

Writing

Writing Topics

The four writing topics included here may be found on PASS at www.louisianapass.org. Students may sign on to PASS and write a composition on one of these four topics, and then check back two days later to review their scores. (Students should always sign on to PASS using their same Screen Name and password.) Also included is a Scoring Checklist or rubric, along with more detailed comments to accompany this checklist.

Because of the nature of online writing (the ability to cut and paste, to quickly delete), students are not asked to write a rough draft on PASS. However, if students do not have regular access to a writing lab, it is recommended that they go through a prewriting phase and then write a rough draft before going online to write their final draft for scoring on PASS. Students who are not proficient at the keyboard may even choose to hand write a composition and later type it into PASS.

Teachers may want to have their students explore these four writing topics in different ways. Any variation of the following would be good writing practice:

1. Write the composition online on PASS and submit for scoring. After scored compositions are returned, students may volunteer to have their compositions printed out and placed on a transparency for the class to revise based on the scoring checklist.
2. Hand-write the composition and have a fellow student (or the teacher) score it using the rubric included.
3. Revise a composition that has been scored on PASS and re-submit it for scoring online.
4. After students have written and received scoring feedback on the topic “Everyday Hero,” make a transparency of the sample essay included here. Discuss with students the characteristics of good writing that they see in the sample essay. Finally, students can discuss ways that this essay could be improved. An assignment could be to revise the essay for further discussion.

Writing Topic 1

Read the topic in the box below, and write a well-organized composition of at least 150–200 words. Be sure to follow the suggestions listed under the box.

Your social studies teacher has asked you to write a composition explaining your response to the following:

Who do you consider to be an everyday hero—someone who does things that may or may not make the headlines but who makes other people’s lives better? Why do you think this person is an everyday hero?

Before you begin to write, think about one person whom you consider to be an everyday hero. What does this person do to make other people’s lives better? Why do you think the way you do?

Now write a multi-paragraph composition in which you name someone and explain why this person is an everyday hero.

- Give specific details, and explain why you think the way you do so that your teacher will understand what you mean.
- Be sure to write clearly and to check your composition for correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

Example of a well-written student response on “Everyday Hero”:

1 Parents in my opinion are great everyday heroes, especially mothers. Think about it. Mothers are always there for you when you need them. They hurt when they see you hurt. They understand what you are going through and sympathize with you. And when you are happy, they get happy (sometimes).

2 Mothers also seem to be everywhere at once. They always seem to be so busy! Mom wakes up early to make a nice hot breakfast for you, your brothers and sister, and (oh yes) we can't forget Dad. Then after the dishes are done and the lunches are made and she is finished screaming at you to “quit messing with your hair and brush your teeth!” she happily drives you and your siblings to school. She drives home and after she finishes scraping half-chewed Gummy Bears off the carpet, she crams in the thing she loves to do best, paying the bills. By the time she is finished writing the last check to pay off that Big-Screen TV Dad just had to get, it's time for her to pick up you and your siblings from school. She helps you with your homework and tries to “beat” into your six-year-old little brother that $2 + 2$ is not ten. Then she helps your older sister with her biology report (and Mom never took a biology class in high school).

3 After homework is done, it's time to make dinner. Everything is going smoothly until your four-year-old little sister comments on how the brussel sprouts are really “dinosaur poo-poo.” After Mom explains that dinosaurs are extinct, she hurries us (and herself) to bed for a much needed sleep. Mothers always seem to crunch everything in and still appear halfway sane. With the evidence I have given, there is no doubt in my mind that mothers are true heroes.

What makes this a well-written response? What are some examples of the following?

1. A clear, focused introduction leaves the reader no doubt about what to expect: examples of how mothers are heroic.
2. Examples are elaborated with interesting and humorous details, including dialogue and irony.
3. More details sum up the main idea to conclude the response.

Writing Topic 2

Read the topic in the box below, and write a well-organized composition of at least 150–200 words. Be sure to follow the suggestions listed under the box.

Your local school board is considering changing the school year so that students attend school year-round. Students will still have the same number of school days and vacation days, but the schedule will alternate between three months in school and one month off. You have decided to write a letter to your school board explaining how this change would change your life and the lives of your friends.

Before you begin to write, think about the advantages and disadvantages of attending school year round. In what ways would school and vacation be different? How much would they change?

Now write a letter to your school board. Be sure to give specific details and to support those details with clear examples and evidence. Explain what attending school year round would be like.

- Remember that your audience is the local school board; use appropriate language and explain your ideas clearly.
- Be sure to write clearly and to check your composition for correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

Writing Topic 3

Read the topic in the box below, and write a well-organized composition of at least 150–200 words. Be sure to follow the suggestions listed under the box.

Your English teacher has asked you to write a composition that describes life in the future.

Before you begin to write, think about specific ways life may change in the next 50 years. In what ways will society, the environment, and schools be different?

Now write a composition for your school's new literary magazine describing life 50 years from now. Be sure to give specific details and to support those details with clear examples and evidence. Describe what life will be like so that the readers of the magazine get a clear picture of the future.

- Remember that your audience is students in your school; use appropriate language, and explain your ideas clearly.
- Be sure to write clearly and to check your composition for correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

Writing Topic 4

Read the topic in the box below, and write a well-organized composition of at least 150–200 words. Be sure to follow the suggestions listed under the box.

As a class assignment, you are to write a composition that gives instructions about how to do something. Your composition could explain how to play a sport, create something, or carry out a specific task.

Before you begin to write, think about something you can do well. What are the most important steps a person would need to know about the activity? How would you organize a set of instructions so that the person could easily follow them?

Now write a multi-paragraph explanation for your class giving instructions about how to do something.

- Give specific details and enough information so that readers will understand your composition.
- Be sure to write clearly and to check your essay for correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar.



Written Composition: Scoring Checklist

| Okay | Needs Improvement |
|------|-------------------|
|------|-------------------|

Composing

| | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> You wrote on the assigned topic. <input type="checkbox"/> You presented a clear main idea. <input type="checkbox"/> You gave enough details to support the main idea. <input type="checkbox"/> You organized your ideas in a logical order. | <input type="checkbox"/> You did not write on the assigned topic. <input type="checkbox"/> Your central idea is not clear. <input type="checkbox"/> Your details are vague or minimal. <input type="checkbox"/> Your ideas are repeated or show gaps. |
|---|--|

Composing score: _____

Score one point for each mark in the left column (4 possible points).

Style/Audience Awareness

| | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> You wrote with your audience in mind. <input type="checkbox"/> You used vocabulary (words) that expressed your meaning well. <input type="checkbox"/> You used sentences that made your main idea interesting to your audience. <input type="checkbox"/> Your voice (or personality that shows in your writing) was clear and interesting. | <input type="checkbox"/> You wrote without an audience in mind. <input type="checkbox"/> Your vocabulary is weak and does not express your meaning well. <input type="checkbox"/> Your sentences are mostly simple. <input type="checkbox"/> Your voice (or your personality that shows in your writing) is not strong enough to make your writing as interesting as it could be. |
|--|--|

Style/Audience score: _____

Score one point for each mark in the left column (4 possible points).

Sentence Formation

| | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> For the most part, you wrote complete and correct sentences. | <input type="checkbox"/> Your composition contains run-ons and/or sentence fragments. |
|---|---|

Sentence Formation score: _____

Score one point for each mark in the left column (1 possible point).

Usage

| | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> For the most part, you wrote using appropriate subject-verb agreement, verb tenses, word meaning, and word endings. | <input type="checkbox"/> Your composition contains a pattern of errors in subject-verb agreement, verb tenses, word meaning, and/or word endings. |
|--|---|

Usage score: _____

Score one point for each mark in the left column (1 possible point).

Mechanics

| | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> For the most part, you wrote using correct punctuation and capitalization. | <input type="checkbox"/> Your composition contains many errors in punctuation and/or capitalization. |
|---|--|

Mechanics score: _____

Score one point for each mark in the left column (1 possible point).

Spelling

| | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> For the most part, you wrote using correct spelling. | <input type="checkbox"/> Your composition contains many spelling errors. |
|---|--|

Spelling score: _____

Score one point for each mark in the left column (1 possible point).

| |
|--|
| Total Score: _____ out of 12 points |
|--|

Comments on Scoring Checklist

1. *You did not write on the assigned topic.*

You must write on the assigned topic to get credit for composing and style/audience awareness.

2. *Your central idea is not clear.*

Your central idea (what your composition is about) is not very clear. Make sure that you state exactly what your composition is about. This will help the persons who read your composition to understand what you say.

3. *Your details are vague or minimal.*

You need to give enough facts to explain what you mean in your composition. When you give more information (also called "elaboration"), the person reading your paper will understand your ideas better. Try explaining what something looked like, smelled like, felt like, or sounded like. Tell your reader the names of people and things and interesting details about them. This makes your writing clear and interesting, instead of vague and dull.

4. *Your ideas are repeated or show gaps.*

You need to work on the organization of your composition. Remember that every composition needs a beginning (where you tell what you are going to write about), a middle (where you give details to explain what you mean), and an ending (where you complete and emphasize what you were writing about).

You also need to present facts or events in an order that makes sense. The details you use should support your main idea. This will make your writing seem whole or unified. If your facts are out of order, repeated, or leave out important information, the person who is reading your composition may not understand what you are trying to say.

5. *You wrote without an audience in mind.*

When you write, remember who will be reading your composition. Use words that your audience will relate to and understand.

6. *Your vocabulary is weak and does not express your meaning well.*

Try to use words that make your composition more interesting. Using specific words and action verbs helps a person reading your paper picture your ideas. You may even want to use a thesaurus and a dictionary.

Try to use examples and details in your composition that make it easy for someone reading your paper to know how you think and feel about the ideas you have presented. Make sure these examples and details relate to the writing topic.

7. Your sentences are mostly simple.

Try to use sentences that help make your composition "sound" better. If you write the same kind of sentence over and over, your composition can be boring to read. Try starting your sentences with different words or phrases and using both long and short sentences. Instead of always using the simple subject and verb pattern (I went to the store), make your writing more interesting by changing the pattern (Pedaling as fast as I could on my bike, I went to the store).

8. Your voice (or your personality that shows in your writing) is not strong enough to make your writing as interesting as it could be.

Try to express your personality in your writing by including ideas and details that show your own unique way of looking at the world. You can also do this by using different techniques, such as dialogue (Their mom said, "Hold it right there. Where are y'all going?"), exaggeration for humor ("I was crying so hard I bet Covington could hear me!"), or similes and metaphors ("We found a hula skirt, orange slippers, curlers, and a red Christmas tree skirt. My sister put them all on. She looked like a Hawaiian queen who had just woken up from hibernating.")

9. Your composition contains run-ons and/or sentence fragments.

Be careful to use complete sentences when you write. Make sure that every sentence has a subject and verb.

10. Your composition contains a pattern of errors in subject-verb agreement, verb tenses, word meaning, and/or word endings.

Make sure that you check for correct subject-verb agreement in your writing (for example, you should say "We **are** happy" instead of "We is happy"). Also, you should check to make sure that you use correct verbs (for example, "We **came** back yesterday" instead of "We come back yesterday") and adjectives and adverbs (for example, "I talked **quietly**" instead of "I talked quiet").

11. Your composition contains many errors in punctuation and/or capitalization.

Make sure that you use correct capitalization and punctuation in your composition. Be sure to read your final draft and correct any careless mistakes.

12. Your composition contains many spelling errors.

There are quite a few misspelled words in your composition. The next time you write, be sure to go back and check your spelling. Remember, you may use a dictionary on this part of the test.