

College Composition Examination

First Essay

Sample Topic 1

There are no challenges so difficult, no goals so impossible, as the ones we set for ourselves.

Directions

Write an essay in which you discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement above. Support your discussion with specific reasons and examples from your reading, experience or observations.

Scoring Guide: College Composition Examination

Readers will assign scores based on the following scoring guide.

6 – A 6 essay demonstrates *a high degree of competence and sustained control*, although it may have a few minor errors.

A typical essay in this category

- addresses all elements of the writing task effectively and insightfully
- develops ideas thoroughly, supporting them with well-chosen reasons, examples or details
- is well focused and well organized
- demonstrates superior facility with language, using effective vocabulary and sentence variety
- demonstrates general mastery of the standard conventions of grammar, usage and mechanics but may have minor errors

5 – A 5 essay demonstrates *a generally high degree of competence*, although it will have occasional lapses in quality.

A typical essay in this category

- addresses the writing task effectively
- is well developed, using appropriate reasons, examples or details to support ideas
- is generally well focused and well organized
- demonstrates facility with language, using appropriate vocabulary and some sentence variety
- demonstrates strong control of the standard conventions of grammar, usage and mechanics but may have minor errors

4 – A 4 essay demonstrates *clear competence*, with some errors and lapses in quality.

A typical essay in this category

- addresses the writing task competently
- is adequately developed, using reasons, examples or details to support ideas
- is adequately focused and organized
- demonstrates competence with language, using adequate vocabulary and minimal sentence variety
- generally demonstrates control of the standard conventions of grammar, usage and mechanics but may have some errors

3 – A 3 essay demonstrates *limited competence*.

A typical essay in this category exhibits ONE OR MORE of the following weaknesses:

- addresses only some parts of the writing task
- is unevenly developed and often provides assertions but few relevant reasons, examples or details
- is poorly focused and/or poorly organized
- displays frequent problems in the use of language
- demonstrates inconsistent control of grammar, usage and mechanics

2 – A 2 essay is *seriously flawed*.

A typical essay in this category exhibits ONE OR MORE of the following weaknesses:

- is unclear or seriously limited in addressing the writing task
- is seriously underdeveloped, providing few reasons, examples or details
- is unfocused and/or disorganized
- displays frequent serious errors in the use of language that may interfere with meaning
- contains frequent serious errors in grammar, usage and mechanics that may interfere with meaning

1 – A 1 essay is *fundamentally deficient*.

A typical essay in this category exhibits ONE OR MORE of the following weaknesses:

- provides little or no evidence of the ability to develop an organized response to the writing task
- is undeveloped
- contains severe writing errors that persistently interfere with meaning

0 – Off topic Provides no evidence of an attempt to respond to the assigned topic, is written in a language other than English, merely copies the prompt, or consists of only keystroke characters.

Sample Essays with Commentaries

Note: Errors in the sample essays are intentionally reproduced.

Essay A—This essay is scored a 6.

I disagree with the statement that the most difficult challenges people face are those that everybody creates for themselves. The assertion is not true, or at least not always, as I intend to show below. There may be instances where people set difficult objectives for themselves, but very often people simply have to try to address challenges they did not create, and survive or make the best of situations they have been put into by accidents such as geography, history, or ethnic and racial background. There are exceptions, but they are just that: exceptions, not the norm.

Often, especially for those coming from countries that are not dominating the world stage, succeeding in life, or simply making ends meet are major challenges, and not because those who face these challenges want to be in such situations. My parents grew up at a time when their country was undergoing major social and political transformations. World War II had just ended by the time my father was 12, the economy was in shambles, and the Nazi occupiers had been driven out of the country so the Red Army can take over. My grandfather was forced to give up his little land during the process of collectivization of agriculture. His small store was eventually confiscated as well, and the couple horses he had, along with thousands of horses throughout the country, were taken away to make room for the tractors the country was beginning to manufacture. By the time my father was drafted into the military, talk of World War II was everywhere, and the hysteria gave way only a couple of decades later. My father had to lie low all his life and not say a word against a regime that did not tolerate dissent. The kids' success in school meant they could get by within or without the messed up system the country was under. In my grandfather's words, it was important to study, because "no one can take away from you what you know."

I have also seen in this country instances where people's lives are made difficult by those in power. It is often assumed that everybody in this country shares a certain standard of living, although evidence contradicts that assumption. For many,

simply getting by is a major success, not because they love struggling to make ends meet, but because they do not have a choice. When Hurricane Katrina made landfall last August, the majority of the residents of New Orleans had evacuated the city. Many had not, though: some of their own free will, others because they simply did not have the means of travel. Later on, when large portions of the city were under water, some residents tried to cross one of the bridges from New Orleans to the west bank of the Mississippi River, but were received by police shooting in the air to scare them away. The city across the river apparently did not want "the problems" of the City of New Orleans.

Certainly there are instances where people set high goals for themselves and some succeed in attaining those goals, while many fail. I have all the respect for the former, but I think focusing on the few exceptions we may miss the big picture. Succeeding in spite of all odds, being a "self-made man," going "from rags to riches," are powerful myths in this country. I am not denying the effort and successes of the Rockefellers, Carnegies, or more recently the Trumps. I do think, nonetheless, that for every person who makes it in spite of all or most odds, there are many more who do not; for every college dropout who succeeds in life, such as Bill Gates, there are thousands who will struggle through life.

People often set hard-to-reach objectives and they may fail or succeed in pursuing those objectives. I do think, though, that for many, the most difficult challenges come from outside the individual, from their position in the social hierarchy, or the time and place where they are born and try to get by.

Commentary on Essay A

This insightful response argues that life's most difficult challenges come from outside the individual and cites specific accidents of history and geography as effective support for that claim. Paragraph two offers abundant, well-chosen evidence that political constraints imposed on the writer's family in Eastern Europe after the Second World War were much more formidable than any challenges they might have chosen for themselves. To provide further development, paragraph three describes the impact of similarly harsh conditions in a more immediate place and time—New Orleans

after Hurricane Katrina. Finally, in preparation for a strong but carefully measured conclusion, the essay acknowledges that some few individuals do accomplish great things despite overwhelming odds. Just as the development of this response is thorough and always sharply focused, the control of language is superior. Note, for example, skillful subordination in the third sentence of the essay and effective vocabulary in phrases such as “dominating the world stage” or “a regime that did not tolerate dissent.” A few minor errors are indeed present, as is allowed by the scoring guide, but sustained control supports a score of 6.

Essay B—This essay is scored a 4.

I agree that, as individuals, we tend to set higher goals for ourselves than outside influences. Because goals are so personal, it makes it that much more challenging to attain them.

Psychologically, individuals can be their own worst enemy. Goals may be set and believed in by an individual but self-doubt, a low self-esteem and societal and familial attitudes may warp personal beliefs. When this happens, an individual may lose sight of the goal and instead focus doubt on the necessary steps to achieve the goal. Conversely, an individual may battle these internal and external obstacles and rise above them to successfully reach their goal. Who better to know the self than the individual? Goals are personal since only the individual really knows what they would like to achieve, at what level to set the goal and must find a way to achieve it.

An example of successful goal-setting is my business idol; George Lucas who's educational and career history has been a real inspiration. Mr. Lucas continued to set higher goals for himself as his life developed. He has become a prolific director and businessman in the entertainment industry. He currently owns several companies including his own production company and special effects company. The reason why this is so inspiring is because he almost failed high school and had almost no prospects for the future. Before graduation, Mr. Lucas was involved in an almost fatal car crash. At this point in his life, he set a goal of becoming an excellent student both in the classroom and in life.

This was quite a high goal to set due to this previous academic ability and the external opinions of family and friends. He worked to accomplish graduating from a junior college then completing his B.A. in Film from USC, both with honors. Mr. Lucas continued to set higher and more challenging goals for himself to become an independent film producer and director and to not be affiliated with any particular movie studio. He had to pay his dues at first but finally his tenacity paid off and his creation of Lucasfilm has allowed him the goal of creative freedom in his work. I don't believe that anyone else in his family or his acquaintances would have set such goals for him. Mr. Lucas psychologically believed in himself enough, knew what he wanted to do, set the applicable goals and worked to achieve them. No one else could have done this for him.

Commentary on Essay B

Since the first paragraph in this response deals mainly with psychological reasons for failure or success in achieving goals, it does not focus sharply on the question of relative difficulty. Paragraph two, however, clearly addresses the writing task and offers an extended example to argue that self-selected goals are indeed more difficult than those imposed by others. Instead of merely summarizing the life of George Lucas, the writer chooses several specific episodes in which Lucas' own aspirations surpassed the expectations of family and friends. Thus, after a slow start, the essay does achieve competence in development, focus and organization. Despite some errors, control of language is also adequate to support a score of 4. Syntax is sometimes flawed (see the first and last sentences of paragraph one), but the essay is free of serious grammar errors. Furthermore, several phrases (e.g., “may warp personal beliefs,” “his tenacity paid off,”) demonstrate vocabulary that is clearly adequate.

Essay C—This essay is scored a 2.

This statement is strongly true. One example of this is my own life. I work very hard and never give up, and am even taking this test! I am very inspired to go to college and have made it my goal to achieve, no matter what. And I have achieved goals before this, so I know that I can achieve this one too, even though it seems hard. When I was a senior at Kennedy High school I saved up money to buy a car, and that was a goal that I achieved myself.

Another example of goals is my Mom. When I was little she went to nursing school and worked very hard, some people said it was impossible because she had four small children, but she graduated and now she works in a hospital. So obviously goals can be useful. I guess when a person has achieved a few goals then they feel more confident about going out to achieve other goals, and that way even though they set higher goals, you find out that you can even achieve the harder goals that seem more impossible like the question says. You feel good about what you already have achieved, so nothing seems impossible. You go out and do it!

Commentary on Essay C

Problems with development and focus make this response seriously limited in addressing the writing task. The writer twice refers to success in achieving personal goals (saving money for a car and Mom's graduation from nursing school), but both examples are extremely thin and neither shows that self-imposed goals are any more challenging than those imposed by others. In the middle of paragraph two, the writer veers even further away from the topic with the plausible but—in this context—superfluous claim that “goals can be useful.” Even though the response begins by asserting that the prompt is “strongly true,” later sentences argue an entirely different point—that “nothing seems impossible” after one has gained confidence. Thus, since the response provides almost no relevant development, it earns a score of 2.

Second Essay

Sample Topic 2

Directions

The following assignment requires you to write a coherent essay in which you synthesize the two sources provided. Synthesis refers to combining the sources and your position to form a cohesive, supported argument. You must develop a position and incorporate both sources. **You must cite the sources whether you are paraphrasing or quoting.** Refer to each source by the author's last name, the title or by any other means that adequately identifies it.

Introduction

A copyright gives the author of a creative work (like a book, film, painting or audio recording) exclusive rights to it: only the holder of a work's copyright has the legal right to copy, publish or profit from the work. Many people agree that copyrights are a good thing, because they give creators the opportunity to benefit from their creative work. However, many people also agree that the free exchange of ideas is good for society because it fosters creativity and innovation. They argue that therefore in many instances there should be no copyright restrictions.

Assignment

Read the following sources carefully. Then write an essay in which you develop a position on whether copyright restrictions benefit or harm society. Be sure to incorporate and cite both of the accompanying sources as you develop your position.

Source 1:

Epstein, Richard A. "The Creators Own Ideas." *Technology Review* 108.6 (2005): 56–60. Print.

The following passage is excerpted from an article in a journal on technology.

No matter one's political beliefs, it is critical to remember the strong economic imperatives that drive modern societies to legislate some form of copyright protection. Just as we protect private rights in land for the benefit of the community, not solely for a property's owner, so too we have a social reason to protect writings and other intellectual creations.

As [the eighteenth-century philosopher] John Locke would have it, a just society recognizes the natural rights of its citizens, including the right to protection of their productive labor. But copyright has an additional justification: it fosters huge positive contributions to culture, in the form of novels, movies, manuals, music, and other works. Some creators are motivated solely by the desire to create and would be happy to distribute their works under simple terms . . . requiring attribution only. But for most authors, compensation matters, and we increase their production by limiting the rights of others to copy their work.

Source 2:

Lessig, Lawrence. *The Future of Ideas: The Fate of the Commons in a Connected World.*
New York: Random House, 2001. Print.

The following passage is excerpted from a book on intellectual property.

Obviously many resources must be controlled if they are to be produced or sustained. I should have the right to control access to my house and my car. You shouldn't be allowed to rifle through my desk . . . Hollywood should have the right to charge admission to its movies. If one couldn't control access to these resources, or resources called "mine," one would have little incentive to work to produce these resources, including those called mine.

But likewise, and obviously, many resources should be free . . . I shouldn't need the permission of the Einstein estate before I test his theory against newly discovered data. These resources and others gain value by being kept free rather than controlled. A mature society realizes that value by protecting such resources from both private and public control.

We need to learn this lesson again. The opportunity for this learning is the Internet. No modern phenomenon better demonstrates the importance of free resources to innovation and creativity than the Internet. To those who argue that control is necessary if innovation is to occur, and that more control will yield more innovation, the Internet is the simplest and most direct reply.

Scoring Guide: College Composition Examination

Readers will assign scores based on the following scoring guide.

6 – A 6 essay demonstrates a high degree of competence and sustained control, although it may have a few minor errors.

A typical essay in this category cites sources appropriately and

- develops a position effectively and insightfully, using well-chosen reasons, examples or details for support
- synthesizes* both sources effectively, with an effective and convincing link between the sources and the position
- is well focused and well organized
- demonstrates superior facility with language, using effective vocabulary and sentence variety
- demonstrates general mastery of the standard conventions of grammar, usage and mechanics but may have minor errors

5 – A 5 essay demonstrates a generally high degree of competence, although it will have occasional lapses in quality.

A typical essay in this category cites sources appropriately and

- develops a position consistently, using appropriate reasons, examples or details for support
- synthesizes both sources clearly, with a clear link between the sources and the position
- is generally well focused and well organized
- demonstrates facility with language, using appropriate vocabulary and some sentence variety
- demonstrates strong control of the standard conventions of grammar, usage and mechanics but may have minor errors

*For the purposes of scoring, synthesis refers to combining the sources and writer's position to form a cohesive, supported argument.

4 – A 4 essay demonstrates *competence*, with some errors and lapses in quality.

A typical essay in this category cites sources appropriately and

- develops a position adequately, using reasons, examples or details for support
- synthesizes both sources adequately, with a link between the sources and the position
- is adequately focused and organized
- demonstrates competence with language, using adequate vocabulary and minimal sentence variety
- generally demonstrates control of the standard conventions of grammar, usage and mechanics but may have some errors

3 – A 3 essay demonstrates *limited competence*.

A typical essay in this category exhibits ONE OR MORE of the following weaknesses:

- develops a position unevenly, often using assertions rather than relevant reasons, examples or details for support
- synthesizes one source only or two sources inadequately, or establishes an inadequate link between the source(s) and the position
- displays problems in citing sources: citations are confusing or incomplete
- is poorly focused and/or poorly organized
- displays frequent problems in the use of language
- demonstrates inconsistent control of grammar, usage and mechanics

2 – A 2 essay is *seriously flawed*.

A typical essay in this category exhibits ONE OR MORE of the following weaknesses:

- is seriously underdeveloped, providing few or no relevant reasons, examples or details for support
- synthesizes only one source weakly or establishes a very weak link between the source(s) and the position
- does not cite any source
- is unfocused and/or disorganized
- displays frequent serious errors in the use of language that may interfere with meaning
- contains frequent serious errors in grammar, usage and mechanics that may interfere with meaning

1 – A 1 essay is *fundamentally deficient*.

A typical essay in this category exhibits ONE OR MORE of the following weaknesses:

- does not develop a position
- fails to synthesize the source(s) used or uses no sources at all
- contains severe writing errors that persistently interfere with meaning

0 – Off topic Provides no evidence of an attempt to respond to the assigned topic, is written in a language other than English, merely copies the prompt, or consists of only keystroke characters.

Essay A—This essay is scored a 6.

The ability to own property is one of the hallmarks of a modern and democratic society. All individuals have a right to their own property, be it tangible (a house or a car that they have bought) or intangible (an artistic or intellectual work that they have created). But the right of ownership benefits not only individuals but society as well. As Richard Epstein, in his article “The Creators Own Ideas,” argues, “just as we protect private rights in land for the benefit of the community, not solely for a property’s owner, so too we have a social reason to protect writings and other intellectual creations.” Because copyright laws protect artistic and intellectual creations, they benefit society as a whole, and should therefore be upheld.

While “some creators are motivated solely by the desire to create,” most do expect to be compensated for their efforts (Epstein). Therefore, as Epstein indicates, there are “strong economic imperatives that drive modern societies to legislate some form of copyright protection.” Artists, writers, and other creators of intellectual and creative work spend countless hours of their time on their creations, which are often their only means of income. A major fear of creators is that somebody else will steal their work, thereby depriving them of their income. Fortunately, as Epstein points out, copyright laws protect against such infringement. Without such safeguards in place, creators may be less likely to release their works for fear that they may be stolen from. Without copyright laws guaranteeing just compensation to creators, productivity decreases, and society would not benefit from a wealth of artistic, creative, and intellectual works. But when producers of intellectual property are protected, productivity increases, fostering “huge positive contributions to society, in the form of novels, movies, manuals, music and other works” (Epstein).

*Lawrence Lessig, however, disagrees with this line of reasoning, arguing instead that copyright laws should be abolished. In his book *The Future of Ideas*, Lessig states: “I shouldn’t need the permission of the Einstein estate before I test his theory.” The flaw in this argument is that there is quite a difference between an artistic work and a scientific idea. While a novel or movie is the creative work of a person or persons, scientific ideas are meant to have their validity tested and scrutinized. Einstein’s theory of relativity isn’t a work of art,*

rather it is just what its name implies: a theory. A theory should be tested whenever the need arises because a theory is an attempt to explain how something works. It is not, however, a form of self expression. While Einstein certainly has the right to receive credit for his theory, it does not, and should not, have the same protection as a creative work, such as a piece of literature, art, or music.

Lessig uses the Internet as a model for a copyright-free society, claiming that “no modern phenomenon better demonstrates the importance of free resources to innovation and creativity.” However, while the Internet does function as an exchange of free ideas in some areas, even there people still strive to protect their intellectual property. For instance, you won’t find the full text from a Harry Potter book online, because the author doesn’t want her work to be stolen. In fact, quite a portion of the Internet is devoted to advertisement and trying to sell products, intellectual works included. While the Internet is certainly innovative, its creativity and innovation are not solely due to free ideas. The Internet also serves a global marketplace, and the sale of artistic works is a primary reason for its existence as well.

In conclusion, people have the right to “own” their own creations. Copyright laws exist to protect the rights of the creators. Without such protections, the drive for intellectual production will be stifled. With the right to property being so emphasized, copyright laws only make sense in order to fully preserve the rights of individuals, who in turn benefit society with their creative and intellectual contributions.

Commentary on Essay A

This response effectively develops a focused argument that copyright restrictions not only benefit individuals, who have a right to “own” their own creations, but society as a whole, which prospers from the artistic and intellectual contributions made by those individuals. Quotations from both sources (Epstein and Lessig) are effectively synthesized (“Therefore, as Epstein indicates . . .”) and appropriately cited. Paragraph three offers an insightful distinction between a scientific theory (Einstein’s theory of relativity) and a creative work (a novel or movie), while paragraph four uses the well-chosen example of a Harry Potter novel to further the argument that not

even the Internet is free from market considerations. The response demonstrates some minor errors in use of language (the unclear pronoun in “they may be stolen from” in paragraph two), but its superior facility with language, effective vocabulary (“hallmarks of a modern and democratic society”), and sustained control of grammar, usage and mechanics merit it a score of 6.

Essay B—This essay is scored a 4.

A copyright gives the author of a creative work exclusive rights to it: only the holder of a work’s copyright has the legal rights to copy, publish, or profit from the work. Therefore, copyright restrictions can only be beneficial to society.

According to Richard Epstein, “copyright fosters huge positive contributions to culture, in the form of novels, movies, manuals, music, and other works.” Epstein, further states that “some creators are motivated solely by the desire to create and would be happy to distribute their works under simple terms . . . requiring attribution only.” It is unfair for authors, musicians, and other copyright holders to not profit from their hard work: some of which takes months or even years to complete. In order for some of these copyright holders to make profits, they have to charge others for the remake or reproduction of their work. “Obviously many resources must be controlled if they are to be produced or sustained,” according to Lawrence Lessig.

However, Lessig argues, “many resources should be free . . . I shouldn’t need the permission of the Einstein estate before I test his theory against newly developed data.” But no one wants to work on a project without the possibility of not getting paid. The mindset that these resources should be free to reproduce is wrong. Not only is the money going back to the communities, the money these copyright holders get is going right back into the economy: this is a driving factor for the economy as well. Lessig, also states that “these resources and others gain value by being kept free rather than controlled.” Again, I disagree with Lessig’s statement. Society will benefit by keeping these works controlled rather than free, because the work will and forever be authentic, and not just some reproduce, unoriginal work.

When a work is being controlled, it gives society the first piece of work or the root of the source, from the source’s viewpoint. According to Epstein, “for most authors, compensation matters, and we increase their production by limiting the rights of others to copy their work.” Therefore, copyright restrictions not only good for the person who made it, but it is also good and beneficial to society.

Commentary on Essay B

The first paragraph sets out the response’s argument that “copyright restrictions can only be beneficial to society.” While this statement is slightly disconnected from the previous sentence, the response does present a clear position. In the next paragraph, the response adequately strengthens the position that authors, musicians and other creators should benefit from their works, using appropriate quotations from both sources for support. Displaying the response’s sustained development of the position, paragraph three disagrees with a statement from the second source and introduces the contention that the money gained by copyright holders is reintroduced into the economy, thereby providing an economic benefit to society. While the synthesis of quotations is sometimes stilted (“I disagree with Lessig’s statement”), there is nonetheless a link between the sources and the response’s position. Despite a weak start, the essay overall is competent in development, focus and organization. Some errors in grammar, usage and mechanics are present, but the control of language and vocabulary displayed in the essay is adequate to support a score of 4.

Essay C—This essay is scored a 2.

Copyrights are extremely common in our society; they can be found everywhere. To some people, copyrighting laws are just another rule and another way to prevent people from expanding their knowledge by sharing someone else's work. To other people: the creators, the arts, & the originators copyrighting is a source of income, privacy, & protection. A law that has benefited our society in more ways than one.

Copyrighting laws have had a positive effect on our society in the past years, although many would like to disagree and say that more intellectual resources should be free. However, when viewing copyrighted laws, I can not help but think about the originators. Whatever the item may be, it's theirs. They are the ones that spent countless hours, thoughts, and ideas on their project. I wouldn't want anyone to be able to take my hard work & sign their name beside it and then receive credit for it because they made a few minor adjustments. It's not ethical; it's wrong and it's stealing.

Also, if the society had the right mind set, they could see all of the positive effects of copyrights. One example of that would be to realize that if a big company published my book & copyrighted it, then the company (that has more power & connects) could distribute my work out into the world. More copies would be sent out and the more knowledge would be spread. Then, there's the argument that follows that point of view: More people can read the book, but they can't use anything from it, to test it, or apply it to their work. This rebuttal is incompetent. When in reality if someone did want to take from my own copyrighted book, yes, they would have to make a few phone calls to get permission from my estate, but if using my work was that important to someone else, it shouldn't even matter to them if they have to go the extra mile to do so.

In conclusion, society is benefitted by copyright laws along with the originators. People just have to look at it from the creator's point of view and realize that not everything can come as easy as the click of a mouse on the internet. If you want something bad enough, you have to put in the effort, make a few more calls, & work towards your goal.

Commentary on Essay C

While this response does formulate the argument that copyright restrictions have a positive effect on society, it displays inconsistencies in focus and organization that make it seriously limited in addressing the writing task. The essay provides an example of the benefits of copyright laws in paragraph three, but the example is weak and does not adequately illustrate how copyrighting the book in question would benefit society. The response takes the point of view of the “originators,” but the focus shifts from analyzing and discussing the merits of copyright laws to an exhortation to obey them instead. Synthesis of source materials is often inadequate, with the response simply summarizing rather than evaluating (“many would like to disagree and say that more intellectual resources should be free”). Most serious, however, is the total lack of citation: although the sources are clearly used (in paragraphs two and three), the response fails to attribute them. Therefore, while its weak organization, poor focus and frequent problems in the use of language (such as the sentence fragment at the end of the first paragraph) demonstrate this essay’s limited competence, its complete failure to cite renders it seriously flawed, earning it a score of 2.