

The Writing Test (optional)

The ACT Writing Test is a **30-minute essay** test that measures students' writing skills—specifically those writing skills emphasized in high school English classes and in entry-level college composition courses. The test consists of **one writing prompt that defines an issue and describes two points of view on that issue.**

The students are asked to respond to a question about their position on the issue described in the writing prompt. In doing so, **they may adopt one or the other of the perspectives** described in the prompt, or they may present a different point of view on the issue. The essay score is not affected by the point of view taken on the issue.

Taking the Writing Test does **not** affect a student's score on the multiple-choice tests or the Composite score for those tests. Rather, two additional scores are provided: a Combined English/Writing score and a Writing subscore. Also provided are comments on the student's essay.

Sample Prompt (from actstudent.org)

Educators debate extending high school to five years because of increasing demands on students from employers and colleges to participate in extracurricular activities and community service in addition to having high grades. Some educators support extending high school to five years because they think students need more time to achieve all that is expected of them. Other educators do not support extending high school to five years because they think students would lose interest in school and attendance would drop in the fifth year. In your opinion, should high school be extended to five years?

In your essay, **take a position on this question.** You may write about either one of the two points of view given, or you may present a different point of view on this question. Use specific reasons and examples to support your position.

College Readiness Standards — ACT Writing Test

	Expressing Judgments	Focusing on the Topic	Developing a Position
3–4	<p>Show a little understanding of the persuasive purpose of the task but neglect to take or to maintain a position on the issue in the prompt</p> <p>Show limited recognition of the complexity of the issue in the prompt</p>	<p>Maintain a focus on the general topic in the prompt through most of the essay</p>	<p>Offer a little development, with one or two ideas; if examples are given, they are general and may not be clearly relevant; resort often to merely repeating ideas</p> <p>Show little or no movement between general and specific ideas and examples</p>
5–6	<p>Show a basic understanding of the persuasive purpose of the task by taking a position on the issue in the prompt but may not maintain that position</p> <p>Show a little recognition of the complexity of the issue in the prompt by acknowledging, but only briefly describing, a counterargument to the writer's position</p>	<p>Maintain a focus on the general topic in the prompt throughout the essay</p>	<p>Offer limited development of ideas using a few general examples; resort sometimes to merely repeating ideas</p> <p>Show little movement between general and specific ideas and examples</p>
7–8	<p>Show understanding of the persuasive purpose of the task by taking a position on the issue in the prompt</p> <p>Show some recognition of the complexity of the issue in the prompt by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> acknowledging counterarguments to the writer's position providing some response to counterarguments to the writer's position 	<p>Maintain a focus on the general topic in the prompt throughout the essay and attempt a focus on the specific issue in the prompt</p> <p>Present a thesis that establishes focus on the topic</p>	<p>Develop ideas by using some specific reasons, details, and examples</p> <p>Show some movement between general and specific ideas and examples</p>
9–10	<p>Show clear understanding of the persuasive purpose of the task by taking a position on the specific issue in the prompt and offering a broad context for discussion</p> <p>Show recognition of the complexity of the issue in the prompt by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> partially evaluating implications and/or complications of the issue, and/or posing and partially responding to counter-arguments to the writer's position 	<p>Maintain a focus on discussion of the specific topic and issue in the prompt throughout the essay</p> <p>Present a thesis that establishes a focus on the writer's position on the issue</p>	<p>Develop most ideas fully, using some specific and relevant reasons, details, and examples</p> <p>Show clear movement between general and specific ideas and examples</p>
11–12	<p>Show clear understanding of the persuasive purpose of the task by taking a position on the specific issue in the prompt and offering a critical context for discussion</p> <p>Show understanding of the complexity of the issue in the prompt by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> examining different perspectives, and/or evaluating implications or complications of the issue, and/or posing and fully discussing counterarguments to the writer's position 	<p>Maintain a clear focus on discussion of the specific topic and issue in the prompt throughout the essay</p> <p>Present a critical thesis that clearly establishes the focus on the writer's position on the issue</p>	<p>Develop several ideas fully, using specific and relevant reasons, details, and examples</p> <p>Show effective movement between general and specific ideas and examples</p>

College Readiness Standards — ACT Writing Test (continued)

	Organizing Ideas	Using Language
3–4	<p>Provide a discernible organization with some logical grouping of ideas in parts of the essay</p> <p>Use a few simple and obvious transitions</p> <p>Present a discernible, though minimally developed, introduction and conclusion</p>	<p>Show limited control of language by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • correctly employing some of the conventions of standard English grammar, usage, and mechanics, but with distracting errors that sometimes significantly impede understanding • using simple vocabulary • using simple sentence structure
5–6	<p>Provide a simple organization with logical grouping of ideas in parts of the essay</p> <p>Use some simple and obvious transitional words, though they may at times be inappropriate or misleading</p> <p>Present a discernible, though underdeveloped, introduction and conclusion</p>	<p>Show a basic control of language by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • correctly employing some of the conventions of standard English grammar, usage, and mechanics, but with distracting errors that sometimes impede understanding • using simple but appropriate vocabulary • using a little sentence variety, though most sentences are simple in structure
7–8	<p>Provide an adequate but simple organization with logical grouping of ideas in parts of the essay but with little evidence of logical progression of ideas</p> <p>Use some simple and obvious, but appropriate, transitional words and phrases</p> <p>Present a discernible introduction and conclusion with a little development</p>	<p>Show adequate use of language to communicate by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • correctly employing many of the conventions of standard English grammar, usage, and mechanics, but with some distracting errors that may occasionally impede understanding • using appropriate vocabulary • using some varied kinds of sentence structures to vary pace
9–10	<p>Provide unity and coherence throughout the essay, sometimes with a logical progression of ideas</p> <p>Use relevant, though at times simple and obvious, transitional words and phrases to convey logical relationships between ideas</p> <p>Present a somewhat developed introduction and conclusion</p>	<p>Show competent use of language to communicate ideas by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • correctly employing most conventions of standard English grammar, usage, and mechanics, with a few distracting errors but none that impede understanding • using some precise and varied vocabulary • using several kinds of sentence structures to vary pace and to support meaning
11–12	<p>Provide unity and coherence throughout the essay, often with a logical progression of ideas</p> <p>Use relevant transitional words, phrases, and sentences to convey logical relationships between ideas</p> <p>Present a well-developed introduction and conclusion</p>	<p>Show effective use of language to clearly communicate ideas by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • correctly employing most conventions of standard English grammar, usage, and mechanics, with just a few, if any, errors • using precise and varied vocabulary • using a variety of kinds of sentence structures to vary pace and to support meaning

Sample Essay (Score = 1)

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Begin WRITING TEST Here.

In this essay I am writing about that school should be extended for five year. I think that school should be extended for five year because it will help you how you are educate. The school for five year will help you a lot when you are doing something. The school for five year could help you in most everything that you are doing. I think that if you go to school for five years you could learn a lot of skills. School could help you out of most anything that you want to do in this world. School could teach you how to be educator. By going to school is a good thing because if you go to school it could help have experience in everything that you are doing. To have experience you to do that thing you do best and how well you do at it. I think that school could teach you how to have experience in everything you are doing. I know that to go to school you have to choice to go to school because nobody can make you go to school. I know that school are not for everyone but I think that every children should go to school because if you don't go to school you will not be educate. I know that when you have an education it is a good thing. School is a place where you could learn a lot of different that you don't know. I know that I learn a lot of thing I didn't know but I know them. By going to school you make new friends, and you see

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a lot of different people like people that is not from the United States. At school you do classwork and do all type of assignment your teacher told you to do. I believe that every students should want to be educator because you need education in this world. School shouldn't be a place where students fights. I think that every students should like going to school.

Scoring Explanation

This essay shows little skill in responding to the writing task.

While the writer takes a position on the issue in the beginning of the essay (*I think that school should be extended for five year because it will help you how you are educate*), the rest of the discussion does not convey reasons to support that position. Instead, the writer minimally develops many different ideas about school in general, repeating ideas rather than explaining them (*School is a place where you could learn a lot of different that you don't know. I know that I learn a lot of thing I didn't know but I know them*). At times, statements supporting claims are not understandable (*By going to school is a good thing because if you go to school it could help have experience in everything that you are doing. To have experience you to do that thing you do best and how well you do at it*).

There is no discernable organization to the essay other than a minimal introductory statement: ideas are not logically grouped, no transitions are used, and no conclusion is offered. Sentence structure and word choice are consistently simple, with sentences repeatedly beginning with, "I think" or "I know."

Language usage errors are frequently distracting and contribute to difficulty understanding some portions of the essay.

Sample Essay (Score = 2)

Page 1

Begin WRITING TEST Here.

If you ever ask a highschool student whether they would want to go one more year very few would say yes. I would, not because I like school, not because I enjoy spending six hours cooped up inside, but because I could use one more year to just be sure I am completely prepared for college. Along with this I feel that because we are required to take tenth grade graduation test and most of our tenth grade year is spent preparing for this test.

Highschool students today are highly prepared for the world, but that one extra year in high school could possibly be spent taking time on preparatory courses in college type setting. Students get thrown into the college setting which is a major shock to them due to the major differences. Maybe doing this our freshmen's first quarter wouldn't be as much of a change.

Because we have to take the graduation test in tenth grade we don't learn anything that year. We need another year due to that, so we should go one more year to make sure we are ready.

Scoring Explanation

This essay demonstrates inconsistent skill in responding to the task. The writer takes a position but displays no recognition of a counter-argument to that position.

Development of ideas is thin with general statements to explain the first idea (*Students get thrown into the college setting which is a major shock to them due to the major differences*) and very little explanation of the second idea (*Because we have to take the graduation test in tenth grade we don't learn anything that year*).

There is some indication of an organizational structure: a discernible introduction offers two ideas, with each discussed in its own paragraph. The conclusion is minimal and not clearly separated from discussion of the writer's second idea (*We need another year due to that, so we should go one more year to make sure we are ready*). Transitions are simple (*but, because*).

Sentence structure shows some variety (*I would, not because I like school, not because I enjoy spending six hours cooped up inside, but because I could use one more year to just be sure I am completely prepared for college*) and word choice is appropriate to the discussion (*cooped up inside, preparatory courses, freshmen's first quarter*).

Sample Essay (Score = 3)

Page 1

Begin WRITING TEST Here.

Educators debate extending high school to five years because of increasing demands on students from employers and colleges to participate in extracurricular activities and community service in addition to having high grades. Some educators support extending high school to five years because they think students need more time to achieve all that is expected of them. Other educators do not support extending high school to five years because they think students would lose interest in school and attendance would drop in the fifth year. Both sides have strong points, but I agree with the educators who say that their shouldn't be an extension to high school adding a fifth year.

I agree that high school should not be made up of a fifth year because I agree with those people who say that students would lose interest. Some adolescence are already losing interest in school and an increasing number of students are becoming dropouts. Being an high school student myself, it is hard and some students don't realize their full potential and think it is easier to give up than to succeed. I think adding an extra year to high school would increase the number of dropouts a year, create very serious attendance dilemmas, and cause student's interest in school to decline.

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I also feel that there should not be another year to high school because I just feel that it should be a job of the instructors at an high school to prepare us, high school students, for college within those four years of high school. I feel that creating another year to high school would decrease the teacher's interest and they would do a poor job and wait until the fifth year to make up for their mistakes. The teacher should have the need to do their best to prepare us for college and careers within the four years of high school

I just think that five years is too long and students would get bored with school. Their drive would definitely decline. Students would lose interest and attendance would drop. The students would become dropouts.

Scoring Explanation

This essay shows some understanding of the writing task.

The writer takes a position on the issue (*Both sides have strong points, but I agree with the educators who say that their shouldn't be an extension to high school adding a fifth year*) and offers some context for discussion by repeating the prompt as an introduction. By using the prompt as part of the essay, the writer acknowledges a counter-argument but does not discuss it at all.

Two main ideas are developed to support the writer's position (. . . *I agree with those people who say that students would lose interest. . . . I also feel that there should not be another year to high school because I just feel that it should be a job of the instructors at an high school to prepare us, high school students, for college within those four years of high school*), with the first idea repeated twice in separate parts of the discussion (*I just think that five years is too long and students would get bored with school*). Discussion of each idea is limited to general statements that are never illustrated by specific reasons, examples, or details (*I feel that creating yet another year to high school would decrease the teacher's interest and they would do a poor job and wait until the fifth year to make up for their mistakes*), but the essay does maintain focus on the specific issue in the prompt.

Organization is simple and clear but provides no evidence that ideas in the essay are logically sequenced within the discussion. Simple transitions connect the paragraphs (*I agree . . . I also feel . . . I just think . . .*) without making meaningful connections between ideas. The introduction and conclusion are clearly discernible as intentional frames for the discussion, but are underdeveloped—either because the language is merely repeated from the prompt or because the writer did not extend summation past a single conclusive statement. Language use shows some sentence variety (*Some adolescence are already losing interest in school and an increasing number of students are becoming dropouts*) and appropriate word choice (*potential, succeed, attendance*). Some errors distract but do not impede understanding.

Sample Essay (Score = 4)

Page 1 Begin WRITING TEST Here.

Educators debate extending high school to five years due to the increasing demands on students from employers and colleges. Those for it say that it will give students more time to achieve what is expected, and those against it say that students would lose interest and attendance will drop in year five. Of course there seems to be advantages and disadvantages to both, but let's be realistic, in America today, education isn't exactly our most relishing topic. I feel that extending high school one more year is a bad idea for three reasons, students really only have three years, there will be a loss of interest, and it's just a "band aid" for bigger problems.

Firstly, if you think about it, there are really only three years of high school, because does anyone really get anything done senior year? No. Senior year is a time of waiting, for school to end, for your acceptance letters to come in, it's a time of waiting. Not to mention the commonly known disease that seems to incubate all seniors called "senioritis". Senioritis is basically not doing anything. With 5 years of high school students would waste 2 years to senioritis instead of just one.

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Out of the millions of students enrolled in high school, maybe one out of 5 truly enjoys school, where as the others just treat it as a social gathering very early in the morning. After the first three years of high school, coming into your senior year, you become a human form of a slug, very slow, both physically and mentally. Of course I might be over exaggerating maybe a little bit, but the interest is gone after sophomore year. What makes you think that it will magically pop up after an addition of one more year? It will just be more time to be bored.

Lastly, extending high school an extra year just seems like a band aid for all the problems in the field of education. At a time where the illiteracy and dropout rate seems to be rising as much as gas prices these days, one more year isn't going to cut it. The solution isn't that easy.

So in conclusion, four years is ample time to achieve greatness and fully take advantage of high school. For those that don't think so, explain how most of my generations parents did it in four years, does that make them super heroes? I think not. Another year is just not a smart idea.

Scoring Explanation

This essay demonstrates adequate skill in responding to the task.

The writer takes a position (*I feel that extending high school one more year is a bad idea for three reasons . . .*) and offers some context for the discussion (*Educators debate extending high school to five years due to the increasing demands on students for employers and colleges. Those for it say that it will give students more time to achieve what is expected, and those against it say that students would lose interest and attendance will drop in year five*). The essay also shows some recognition of complexity by acknowledging multiple perspectives and providing some response to counter-arguments to the writer's position (*Of course there seems to be advantages and disadvantages to both, but let's be realistic, in America today, education isn't exactly our most relishing topic*).

Development of ideas is adequate, with three ideas discussed and with some movement between general statements (*extending high school an extra year just seems like a band aid for all the problems in the field of education*) and specific examples and details (*At a time where the illiteracy and dropout rate seems to be rising as much as gas prices these days, one more year isn't going to cut it*). Focus on the specific issue in the prompt is maintained throughout the essay.

The organization of the essay is apparent but predictable, with obvious transitions (*Firstly, Lastly, So in conclusion*). There is some evidence of logical sequencing within the third paragraph (*coming into senior year, you become a human form of a slug. . . . the interest is gone after sophomore year. What makes you think that it will magically pop up after a addition of one more year? It will just be more time to be bored*). The introduction and conclusion are both clear and somewhat developed. The writer demonstrates adequate ability with language, using a variety of sentence types and some appropriate word choice (*extending, social gathering, physically and mentally, illiteracy*) as well as some inaccurate and distracting word choice (*relishing, incubate*). Other errors also distract the reader but do not impede understanding.

Sample Essay (Score = 5)

Page 1

Begin WRITING TEST Here.

Demand for more credits, community service, and better grades runs many high schoolers ragged. For many anything but the best is simply unexceptionable. In a society that constantly tells it's youth they must have the highest pay check and newest car to be happy, why wouldn't this be the case? A fifth year of high school would give students more opportunity to take classes they would enjoy, take stress off of teenagers, and give the youth of our nation a chance to develop good priorities.

Schools are always adding new and interesting courses, but for many, like the college bound student, there just isn't the time. Though an arts and crafts class might sound like fun, something like AP Music Theory would probably look better on a transcript. Since there is no time to take both the student will probably take the harder class even if it is just to keep up appearances. Fifteen years old seems to early to start making "career" choices over things that would be fun. But it happens and it causes stress.

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Teenagers in the country have an ever growing load of stress being placed upon them. Starting before high school teens are faced with the questions: Where are you going to college? How are you going to get there? What are you going to be? All these questions are extremely daunting and often stress students out. Also, with the price of college so high many students take on a job during high school which only adds to the stress. With an extra year of high school not only would students have time to think through big decisions, but they would also be better able to balance work with school.

Time is so fleeting in this day and age. There is never enough time. No time for family, no time for relaxing, no time for sleep. Even if some time is stolen to recuperate, aren't the youth told that if they rest at home or sleep too much they are lazy and worthless?! While too much "vegging" could be a problem, teens need to know what is important and necessary for their mental and physical health. At the pace of many high schoolers lives, this generation is sure to be one full of workaholics. Is that really what are society needs? When the lesson students learn in school is one that exhausts them and sets them up for an unhealthy lifestyle in their future, it is time for a change.

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With such a high demands placed on the youth of our nation, it seems only fair that they are given more time. They are only young once. Teens should not be forced to grow up at such a fast pace. An extra year of high school will allow students to enjoy their education by giving them the gift of time, time to relax, time to take classes at their own pace and maintain a healthy lifestyle, time to discover the fun and interest in school. More time in high school will benefit students now and in the future.

Scoring Explanation

This essay takes a position in favor of extending high school and offers a broad context for discussion by situating high school effort within a larger society that values excellence and high achievement (*In a society that constantly tells it's youth they must have the highest pay check and newest car to be happy, why wouldn't this be the case?*).

The essay demonstrates recognition of complexity with discussion of the complications of the issue in the fourth paragraph. First, the writer establishes that students never have enough time, then anticipates the stereotype of the lazy teenager who "sleeps too much," then attempts to solve the acknowledged complication that "too much 'vegging' could be a problem." The essay thus demonstrates an ability to treat the complexity of the issue without undermining the essay's position or logic.

Development of ideas is specific and logical. The essay moves between general ideas (*Schools are always adding new and interesting courses, but for many, like the college bound student, there just isn't the time*) and specific examples (*Though an arts and crafts class might sound like fun, something like AP Music Theory would probably look better on a transcript*). Moreover, some ideas are developed fully as the writer draws critical conclusions from the discussion (*Fifteen years old seems to early to start making "career" choices over things that would be fun*).

The essay has a simple structural organization, but generally demonstrates logical progression of ideas, especially through the second and fourth paragraphs. Transitions between ideas are well crafted both between paragraphs (*But it happens and it causes stress. . . . Teenagers in the country have an ever growing load of stress being placed upon them*) and within paragraphs to make logical connections between ideas.

Language use in the essay is generally clear, although misspellings of homophones (*its/it's, our/are*) are distracting. Some incorrect punctuation is also distracting, but the mistakes do not impede understanding. Some precise vocabulary (*daunting, fleeting, generation*) and a variety of sentence constructions are used effectively throughout the essay.

Sample Essay (Score = 6)

Page 1

Begin WRITING TEST Here.

The Senior Itch—the incurable chaffing we all crave to scratch. The cure? Graduation. As we progress through our high school years growing with wisdom and maturity, we all yearn for freedom. Yet what we desire most is not always what is best for us. Although most won't want to admit it, extending our high school career to five years would make an important and beneficial impact on our future. With the four years that are currently provided, there is not enough time for motivated students to accomplish their goals before college. Merely being accepted by a selective college or university requires much pre-planned effort that is literally unavailable to students already concerned with grades and other activities.

Colleges look most thoroughly at how an applicant used his or her four years of high school. Leadership roles, a dedication to an organization, and a well-rounded, involved student is appealing to the most elite educational institutions. Often, students desire leadership positions in numerous extra-curricular organizations, but face limiting regulations on the number of offices they may hold at one time. Even if a school doesn't limit students' involvement, students

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eventually reach the limits of what a 24-hour day can hold. Too often, students cannot participate as much as they want in as many extra-curriculars as they want because there just isn't time. With an extra year of high school, those involved in more than one activity could successfully find the time to contribute to and to lead each one. Colleges would see a longer, more developed individual's resume that included a time for each of their interests. The organizations would benefit from stronger student participation and the students would be recognized for their true efforts as well.

Because they struggle to gain leadership roles and become the well-rounded students colleges desire, the task of maintaining a respectable grade-point-average during high school is a struggle for many students. It is difficult to be involved in activities of interest while still keeping high grades. However, colleges don't consider this when they seek applicants with high grade-point-averages in their admissions pool. Elongating the span of high school would allow more students with both grades and activities on their agenda to spend more time focusing on each separate interest. Rather than feeling forced to crunch a large block of "weighted" classes together in hopes of elevating

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their GPA, students would find more time to spread out their difficult classes and make the most of every single year. With less pressure and more time, grades would improve for all dedicated students, as would the enjoyment of studying those subjects and the increased retainment of what we learned in those classes.

Education aside, many high school students find that four years is not enough time to accomplish their varied goals. For instance, a student may desire a job in addition to school. The money they earn may help pay their way through college. With such a short preparation period before college, they can hardly be expected to make a successful life for themselves without the proper funds. Also, many students are interested in community service prior to attending college, but find they do not have enough time in the four-year high school period. Colleges are drawn to students with a rich assortment of community service and evidence of responsibilities such as holding a job, but students have a hard time finding the hours to put into these tasks.

High school is the foundation of the rest of our life. Like money in the bank, the investment of an additional year when we are young can

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make all the difference. With the additional time, motivated students would be able to become more involved in their schools, boost their grades, and find the time for a job and community service. Colleges admire these attributes, and for the sake of high-schoolers' acceptance into these institutions, more time should be provided for their endeavors. High school students work hard toward their future. Another year would help ensure their success.

Scoring Explanation

This essay demonstrates effective skill in responding to the writing task.

The essay takes a position on the issue (*extending our high school career to five years would make an important and beneficial impact on our future*) and offers a critical context for discussion (*Yet what we desire most is not always what is best for us*). Complexity is addressed as the writer anticipates and responds to a counter-argument to the discussion (*Even if a school doesn't limit students' involvement, students eventually reach the limits of what a 24-hour day can hold*). Development is ample, specific and logical, discussing most ideas fully in terms of the resulting implications (*Colleges would see a longer, more developed individual's resume that included a time for each of their interests. The organizations would benefit from stronger student participation and the students would be recognized for their true efforts as well*). Clear focus on the specific issue in the prompt is maintained.

Organization of the essay is clear though predictable. Most of the essay demonstrates logical sequencing of ideas (*It is difficult to be involved in activities of interest while still keeping high grades. However, colleges don't consider this when they seek applicants with high grade-point-averages in their admissions pool. Elongating the span of high school would allow more students with both grades and activities on their agenda to spend more time focusing on each separate interest*). Transitions are used throughout the essay (*Although, Even if, However, Rather than*) and are often integrated into the essay (*Because they struggle to gain leadership roles and become the well-rounded students colleges desire, the task of maintaining a respectable grade-point-average during high school is a struggle for many students*). The conclusion and especially the introduction are effective and well developed.

The essay shows a good command of language, with precise and varied sentences and word choice (*The Senior Itch—the incurable chaffing we all crave to scratch. . . . Merely being accepted by a selective college or university requires much pre-planned effort that is literally unavailable to students already concerned with grades and other activities*).

There are few errors to distract the reader.