet are people who share your same interests. When you have friends you are more likley to succeede at what you do. You have more power and self confidence when your with your team.

When you have your friends by your side you have more confidence and determination. When you win or lose you can still be proud of yourself and your

Grade 7 Expository Writing

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teammates. You have someone to celebrate with you if you're on a team.

Teams are great because they show if you can work well with others and help each other out. They also show your skill that you have. Teams are not only helpful, they are worth it. When your team loses it really doesn't matter because you guys are together and having fun.

Teams are just a group of friends working together doing what they love. Teams are helpful and understanding. I would rather be on a team than alone.

(This composition was handwritten on 26 lines.)

Grade 7 Expository Writing

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Score Point 4

There are two types of people in this world, those who prefer to work together as a team, and those who prefer to work alone as one player. The question is, Which one has a better look on life, and what does it say about their personality?

A person that prefers to work alone often shows independance, they do things themselves. This can be a great characteristic about someone, but it can also lead that person to never develop social and or team skills. Another thing about people who play alone is that they receive more glory, not having to share any that is, and whatever they perform has more of a “wow factor”, since

Grade 7 Expository Writing

they completed something by themselves that would normally take a whole team. Unfortunately, this can lead them to become self-centered. Especially if they succeed at something they did alone. These kind of people see life as one big competition, and they have to shine in the spotlight alone; they have to receive all of the glory for everything that they do.

People who prefer to work as a team tend to show more of the ability to share, more compassion for others, and stronger and more meaningful relationships with others compared to someone who prefers to work alone. These people develop skills such as leadership skills, social skills, communication skills, and they learn how to

Grade 7 Expository Writing

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depend on others. They see life as an opportunity to gain personal skills to help them grow as a person and to build meaningful relationships with others while doing it.

In life, you can't do everything alone, you need the help of others. If everything was a one man job, then God wouldn't have created two people, he would've created one, and that is why team work is much better.

(This composition was handwritten on 26 lines.)

STAAR Personal Narrative

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- Personal narrative prompts contain a stimulus and are scaffolded, though less so than other prompts.
- Grade 4—SE 17(A) write about important personal experiences
- Grade 7—16(A) write a personal narrative that has a clearly defined focus and communicates the importance of or reasons for actions and/or consequences
- Personal narratives must be realistic in nature.
No obvious “fantasy” papers. (Literary writing: 16[A] at grade 4 and 15[A] at grade 7.)

STAAR Personal Narrative Prompt

Grade 4

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Look at the picture below.



It takes talent to balance a basketball on your finger.

Write about a time when you discovered that you were good at something.

STAAR Personal Narrative Prompt

Grade 4

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Be sure to–

- **write about a personal experience**
- **organize your writing**
- **develop your ideas in detail**
- **choose your words carefully**
- **use correct spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and sentences**

Grade 4 Personal Narrative

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Score Point 4

I learned how to ride a bicycle after being helped. One breezy afternoon, I was blowing bubbles in my front yard, and a man on a bicycle pedalled by. “Daddy, Daddy!” I cried. “I wanna try that!” “Okay. I’ll go get the bike and helmet,” he said, walking toward the side of the house, where we keep the bikes. Soon enough, there was a helmet strapped to my head, a bike beneath me, and a father beside me.

My legs began circling and I started rolling, my father jogging beside me ready to catch me if I tumble. Forgetting to turn, I skidded to a halt at the curb. A sharp pain stabbed my knee, and I felt something trickle down my leg. I stood up and limped back across the street, while my father rolled the

Grade 4 Personal Narrative

bike next to me. “Maybe we should try again tomorrow,” he said gently. I nodded in agreement.

That night I dreamed I was a professional cyclist. I won every race I was a part of. Suddenly my wheel hit a rock and—my eyes jolted open. I tossed clean clothes on, rushed downstairs, had breakfast, and told my dad I was ready. I hopped back on the bike and started moving again, slowly my dad let go of my shoulders. I was doing it! I was riding a bike! I stopped and walked the bike back. I was proud of myself.

One weekend I even begged to go on a bike ride. He finally said yes and off we went.

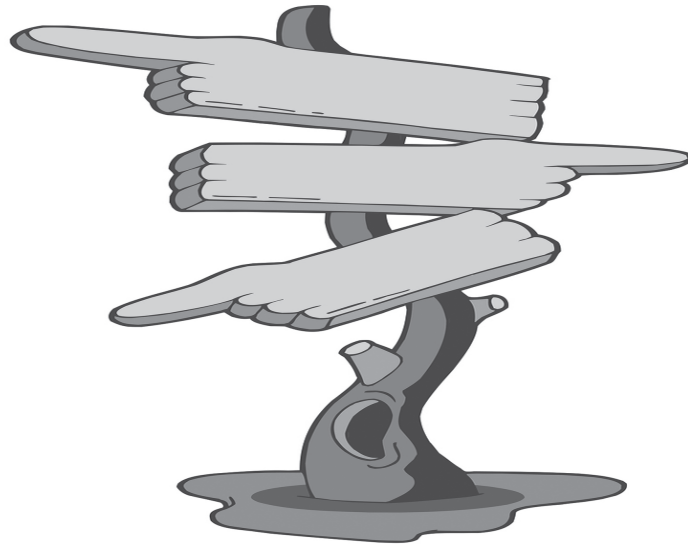
(This composition was handwritten on 23 lines.)

STAAR Personal Narrative Prompt

Grade 7

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Look at the picture below.



Sometimes it's hard to make a decision because there are so many choices.

Write a personal narrative about a time when you had to make a decision. Be sure to write in detail about the choice you made and describe what happened as a result of your decision.

Grade 7 Personal Narrative

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Score Point 3

Everyone has always faced a decesion, your lying if you haven't. Wether it be when you're a baby and don't know which candy to take, or your an adult and don't know what job to take. Decesions are everywhere!

I've made a decision before. It was at the local high school game where I met up with my friend Gabriela. We had been talking latley, and I started to noticed we flirted a lot. So, at the game I didn't know if I should ask her to be my girlfriend. We went to two different schools and we hardley ever saw each other. I liked her a lot though and I didn't know what to do. I finnaly just sucked up my act of being afraid and asked her to be my girlfriend. With a huge smile, and a blushed face she responded with "Yes!"

Grade 7 Personal Narrative

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That was the day of September twenty-fourth, 2010. We are now in the month of April 2011, and we are still hapily together. Yes, we have hit our ups and downs, but we always find a way to get through all of it. Gabriela sure is the reason I smile everyday.

Decisions are hard, they mostly have to be. You could be making a choice that will effect the out come of your life, however, when you do come across a decesion, you have to go with your gut to make the right choice, that's what I did.

(This composition was handwritten on 24 lines.)

Grade 7 Personal Narrative

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Score Point 4

Overwhelming stress, headaches, confusion, and darkness. These are just a few of the memories of the time I made the most difficult decision in my life.

It was five o'clock on a school morning when my mom told me I would have to do my hair, get dressed, and get to the bus stop once she left to go visit my sister in the hospital. The only problem with that, was the fact that I did not know how to do my own hair.

As soon as I got dressed, I called my mom on her cell phone. I tried telling her that I could not do my hair so I could not go to school. In her response, she told me that if I did not go to school, I would suffer consequences. I was in a pickle. I did not know whether to stay home or go to school. Since I

Grade 7 Personal Narrative

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tried to do my hair and I became late for the bus, I decided not to go to school. Later that day when my mom made it home, she told me I was in deep trouble. When I sat down to tell her about my situation, she sounded like she was frustrated with me, but I was wrong. It turned out that my mom gave me mercy. She told me that all I had to do was to apologize, so I did from the bottom of my heart.

Ever since that morning, I have always seen the mercy in the eyes of my parents. I learned that if I ever had to make a decision like that again, to go through with the hardest decision for me. In this case, it was doing my hair and going to school. The fact is that the most difficult decision turned out to be the decision I should have made.

(This composition was handwritten on 24 lines.)

STAAR Writing—What We’ve Learned So Far

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- Trends we noted across grades from the 2011 field tests
- Synthesizing across the Read, Think, Write
Some students scored 1s and 2s because they could not move from the stimulus (the “Read”) to the generalization (the “Think”) to the charge (the “Write about”). Students who did not synthesize information across the prompt tended to have these problems:
 - getting stuck in the stimulus
 - ignoring the charge and writing only about the “Think” statement

STAAR Writing—What We’ve Learned So Far

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- Trends we noted across grades during the scoring of the 2011 STAAR field tests
 - Form/purpose match Many students scored 1s and 2s because their overall organizational structure and form did not match the purpose for writing or were weakly matched. Some students started out in the right form but then “drifted” into another purpose:
 - personal narrative instead of expository
 - fantasy instead of personal narrative
 - expository instead of personal narrative

STAAR Writing—What We've Learned So Far

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- Trends we noted across grades from the 2011 field tests
 - Central or controlling idea: Essential in writing a focused and coherent expository piece as well as a focused and coherent persuasive or analytical piece in high school
 - Personal narratives also need a narrow focus.

STAAR Writing—What We’ve Learned So Far

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- Trends we noted across grades from the 2011 field tests

The effect of one page

- High scores require an economical use of space: tight, specific, logical development—no wasted words.
- Short, effective introduction and conclusion
- Bottom line: Both planning and revision are absolutely essential since students don’t have the space to “write their way into” a better piece.

Students will have 2½ blank pages per prompt in the test booklet for planning purposes.

How Not to Begin a Composition

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People view things differently and see it in their own way. They also have different opinions, and each person thinks no one is right but themselves. Quotations are thought through very differently from everyone else. It all depends on the way you think and how you view things in life.

(This introduction takes up the first 5 of the 26 lines.)

In a Nutshell—Lower Score Range

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Typical Problems in Lower-Scoring Responses

- Wrong organizational structure/form for purpose
- Weak, evolving, or nonexistent central idea/controlling idea
- Wasted space: repetition, wordiness, looping/meandering, meaningless introductions and conclusions, development that does not contribute (e.g., the “bed-to-bed” approach)
- Inclusion of too many different ideas for 1 page
- General/vague/imprecise use of language or inappropriate tone for purpose
- Essay poorly crafted
- Weak conventions

In a Nutshell—Higher Score Range

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- Typical Strengths in Higher-Scoring Responses
 - Strong match between structure/form and purpose
 - Explicit central or controlling idea and sustained focus
 - “Narrow and deep” development with no wasted words or space → Think Quality over Quantity!
 - Introduction and conclusion short but effective
 - Specific use of language and appropriate tone for purpose
 - Essay well crafted
 - Strong conventions
- (Remember: “Strong” doesn’t mean “Perfect”!)

Adjacent Scoring for STAAR

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TAKS compositions were scored using the “perfect agreement” model. Two readers read each paper, and if the scores did not agree, a third reader (and sometimes a fourth) read the paper to determine the final score.

STAAR compositions will be scored using the “adjacent scoring” model. Perfect agreement does not have to be reached. With this method, districts will receive a more accurate description of each student’s writing performance.

Adjacent Scoring for STAAR

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SCORE 1	SCORE 2	SUMMED SCORE	CSR RATING
0	0	0	Nonscorable Performance
1	1	2	Very Limited Performance
1	2	3	Between Very Limited and Basic Performance
2	2	4	Basic Performance
2	3	5	Between Basic and Satisfactory Performance
3	3	6	Satisfactory Performance
3	4	7	Between Satisfactory and Accomplished Performance
4	4	8	Accomplished Performance

CONTACT INFORMATION

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