

## Sample Test Questions - Argumentative Essay

This section presents an argumentative topic and sample responses along with the standards used in scoring the argumentative essays. When you read these sample responses, keep in mind that they will be less polished than if they had been developed at home, edited, and carefully presented. The examinee does not know what question will be asked and must decide, on the spot, how to respond. Readers take these circumstances into account when scoring the essays; they have been trained to judge the overall quality rather than to attempt to count errors.

Each essay is scored holistically, on the basis of its total quality. In computing your total Core Academic Skills for Educators: Writing score, the scores for both the argumentative and explanatory essays are combined with the score for the selected-response part of the Writing test.

Readers assign scores for the argumentative essay based on the following scoring guide.

### Scoring Guide for Argumentative Essay

#### Score of 6

A 6 essay demonstrates a *high degree of competence* in response to the assignment but may have a few minor errors.

An essay in this category:

- states or clearly implies the writer's position or thesis
- organizes and develops ideas logically, making insightful connections between them
- clearly explains key ideas, supporting them with well-chosen reasons, examples, or details
- displays effective sentence variety
- clearly displays facility in the use of language
- is generally free from errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

#### Score of 5

A 5 essay demonstrates *clear competence* in response to the assignment but may have minor errors.

An essay in this category:

- states or clearly implies the writer's position or thesis
- organizes and develops ideas clearly, making connections between them
- explains key ideas, supporting them with relevant reasons, examples, or details
- displays some sentence variety
- displays facility in the use of language
- is generally free from errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

#### Score of 4

A 4 essay demonstrates *competence* in response to the assignment.

An essay in this category:

- states or implies the writer's position or thesis
- shows control in the organization and development of ideas
- explains some key ideas, supporting them with adequate reasons, examples, or details
- displays adequate use of language
- shows control of grammar, usage, and mechanics, but may display errors

### Score of 3

A 3 essay demonstrates *some competence* in response to the assignment but is obviously flawed.

An essay in this category reveals *one or more* of the following weaknesses:

- limited in stating or implying a position or thesis
- limited control in the organization and development of ideas
- inadequate reasons, examples, or details to explain key ideas
- an accumulation of errors in the use of language
- an accumulation of errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

### Score of 2

A 2 essay is *seriously flawed*.

An essay in this category reveals *one or more* of the following weaknesses:

- no clear position or thesis
- weak organization or very little development
- few or no relevant reasons, examples, or details
- frequent serious errors in the use of language
- frequent serious errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

### Score of 1

A 1 essay demonstrates *fundamental deficiencies* in writing skills.

An essay in this category:

- contains serious and persistent writing errors or
- is incoherent or
- is undeveloped

## Sample Argumentative Essay Topic

On the computer screen will you see the following:

Read the opinion stated below:

"Minimum-wage jobs are a ticket to nowhere. They are boring and repetitive and teach employees little or nothing of value. Minimum-wage employers take advantage of people because they need a job."

Discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with this opinion. Support your views with specific reasons and examples from your own experience, observations, or reading.

Cut  
Paste  
Undo

The essay topic will appear on the top half of the computer screen. You will compose and type your response to the topic on the bottom half of the computer screen.

**Directions:** You will have 30 minutes to plan and write an argumentative essay on the topic presented above. The essay will be based on your own reading, experience, or observations.

Read the topic carefully. You will probably find it best to spend a little time considering the topic and organizing your thoughts before you begin writing. **DO NOT WRITE ON A TOPIC OTHER THAN THE ONE SPECIFIED.** Essays on topics of your own choice will not be acceptable. In order for your test to be scored, your responses must be in English.

The essay questions are included in this test to give you an opportunity to demonstrate how well you can write. You should, therefore, take care to write clearly and effectively, using specific examples where appropriate. Remember that how well you write is much more important than how much you write, but to cover the topic adequately, you will probably need to write more than one paragraph.

### Sample Argumentative Essay That Received a Score of 6

*I agree wholeheartedly that "Minimum-wage employers take advantage of people because they need a job." Given the existing high unemployment rates in today's economy, people do not have as much power to negotiate for reasonable pay. Thus, they are at the mercy of employers who seize the opportunity to line their*

*own pockets while underpaying their workers. Since all jobs necessitate the mastery of certain skills, and involve responsibility and effort on the part of employees, laws governing minimum wages should be evaluated frequently and government should intervene to make sure that employers are not being taken advantage of. All work is worthwhile and valuable; workers should be treated with dignity and respect and paid appropriately.*

*Having said that, however, I strongly disagree with the rest of the statement, especially the claim that "Minimum-wage jobs are a ticket to nowhere." Most people's introduction to the workforce is through a minimum-wage job; we all have to start somewhere and we are unlikely to begin our working lives with high salaries. Granted, minimum-wage jobs often do involve tasks that are "boring and repetitive" but that doesn't mean these tasks "teach employees little or nothing." Our first jobs actually teach us a lot about the workforce and how to conduct ourselves at work.*

*For example, my first job was a minimum-wage office job. Because I thought the job wasn't that complicated, I initially didn't pay attention to what I was doing and, as a result, found myself making mistakes. I neglected to follow procedures or proofread my work and I found that I wasn't doing a good job. Ultimately I realized that no matter how menial a task may seem, it was still vital for me to focus on what I was doing and to do my best. I learned that in order to succeed at any kind of job, I had to make an effort and work hard. So while it may not have been that important for me to know how to fill out a travel voucher without errors, it was imperative for me to learn that I couldn't approach work with a lackadaisical attitude and expect to succeed. That was a very crucial, lifelong lesson for me. I learned other important lessons as well. I learned to be punctual, to get up and go to work day after day, to persevere and troubleshoot, and to cooperate with others. I became adept at communicating with my boss and negotiating with my co-workers. Best of all, I learned that work could be very gratifying when things went well and that it was a pleasure to have co-workers to collaborate with on projects. Minimum-wage jobs are like apprenticeships for the work world. You may not spend the rest of your life making hamburgers or typing letters but the general work skills you master teach you how to become a productive member of the workforce for the rest of your life.*

### Comments on Sample Argumentative Essay that Received a Score of 6

This highly competent response begins by agreeing with the last part of the prompt, situating it in the current economy, whose high unemployment rates guarantee that “people do not have as much power to negotiate for reasonable pay.” The essay continues its argument by stating that minimum wage laws should be evaluated frequently and that governments should oversee the labor market to make sure employees are not being exploited. The essay, however, then shifts its focus to disagree with the rest of the prompt, which argues that minimum-wage jobs “are a ticket to nowhere” and “teach employees little or nothing of value.” After deftly conceding that some minimum wage jobs are often “boring and repetitive,” the writer presents a clear thesis at the end of the second paragraph: “Our first jobs actually teach us a lot about the workforce and how to conduct ourselves at work.”

Using the well-chosen example of the writer’s own first job, the essay effectively develops the main idea by enumerating the lifelong lessons the writer learned there, beginning with the writer’s initial mistake of regarding the job as uncomplicated, and thereby undeserving of proper attention and hard work. In discussing this misapprehension, the essay insightfully links the writer’s attitude with the one expressed in the prompt, which it then refutes. Through detailed examples, such as filling out a travel voucher, the response explains how the writer’s initial failures led to the valuable lesson that “I couldn’t approach work with a lackadaisical attitude and expect to succeed.”

The final paragraph continues with other lessons the writer learned from this first job before concluding that minimum-wage jobs “are like apprenticeships for the work world.” This statement reiterates the response’s thesis that, far from being worthless, minimum-wage jobs actually “teach you how to become a productive member of the workforce for the rest of your life.” The essay’s final sentence effectively reinforces the main argument, which has been highlighted throughout this highly organized response. In addition to being free from grammatical, usage, or mechanical errors, the essay displays clear facility with language and effective variation in sentence structure. These qualities, along with the well-organized structure of the response and the in-depth development of its key idea with a well-chosen example and details, are more than enough to merit a score of 6.

*"Minimum-wage jobs are a ticket to nowhere. They are boring and repetitive and teach employees little or nothing of value. Minimum-wage employers take advantage of people because they need a job."*

### Sample Argumentative Essay That Received a Score of 5

*I disagree with the position taken in the statement above. We all have to start working at some point in our lives, and especially if we start working while still in high-school or before obtaining an advanced level of education, we will most likely start in a minimum wage job. These jobs, while low-paying, provide a necessary training ground for those new to the world of work and provide the base for developing skills in working that we will need later in life. One of my co-workers provided the best example of using a minimum-wage job to develop skills in a way that benefitted both the employee and the employer. Her younger brother, who was still in high school, was very excited about getting his first job at McDonalds. My co-worker simply saw this as a way for him to pick up a little money to help with his expenses and support some of her brother's teenage pleasures. He, on the other hand, was looking at this job as the start of a career path. Explaining McDonald's emphasis on training entry level workers and recruiting from within for management positions, her brother saw himself as eventually managing a restaurant, a region, or even becoming a franchise owner. Clearly for him, his first minimum-wage job was not a ticket to nowhere, and his employer, rather than taking advantage of him, was helping him to develop for better things.*

*Likewise, a number of other minimum-wage jobs provide stepping off points for other careers. Nurses' aides may be inspired to go to school to become future nurses. Daycare assistants or pre-school teachers may find that their love of working with children will propel them to study education and become teachers, counselors, or administrators of programs that provide services for children. Even for those who are not planning a higher level of education or who may decide to do something else, the minimum-wage job will allow them to develop their skills and find out if they really enjoy what they are doing. Sometimes, high school students decide they want to go to college to major in a particular area, but they really don't understand what the job market will be for that area. A carefully selected minimum-wage job could help a student decide that he/she really*

*hates the area before it is too late to change their major.*

*One other point also needs to be made about minimum-wage jobs: someone has to do them and it is not just the employers who gain. As all of us go about our daily lives, we need cashiers, waitresses, janitors, restaurant workers, garbage collectors, nannies, and the varied assortment of low level factory workers and technicians that make our world operate. These are the people we rarely recognise, but if we tried to go without them, either the costs that we pay would rise significantly or we would do without a lot of the things we have today. Overall, minimum-wage jobs, provide the base for our society.*

### Comments on Sample Argumentative Essay that Received a Score of 5

This response opens with a clear statement disagreeing with the prompt and explains that minimum-wage jobs "provide a necessary training ground" for new workers along with "the base for developing skills in working that we will need later in life." Making a direct connection with the idea of developing skills, the response provides a personal example that counters several of the prompt's claims and demonstrates that employees can benefit from minimum-wage jobs without being taken advantage of. This specific example is then used to make a generalization about other minimum-wage jobs that may help to prepare workers for other careers or allow them to make informed choices about careers. In the final paragraph, the response approaches the argument in a slightly different way, noting that "someone has to do" minimum-wage jobs and that it is the general public, and not just an employer, that benefits from having "cashiers, waitresses, janitors, . . . and the varied assortment of low level factory workers and technicians that make our world operate." This portion of the response is less developed than the position presented in the first three paragraphs, but the ideas are still clearly connected and relevant.

Throughout the response there is a clear line of organization and ideas are clearly connected. Examples are relevant, but not necessarily insightful. Sentences are varied, and the response verges on some effective sentence use, but it is not consistent. Language facility is certainly more than adequate, but the response lacks the vocabulary and effective use of language that would characterize a response scored at the 6 level. The response is generally free of errors, but does contain a few grammar or mechanical errors.



### Sample Argumentative Essay That Received a Score of 2

*Minimum-wage jobs are a ticket to nowhere. They are boring and repetitive and teach little or nothing of value. Minimum-wage employers take advantage of people because they need a job.*

*When I worked at a fast food restaurant at the mall I received minimum wage. All they do is see how much work they can get out of you for as little pay as possible. Many minimum-wage employers are harder on you in places like that than they are at high paying jobs. Yes, minimum-wage jobs are boring because you do the same thing over and over which means that you learn little skill from working there.*

### Comments on Sample Argumentative Essay that Received a Score of 2

This response, while relatively error-free, has very little development. The first paragraph, which appears to indicate agreement with the position given in the prompt, merely repeats the prompt and provides no other development. The second paragraph adds to that by noting that the writer worked at a fast food restaurant for minimum wage, but then mostly repeats the same ideas included in the prompt without providing much in the way of reasons, examples, or details. Without further development, it cannot be scored higher than a 2.