

# TASC Essay Writing

For part of the TASC Writing test, you'll need to write an essay based on one or two reading passages. A writing prompt will ask you to either explain a topic or argue for a side in a debate. You'll need to use information from the readings in your essay.

The readings could be on topics from science, politics, etc. **The good news is that you don't need to have prior knowledge about the topics.** All the information you need will be provided in the readings.

There are two types of essays on the TASC, but you'll only need to write one depending on the prompt:

- **Argument/Opinion Essay** – A passage or two will present two sides of a debate. You'll need to argue for one side and against the other side, using evidence from the readings to support your position.
- **Informative/Explanatory Essay** – You'll be asked to explain an idea, process, point of view, or sequence of events from the reading. Make sure to use details from the passages.\*

Some students find the essay is challenging, partly because they don't have much experience writing essays. **One of the best ways to improve scores on the essay is to spend time preparing for it.** Study the essay tips below and then write a practice essay to have a teacher or tutor review. Then rewrite the same essay based on any suggestions. This practice won't take much time, and it's a good way to develop your writing skills to pass the essay part of the TASC.

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## Tips for a Better Essay

1. **Understand the prompt.** What are you being asked to do? Being clear about the essay requirements will help you focus your reading of the passage(s). As you read, you can underline information that will help you write your essay
2. **Organize your thoughts before writing.** Many students resist this step because they are worried about time. However, planning your writing, jotting down some ideas, and making an outline will all save time and help your essay be better organized.
3. **Your essay should look like an essay.**
  - Break your writing into paragraphs that have a clear focus.
  - Indent each paragraph or skip a line between paragraphs.
4. **A 3 to 4 paragraph is sufficient for the TASC.**
  - An introductory paragraph
  - 1 or 2 paragraphs that explain or argue your position and give details from the readings
  - A concluding paragraph.
  - Click here for an essay outline:  
[http://wikis.westchesterlibraries.org/ocfiles/Outline\\_for\\_TASC\\_Essay.pdf](http://wikis.westchesterlibraries.org/ocfiles/Outline_for_TASC_Essay.pdf)
5. **The first paragraph should include a thesis statement (a sentence that states your position for an opinion essay or sums up what your focus is in an explanatory essay).** For example:

**Thesis statement (opinion essay):** The government should prohibit children from playing violent video games.

**Thesis statement (opinion essay):** The government should not prohibit children from playing violent video games.

**Thesis statement (explanatory essay):** Helen Keller relied on her sense of touch to help her understand language.

**Don't worry if you don't feel strongly either way about a position.** Just choose a side that you can defend using evidence from the reading. It's not important that the scorers agree with you. They are only looking to see if you can organize your thoughts, use evidence from the readings to defend your position, and write well enough to communicate clearly.

6. **Use information from the readings.** This step is very important. You must show that you can use information, evidence, and details from the readings and present them in a clear manner.

There are two ways to use the information. You can paraphrase (put in your own words) and you can use direct quotes (exact words from the readings). When you are quoting the exact words, you must be very clear about this and use quotation marks.

- **Example – paraphrasing:** As the writer of passage A states, there are many studies which show that the more video games a person watches, the more likely that person is to be violent.
- **Example – exact words:** The writer of passage A states that, “numerous studies done by various groups show a positive correlation between video game usage and violence.”

7. **Use transitional words and phrases.** Expressions such as “in addition, additionally, furthermore, however”, etc. will help your writing flow smoothly. Using even a few transitional words will make a big difference!

8. **Have a general concluding statement that can be used for many topics.** If you worry that you won't have time to write a conclusion, then memorize a statement that you can modify for almost any opinion essay where you need to take a position. It should be a rewording of your thesis statement.

**General Statement:**

**In conclusion, the evidence clearly indicates that \_\_\_\_\_ . or  
In conclusion, it is important that \_\_\_\_\_ .**

Topic #1: In conclusion, the evidence clearly indicates that the government needs to regulate video game usage. **or** In conclusion, it is important that the government regulates video game usage.

Topic #2: In conclusion, the evidence clearly indicates that pre-school education will be beneficial for all children. **or** In conclusion, it is important that all children have access to pre-school education.

Topic #3: In conclusion, the evidence clearly indicates that mandatory gym classes are not necessary in high school. **or** In conclusion, it is important that gym classes in high school are optional.

**Explanatory essay conclusion (restating the thesis statement as a conclusion):** In conclusion, it is evident that Helen Keller relied heavily on her sense of touch to help her communicate with others.

9. **Look over your essay for mistakes in grammar, spelling, etc. But don't worry that you need to write a perfect essay - because you don't!** It's okay to have some misspellings or grammatical mistakes. But if you have time to correct those you can catch – even better.

10. **Practice.** Develop your essay writing skills by writing a practice essay. Preparing is the best way to do well for all subjects on the TASC!

- Click here for a practice essay:  
[http://wikis.westchesterlibraries.org/ocfiles/Essay\\_Nuclear\\_Energy.pdf](http://wikis.westchesterlibraries.org/ocfiles/Essay_Nuclear_Energy.pdf)
- Send your essay to [TASC@wlsmail.org](mailto:TASC@wlsmail.org) or bring it to one of our sessions. A tutor will work with you to develop your essay writing skills. For online help with essays, click here:  
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