

A Student Guide to

Writing ON DEMAND

Strategies for
High-Scoring
Essays



Anne Ruggles Gere • Leila Christenbury • Kelly Sassi

HEINEMANN Portsmouth, NH

Heinemann

A division of Reed Elsevier Inc.
361 Hanover Street
Portsmouth, NH 03801-3912
www.heinemann.com

Offices and agents throughout the world

© 2006 by Anne Ruggles Gere, Leila Christenbury, and Kelly Sassi

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer, who may quote brief passages in a review.

The author and publisher wish to thank those who have generously given permission to reprint borrowed material:

Excerpt from *The House on Mango Street*. Copyright © 1984 by Sandra Cisneros. Published by Vintage Books, a division of Random House, Inc., and in hardcover by Alfred A. Knopf in 1994. Reprinted by permission of Susan Bergholz Literary Services, New York. All rights reserved.

Prompt from the Illinois State Board of Education. Copyright © 2005, Illinois State Board of Education, reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

Prompts from the Delaware Department of Education, reprinted by permission of the Delaware Department of Education.

Rubric for the ACT Writing Test, reprinted by permission of ACT, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
[t/k]

Editor: James Strickland
Production editor: Sonja S. Chapman
Cover design: Catherine Hawkes, Cat & Mouse
Compositor: Tom Allen/Pear Graphic Design
Manufacturing: Louise Richardson

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper
10 09 08 07 06 VP 1 2 3 4 5

*For all our students, present and future,
who face high-stakes writing tests.*

Contents

Acknowledgments

ix

Part One: Getting Ready for the Timed Writing Test

Chapter 1	Facing Your Fears	1
Chapter 2	Facing the Test	8
Chapter 3	Using Literature to Write	16
Chapter 4	The Power of the Sentence	32
Chapter 5	Using What You Can Already Do	46

Part Two: Writing for the Test

Chapter 6	Analyzing Prompts	58
Chapter 7	What to Expect When You're Expected to Write	77
Chapter 8	Specific Tests and Expectations: ACT, SAT, AP, and State Tests	96
Chapter 9	Writing Beyond the Test	116

Appendix A

<i>Web Sources for AP, SAT, and ACT</i>	<i>125</i>
---	------------

Appendix B

<i>Chapter Five Possible Responses for Comparison</i>	<i>126</i>
---	------------

Appendix C

<i>Chapter Six Possible Responses for Comparison</i>	<i>128</i>
--	------------

Appendix D

<i>Chapter Seven Possible Responses for Comparison</i>	<i>132</i>
--	------------

Appendix E

<i>State Writing Test URLs</i>	<i>133</i>
--------------------------------	------------

Acknowledgments

Many people helped shape this book, and we are grateful to all of them. Teachers with whom we have worked helped us understand the challenges of writing tests more fully and convinced us that a student guide would be helpful. Students who shared their work with us and talked with us about their experiences with high-stakes writing tests taught us a great deal. Our editors Jim Strickland and Sonja Chapman provided a wonderful mixture of critique and support. Thanks to everyone.

Analyzing Prompts

Well, I read it, then read it again, then again 'cause there was one essay where I did horrible 'cause I read the question wrong and then I ended up answering something else that I wasn't supposed to.

—SID

I get into this zone where I'm really focused on the prompt, and I tune out all the noise and the other students and the pressure. If you reread the prompt and really think about the poems, your body relaxes. Also, I try to block out everything except the prompt. I don't think about what people are doing on the weekend or the prom or anything. Make the prompt your world for twenty minutes or so.

—MAYA

If timed essays are like track races, then prompts are like event names—the 100-yard dash, the 440 relay, the long jump. Unlike the track star who approaches the starting line with a strategy in mind for the race in which he or she is competing, when you sit down at the start of a timed writing test, you don't even know the prompt. You have to show up at the “starting line” prepared to perform a variety of writing tasks—the expository essay, the persuasive essay, the compare and contrast, and so on.

To help you prepare, let us give you a quick definition of a prompt before we go any further. A prompt is “something said or suggested to incite to action, or to help the memory.” In this chapter, we'll give you the strategies to contend confidently with the challenges presented by prompts.

Our back story starts in 1866 when Alexander Bain, a Scottish rhetorician, wrote *English Composition and Rhetoric*, which described what we know today as the four modes—exposition, description, narration, and argument (a handy acronym for remembering them is EDNA). You may have been asked to write one or more of these types of essays in your English class.

Exposition: written to inform the audience

Description: written to describe something

Narration: written to tell a story

Argumentation: written to persuade the audience to the position promoted

Why is it useful to know these terms? Well, many writing-on-demand prompts refer to the modes, and you will be more comfortable responding to those prompts if you

know what conventions the mode calls for. To help you analyze or take apart prompts, we'll use our secret weapon: the Prompt Analysis Questions—or, as we like to call them, the PAQs.

Five PAQs

The PAQs help you become a close reader of prompts, which will help you avoid the rookie mistake that Sid mentions at the beginning of this chapter. Of course, prompts vary radically in the types and amount of information they provide about the kind of writing expected, so it may not be possible to answer every question for each prompt or assignment. However, learning to ask and answer a series of questions about the claim/topic, audience, purpose/mode, strategies, and role helps you figure out what is required and generate ideas for meeting that requirement.

With that in mind, we offer the PAQs below to help you unlock the secrets of any prompt. Each of the five questions can be amplified by additional questions. These questions recur throughout this chapter and the rest of the book because we have found them particularly useful for understanding prompts and assignments.

To help you analyze, or take apart prompts, we'll use our secret weapon: the Prompt Analysis Questions—or, as we like to call them, the PAQs.

PAQs

1. What is the *central claim/topic* called for?
Do I have choices to make with regard to this claim/topic? Will I need to focus the claim/topic in order to write a good essay? What arguments can I make for this claim? What do I know about this topic?
2. Who is the intended *audience*?
If named specifically, what do I know about this particular audience? If the audience is implied or not identified, what can I infer about it or them? In either event, how might the expectations of this audience affect my choices as a writer?
3. What is the *purpose/mode* for the writing task?
Is the purpose stated or must it be inferred? What is this writing supposed to accomplish (besides fulfilling the demands of the prompt/assignment)? What does the goal of this writing suggest about the mode (narration, exposition, description, argument) or combination of modes that I should consider in responding?
4. What *strategies* will be most effective?
What does the purpose/mode suggest about possible strategies? Of the strategies I am comfortable using—like examples, definitions, analysis, classification, cause/effect, compare/contrast—which will be most effective here? Are there any strategies—such as number of examples or type of support—that are specified as required?
5. What is my *role* as a writer in achieving the purpose?
Have I been assigned a specific role like *applicant* or *representative*? If I have not been assigned a specific role, what does the prompt or assignment tell me about the level of expertise I should demonstrate, the stance I should assume, or the approach I should take?

You might have some questions about some of the terms in our questions. If so, you may find these definitions useful:

Claim: Often confused with *topic*, claim is what an argument rests on. Some prompts specify a particular topic on which the claim needs to be based. Here is an example of the difference between topic and claim:
Topic: The role of experience in learning.
Claim: One can learn in many ways, but the most effective is through direct experience.

Purpose and Mode. The purpose designated by the prompt—to explain, to describe, to argue, and so on—will usually dictate the mode of writing to be used. The modes frequently blur into one another because it’s very difficult to write an explanation without some description or argue without explanation.

Rhetorical strategies: Techniques for writing well and/or organizing your ideas so that the reader can understand your point. Some examples are compare/contrast, cause/effect, example, definition, and so on.

Stance: The different positions writers take in relation to their audience and topic.

In the following pages we will show how you can use prompt analysis to engage a wide variety of prompts and assignments. Now, let’s look at some actual prompts. Here, for example, is a prompt that students may find challenging because of the number of questions it poses:

You are completing a job application. As part of the application process, your potential employer requires a writing sample explaining the expression “experience is the best teacher” and telling how it applies to you or someone you know.
Write what you will present to your potential employer.
Thinking about the following will help you focus and plan your writing.

- What might the expression “experience is the best teacher” mean?
- What are some experiences you have had (or someone you know has had) that taught you an important lesson?
- What did you learn and why was it valuable? The following chart shows how you can understand and begin to generate ideas for responding to this prompt. Note that the categories in each column correspond to the five PAQs.

<i>Prompt</i>	<i>Claim/Topic (Question 1)</i>	<i>Audience (Question 2)</i>	<i>Purpose/Mode (Question 3)</i>	<i>Strategies (Question 4)</i>	<i>Role (Question 5)</i>
1	Experience is the best teacher	Potential employer	Exposition	Examples, Cause and effect	Applicant

Your Turn

Use the chart below to do a similar analysis of other prompts. Read the three prompts that follow. These are similar to the actual prompts from the SAT. Can you determine topic, audience, etc.? To what extent does a chart like this help you address and respond to the prompt or prompts? When you are finished, check your responses with ours in Appendix C at the end of the book.

Prompt 1: Gradually, almost painfully, I began to understand that what I called “wilderness” was an absurdity, nothing more than a figment of the European imagination. Unless all human beings can learn to imagine themselves as intimately and inextricably related to every aspect of the world they inhabit, with the extraordinary responsibilities such a relationship entails—unless they can learn what indigenous people of the Americas knew and often still know—the earth simply will not survive.

—Adapted from Louis Owens, *The American Indian Wilderness*

Assignment: How is the way we conceptualize wilderness related to the survival of the earth? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

Prompt 2: Silence, in its way, is fundamental to life, the emotional equivalent of carbon. Ensnared in webs of sound, those of us living in the industrialized West today must pick our way through a discordant, infinite-channeled auditory landscape.

—Adapted from Mark Slouka, “Listening for Silence”

Assignment: Do people need silence in their lives? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

Prompt 3: Sociologists and linguists probably will tell you that a person’s developing language skills are more influenced by peers. But I do think that the language spoken in the family, especially in immigrant families which are more insular, plays a large role in shaping the language of the child.

—Adapted from Amy Tan, “Mother Tongue”

Assignment: What do you think is the stronger influence on a person’s language development—peers or family? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

Prompt	Claim/Topic (Question 1)	Audience (Question 2)	Purpose/Mode (Question 3)	Strategies (Question 4)	Role (Question 5)
1					
2					
3					

We want to direct your attention to the last column of the preceding chart, where we have identified the type of support used. Notice that we have used a *variety* of support—reading, studies, experience, or observations. You probably won’t include such a column in your own prewriting, but we want you to be aware that these are the types of examples asked for in the SAT prompts, and it would be wise to use a variety of them.

We hope our modeling showed you how to understand the expectations of the prompt, as well as a way to get started in answering the prompt. We believe that prompt analysis can help you write better. That is, everything you learn in the analysis of a prompt or any assignment should lead to a better understanding of the writing requirements and build confidence in being able to meet those requirements.

But what happens when there is very little to analyze? Here’s an expository prompt for a tenth-grade writing assessment that doesn’t give many explicit cues: “Tell your classmates about a responsibility you have been given.”

Understandably, you might feel lost when you see a prompt like this. Very little explicit information is given, and you might not feel motivated to share information about a responsibility. This is a situation ripe for a good case of writer’s block, but working through the PAQs may help you to see some footholds in what originally seemed a blank, smooth wall.

Your Turn

Now try analyzing this prompt: “Tell your classmates about a responsibility you have been given.”

PAQs

1. What is the central claim/topic called for?

Do I have choices to make with regard to this claim/topic? Will I need to focus the claim/topic in order to write a good essay? What arguments can I make for this claim? What do I know about this topic?

2. Who is the intended audience?

If named specifically, what do I know about this particular audience? If the audience is implied or not identified, what can I infer about it or them? In either event, how might the expectations of this audience affect my choices as a writer?

Your Turn continued

3. What is the purpose/mode for the writing task?

Is the purpose stated or must it be inferred? What is this writing supposed to accomplish (besides fulfilling the demands of the prompt/assignment)? What does the goal of this writing suggest about the mode (narration, exposition, description, argument) or combination of modes that I should consider in responding?

4. What strategies will be most effective?

What does the purpose/mode suggest about possible strategies? Of the strategies I am comfortable using—like examples, definitions, analysis, classification, cause/effect, compare/contrast—which will be most effective here? Are there any strategies—such as number of examples or type of support—that are specified as required?

5. What is my role as a writer in achieving the purpose?

Have I been assigned a specific role like *applicant* or *representative*? If I have not been assigned a specific role, what does the prompt or assignment tell me about the level of expertise I should demonstrate, the stance I should assume, or the approach I should take?

If you would like to see how we dealt with these questions, see our notes in Appendix C at the end of the book.

Your Turn

Once again, work through the PAQs as a way of unpacking the prompt from page 65. By now, you are probably getting the hang of prompt analysis, so this time we have given you just the main questions to work with. When you are finished, compare your responses with ours in Appendix C at the end of the book.

PAQs

1. What is the central claim/topic called for?

2. Who is the intended audience?

3. What is the purpose/mode for the writing task?

4. What strategies will be most effective?

5. What is my role as a writer in achieving the purpose?

of prompts by transforming them into topics you can write about. One of the challenges of writing in response to any prompt is figuring out how to transform it into something you can write about, or how to “own” it.

Taking ownership of an assignment, whether one given in class or included in a writing test, is an essential skill for writers. In the process of making an assignment your own, you also choose a focus for the essay, identify an audience, and take a step toward establishing tone. Exercises like the ones we’ve given you should help demystify prompts and help you see them as opportunities to take ownership of your writing.

A Longer Persuasive Prompt

We’ve dealt with a persuasive prompt that gave you little information; now let’s look at one that includes much more information. The challenge here is to use the instructions in a productive way, without getting bogged down in reading the prompt.

Change is generally considered either an improvement or a change for the worse. Most people resist changes because they feel the old ways are working, so changes are not necessary.

Write a persuasive paper presenting one change you feel is needed. Discuss a change that relates to your school, your community, the state, or the world. Include examples and evidence to support why the change is needed. You should:

1. Take a few minutes to plan your paper by making notes.
2. Choose *one* change you think is needed.
3. Give specific reasons that explain why this change is needed.
4. Organize your ideas carefully.
5. Check that you have correct sentences, punctuation, and spelling.

Before turning to the PAQs, let’s look at what’s different about this prompt and what we can learn from it. This prompt suggests the importance of prewriting in test situations, and we agree that taking time for planning your essay, even under tight time constraints, is important. Directions two through five can be read in two ways: as an outline of the approach you should take in responding to this prompt and as an outline for a reader’s assessment of your response. That is, the grader is probably looking for one change, specific reasons for the change, and clear and careful organization. Number five, with its explicit reference to sentences, punctuation, and spelling, suggests the need to pay close attention to the conventions of written English. It also suggests the importance of sentence structure, and it may be worthwhile to turn to Chapter Four where we discuss sentences in detail.

Now, here is how we might answer the PAQs for the above prompt:

1. What is the *central claim/topic* called for?
One is a key word in the prompt. I should make a claim for only one change and not introduce several. Because I can write about my school, community, state, or world, I have many choices for a topic, and it may be difficult to figure out where to focus.
2. Who is the intended *audience*?
 Although no audience is specified, I think it makes sense to address an audience related to the area where I focus my topic—the principal of the school, the mayor of the community, the governor of the state, and so on.

3. What is the *purpose/mode* for this writing task?
Because my purpose is to argue for one change, I'll be making an argument, but I would probably use narrative or description to lay out the situation I want to change.
4. What *strategies* will be most effective?
Comparison and contrast might be useful if I try to explain the difference my change will make. Of course, I'll need examples, and definition may also be necessary.
5. What is my *role* in achieving the purpose?
Because I'll be proposing a change and people don't always like change, I'll need to take on the role of expert, and a persuasive one at that.

Yet Another Long Prompt

Would you believe that some prompts offer even more information? In this case, you face the challenge of needing to read quickly and identify the information that is vital to your success. Here is an example of a prompt that includes a great deal of information:

As part of an exhibit on inventions, the Delaware Museum is sponsoring a writing contest for high school sophomores on notable inventions and their impact on history.

Write an essay for this contest identifying the invention you consider notable and how it has impacted the world in either a positive or a negative way. Answering the following will help you focus and plan your writing.

- Think of the many inventions throughout the history of the world.
- Think about the effect these inventions have had on our world.
- Is there one invention you think is better than the others?
- Is there one invention you would get rid of?
- Choose one invention to write about.

After you have planned your response, begin to write. Proofread your finished paper to check for complete sentences, correct punctuation, and spelling.

The Writer's Checklist below may help you plan, write, and revise your response.

Ideas and Organization

- ___ Focus on your audience and your purpose for writing.
- ___ Develop a clear opinion about the topic.
- ___ Support your opinion with ideas, explanations, and examples.
- ___ Present your ideas in the order that best supports your opinion.

Sentence Fluency

- ___ Use sentences that vary in structure and length.
- ___ Make your sentences flow smoothly.

Voice and Word Choice

- ___ Use language that sounds natural.
- ___ Use specific and accurate words.
- ___ Write to your audience.

Conventions

- ___ Capitalize, spell and punctuate correctly.
- ___ Make sure others can read your handwriting.

Because the prompt includes so many details, you might be tempted to skip all of it and just begin writing. We have seen students do this frequently, and sometimes they miss the important clues for writers. The specification of a contest, for example, suggests that you should begin your prewriting by thinking about how judges associated with a museum might regard inventions. Another significant detail appears in the term *identifying*. This word suggests that choosing the invention or topic is an important part of the writing task, and the list of questions and statements to consider reinforces this point. There is no language here to tell you anything about the form your essay should take, but clearly it needs to be persuasive in order to convince readers that a particular invention has made a significant impact on the world.

Note that this prompt includes “the writer’s checklist,” which can seem overwhelming when you are anxious to begin working on your response to the prompt. You might scan the list to get an overall sense of what it covers and then return to examine each of the items under headings like Conventions and Sentence Fluency. If possible, find out whether a checklist is available for your prompt (it might also be called a rubric) and familiarize yourself with it ahead of time, so you don’t have to waste your timed writing time reading it. For the SAT, for example, you could get online and read their rubric to see how your essay will be scored before you sit down to take the test. That way, you’ll know ahead of time what is expected. As of this writing, the SAT scoring guide can be found at this web address: www.collegeboard.com/highered/ra/sat/sat_score_guide.html.

Learning how to generate ideas for writing and to move directly from analysis to prewriting will help you face the challenge of prompts.

Prewriting After Analyzing a Prompt

The PAQs give you strategies for analyzing prompts and assignments to understand more fully what is required. In the process, you also begin to generate ideas for your papers, and, as Robert Frost has said, the key to writing is the having of ideas. In other words: no ideas, no essay. Learning how to generate ideas for writing and to move directly from analysis to prewriting will help you face the challenge of prompts.

Let’s look at another prompt and focus on the prewriting strategies that we introduced in Chapter Five:

A major teen magazine has voted your city (Fairbanks, Alaska) as one of the ten worst places in the country for teens to live. What is your point of view?

Directions for writing task: Write an essay either supporting or opposing the teen magazine’s designation of your city. Use facts, examples, and other evidence to support your point of view.

A first step with this prompt would be to analyze it using the PAQs, noting the need for a persuasive essay about your city addressed to an audience of other teens from around the country, using examples and facts. After working through the PAQs, it would be useful to practice some prewriting strategies. For example, to help you both generate material and organize your essay, you might use two column notes.

Claim: Our town (Fairbanks, Alaska) is an excellent place for teens to live.	
Key Points in Argument	Support for Key Points
1. The weather makes this a year-round place for teens to enjoy sports.	<p>A. Because the first snow flies in October and doesn't melt until March, our teens get the most days on the slopes to snowboard.</p> <p>B. Cool weather makes the hockey season extra long, and we have more teams per capita than any other city.</p> <p>C. Every two years we have the Arctic Winter Games, which allows us to compete in a variety of winter sports, like speed skating, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, hockey, and curling with athletes from Canada and the Yukon.</p>
2. The low crime rate makes life more positive and less stressful for teens.	<p>A. Students don't have to lock their cars in the parking lot.</p> <p>B. It is safe to walk anywhere in the city, even in the dark.</p> <p>C. Because there is little crime, there is an atmosphere of trust among teens and between adults and teens.</p>
3. Teens get an Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend check every year.	<p>A. The permanent fund check ranges from \$300 to \$1300 and helps teens pay for things they normally couldn't afford, like car insurance, family vacations, or computers.</p> <p>B. There is a special fund for investing the dividend checks that can be used to pay for college.</p> <p>C. Besides the free money each year, there's no sales tax in Alaska—which means teens have more money to spend!</p>

Your Turn

Now that we have modeled how you can generate ideas for an essay in support of the idea that your city is a good place for teens, let's have you try generating ideas for the opposite position in the following chart.

Claim: _____ is not a good city for teens to live.	
Key Points in Argument	Support for Key Points
1.	A. B. C.
2.	A. B. C.
3.	A. B. C.

Your Turn

Putting It All Together: From PAQs to a Full-Length Essay

We are going to ask you to get a clock for this one. Give yourself forty minutes total to complete this example.

Step One: Analyze the Prompt (two minutes)

Prompt: Writers often highlight the values of a culture or a society by using characters who are alienated from that culture or society because of gender, race, class, or creed. Select a character from a novel and show how that character’s alienation reveals the surrounding society’s assumptions and moral values.

Prompt	Claim/Topic (Question 1)	Audience (Question 2)	Purpose/Mode (Question 3)	Strategies (Question 4)	Role (Question 5)
1					

Step Two: Prewrite (three minutes)

Your Claim:	
Key Points in Argument	Support for Key Points
1.	A. B. C.
2.	A. B. C.
3.	A. B. C.

[illegible]

Step Four: Read over Your Essay and Make Corrections (five minutes)

If you would like to see how Swathi, a student who eventually got the top score on the AP English exam, responded to this prompt, turn to Appendix C the end of the book.

Prompts and Assignments

Whether faced with a lack of information in a prompt or bombarded with bulleted lists of requirements and suggestions, you must be able to think critically about the prompts and assignments you encounter.

Although this chapter has focused on prompts that appear in various writing tests, we want to underscore the fact that the process of analysis transfers easily to any writing assignment. Once you're comfortable using PAQs to analyze prompts, you'll be able to use those skills with assignments as well. Many of the assignments you encounter will resemble the various types of prompts discussed here. Assignments in your classes, both high school and college, will also ask you to make explanations and arguments, make decisions about what to include and exclude, and decide on claims and offer warrants; some assignments will be filled with questions and suggestions to the writer and others will be as spare as a single quoted line. Whether faced with a lack of information in a prompt or bombarded with bulleted lists of requirements and suggestions, you must be able to think critically about the prompts and assignments you encounter. We hope our modeling of and your practice using PAQs has boosted your confidence by showing you how to "break the code" of responding to prompts.

Things to Remember

- Using the PAQs can help you understand any prompt.
- Prompt analysis not only helps you understand what is required of you, it also helps you start generating ideas for your essay, thereby allowing you to sidestep the dreaded "writer's block" and move toward writing a successful essay.
- PAQs help you understand not only the demands of prompts but also challenging assignments in your classes.



Student Profile: Swathi

"I'd like to become an ophthalmologist someday," says Swathi. She loves to read, analyze, and debate books, especially the Harry Potter series, and anything by Sarah Dessen or Tamora Pierce. She also likes to watch movies that feature Johnny Depp, and she loves *The OC* and *Family Guy*. She plays soccer and softball, and likes to jog at night. The clarinet is her musical instrument.

Describing her approach to the AP test, she explains, "I read through the question and highlight the significant words, like *compare and contrast*, so I know what I need to be doing with the essay. Then I read through the two poems, underlining what I think is important, making notes in the margin. After that I go back to what I have written and quickly make a rough, rough outline. I use arrows to link ideas and then I just write."

She offers this advice: "You have to develop your own style of writing and decide what works for you. With reading and writing, you don't need someone to tell you all the time what to do. Figure out your strengths and use them."

Swathi also counsels students to stay calm in a timed writing situation: "Don't stress out. You've been prepared over the years to read and write well. Trust yourself and your instincts."

What to Expect When You're Expecting to Write

7

I am a pretty lengthy writer. If the class is asked to write one paragraph, I usually will be the one to write two paragraphs. I just finished the test in time.

—KRISTEN

I was really worried that I would run out of time; that I would go off topic and wouldn't need everything I could put in the paper.

—KARI

Practice makes perfect. Do a prompt every Saturday morning. The more you write, the more confident you'll become.

—MAYA

As these students' comments reveal, time is a big concern when writing an essay test and practice can be key in helping you address those concerns. In the previous chapter we shared strategies for analyzing the prompt, but there's more to a timed essay than just the prompt. In this chapter we'll help you analyze the context in which the prompt appears. We call this the "prompt environment." Understanding the prompt environment is key to developing strong test-taking strategies.

So, what do we mean by prompt environment? Well, test makers provide a variety of cues, checklists, requirements, writing aids, and time limits that surround prompts, and this context—environment—can influence how you approach a prompt. In this chapter we will explore these features and show you how to make the most of them. Context, the prompt environment, is important for all writers, but it is especially crucial for strong performance on timed writing tests.

Strategies for Analyzing the Prompt Environment

Examining the prompt environment will help you demystify the process of approaching a writing test and thereby succeed. Answering the following five questions can show you how to use all the information available to you. One of the things we've noticed about students' approaches to writing on demand is that they frequently overlook critical statements and directions that could guide their work. Learning to answer the context analysis questions will make you alert to valuable cues.



DEDICATED TO TEACHERS

Thank you for sampling this
resource.

For more information or to
purchase, please visit
Heinemann by clicking the link
below:

<http://www.heinemann.com/products/E00876.aspx>

Use of this material is solely for
individual, noncommercial use and is
for informational purposes only.