PAGE Georgia Academic Decathlon

ESSAY

Competitors are to write a well-formed Essay based on one of three possible prompts within 50 minutes. Time begins when the student sees the prompts for the first time. Students may participate in Essay on paper during Rounds 1 and/or 2 if that is how their school/district chooses to test, but all students will use the official testing platform for State. The following instructions refer specifically to the State competition.

PREPARATION FOR COMPETITION:

The Essay event in the Georgia Academic Decathlon is conducted online before state competition. Prior to competition, GAD will arrange for an online practice session. It is ***imperative*** that all students test their usernames and passwords at that time. This is also an opportunity to allow students to familiarize themselves with the program. It is advisable to have the team use the practice prompts to practice typing an essay in the time given. Any essay practice is useful.

The essay competition must be held on one of two dates set for the competition. Students should arrive at least 25 minutes prior to the testing time. The entire team must write at the same time, including up to three alternates. Decathletes will type an essay in response to a prompt chosen from a set given to them. Students will be given 50 minutes for writing the essay that will be scored in accordance with the published essay rubric.

Students may be given planning paper and printed Student Instructions. You might want to spend a few minutes prior to competition reviewing the instructions. **Please collect these instructions and the planning paper at the end of testing**.

The proctor **must** be someone other than the coach. There will need to be enough computers for the entire team plus additional computers in case of any problems. There will be a 60-minute window for each competition time. The student screen counts down the time remaining.

Instructions for the Coach, Proctor and Students follow. Coaches will receive any updates to these instructions via email/link prior to the state event.

GAD Coach Online Essay Instructions - https://usad.enlyght.com/

Preparing the Technology

- Assure that ALL the computers your students are using have Internet Explorer or the newest version of Chrome (even Macs) and that your students are aware they are to use these browsers only. No other screens or programs may be open during testing.
- Make sure your tech department has turned off auto-shutdown. Talk with your tech department to see if you might have problems with a restricted bandwidth.
- Only one student will be allowed per computer. There should be at least one or two extra stations in case of problems.

Preparing Students

- Have students practice writing timed essays on the computer.
- Pass out and review the "Student Essay Instructions" prior to competition so students are aware of the requirements and expectations of the essay competition.
- The practice login is imperative. Encourage students to use the practice login to familiarize themselves with the program.
- Students should arrive at least 25 minutes prior to the testing time. They will need to hear the instructions as well as make sure there are no problems. Logging in before scheduled time is **not** possible.
- There is a 60-minute window for each competition time, but students only have 50 minutes to write. The program will not allow students to write longer than 50 minutes.

GAD Coach Online Essay Instructions cont.

Preparing the Proctor & Practice Sign-In

- Give the proctor a list of participating students along with their usernames and passwords. The proctor must be someone other than the coach.
- Provide the proctor with all necessary materials:
    - Proctor instructions and "Troubleshooting Problems During the Essay Competition"
    - At least one sheet of blank paper and a pen/pencil per student
    - A way to contact you immediately in case of questions or problems
- Be present at the practice login to make sure the correct students get the correct usernames and passwords.
- If any students are not present for the practice login, you or the proctor will need to test their username and password for them to make sure it works. If you do have a student absent on practice day, it might be good to introduce that student to the proctor on the writing day to make sure there is no confusion.
- Proctors do not need a computer - they do not log in for Essay.

Competition

- Make sure the proctor can get in touch with you during competition in case of questions or prompts.
- The whole team **must** write at the same time, including any alternates.

Proctor Essay Instructions

It is very important that students follow all instructions given aloud by you and that you understand your responsibilities.

Preparation

- Make sure you have contact information for the coach in case of questions or problems.
- Make sure there is only one student per computer station. Students **must** use a computer for the competition.
- Students must use the newest version of Internet Explorer or Chrome (even Macs). No other browsers will work.
- Give the students their usernames and passwords (the same ones from the practice login).
- Pass out 2 sheets of blank paper and a pen/pencil to each student for them to plan on. You must pick up these papers after the competition. The paper should not leave the room with the student. No other materials should be allowed in the testing room.

Procedures

- Approximately 15 minutes before competition, read aloud all of the instructions.
- Remind students that they must login before beginning to plan, even if they are using the paper. Planning is part of the 50-minute time limit.
- It is important to pay close attention to the screens. Having all students facing the same direction so you can see ALL screens is optimal. No other websites, screens, or programs should be open on the computer. Also please keep an eye open for anything other than excellent (ethical) test-taking behavior.
    - In the event that a student is guilty of an infraction, allow the student to complete the test, but inform the coach of the infraction as soon as possible. It is your responsibility to inform the State Director as to the nature of the infraction in writing including the student name, coach name, school, time, and nature of the infraction.
- Do not leave the testing area until all essay tests have been completed and all scratch papers have been collected. The screen will give each student a 5-minute warning after 45 minutes have elapsed.
- Enter any possible LDF triggers on the "Testing Irregularities" form. Complete the Proctor Certification form. Give both forms to Coach to sign and then send to District Coordinator or State Director.

Proctor Essay Instructions cont.

Rules

- No hats.
- No drinks or food.
- No names, school names, or other identifying headings on the essay.
- No student is to leave the room during the testing period, except for emergencies.
- Students arriving late do ***not*** receive additional time for the essay.
- No talking during the testing time. The room ***must be silent*** until the time is called.
- No study materials in the essay room (cell phones, books, study cards, etc). They are to be taken and returned when the student leaves.

- Make sure they type the username and password exactly as it is shown. No CAPS lock.
- Problems? Close then restart the browser. Login and restart the test.
- Students should press the "Save" button frequently during the testing session.
    - If they receive the "Save Failed" message each time, close browser and try again. If you still receive the message, move to another computer.
- Students should not press the Back, Forward, Refresh, or Reload keys during writing. This will pop up a box warning them that doing so will "reload" the page. Reloading means erasing the essay!
- When the program is saving the essay, portions of the top bar will turn green. No green = No save. If it turns green and stays green, be patient. Your school's network might be busy. If it stays green for more than one minute, close the browser and restart the essay.

  If there are issues, call one of the support numbers listed on the instructions that were emailed to the coach prior to testing.

STUDENT INSTRUCTIONS:

Basic Essay Instructions:

You have been given **3 prompts** from which you will **select 1 as the topic** for your essay. Do **not** write your name or prompt on your essay. It is **not** necessary to include the quotation or language from the prompt in the body of your essay.

Explain the meaning of the prompt and support your position in several well-developed paragraphs with specific examples from your experiences and/or your reading. Provide a final paragraph that offers a logical conclusion to your essay. Be sure to include adequate transitions between your ideas; and follow the accepted rules of standard English sentence structure, usage, spelling, and punctuation. Allow yourself time for proofreading and correcting your essay.

You will be graded on your ability to:

1. Organize ideas in logical patterns appropriate to the purpose of the assignment.
2. Present these ideas using effective vocabulary and written structures appropriate to formal standards of written communication in English.
3. Use mechanical skills of standard American English (*punctuation, grammar and spelling*) that facilitate communication and are acceptable in formal writing.

Essay Reminders:

- ***Do not type your name, school, or prompt on your essay!***
- Select one of the prompts carefully. You may not change prompts once you begin.
- Write a well-organized essay in which you clearly respond to the question or direction that is presented in the prompt. Use specific information and examples from your studies to support your position.
- Be sure to include adequate transitions between your ideas and to follow the accepted rules of standard English sentence structure, usage, spelling, and punctuation.
- Provide a final paragraph to conclude or close your essay.
- Allow time for proofreading and editing your essay.
- You may use paper for planning, but it **must** be turned in to the proctor before you leave.

Additional Reminders for Competition:

- No hats.
- No drinks or food.
- No names or other identifying headings on the essay.
- No student is to leave the room during the testing period, except for emergencies.
- Students arriving late do ***not*** receive additional time for the essay.
- No talking during the testing time. The room ***must be silent*** until the time is called.
- You ***must*** use a computer for the essay. If there is a problem, raise your hand immediately so the proctor can make the necessary changes.
- No study materials in the essay room (cell phones, books, study cards, etc.). They will be taken and returned when you leave.
- No other screens or programs may be open on the computer during testing. Navigating away from the testing screen will trigger a Loss of Direct Focus flag (LDF) and could lead to disqualification.
- Report any potential LDF to your proctor immediately so it can be recorded on the Testing Irregularities form.

JUDGING ESSAYS

Two judges will read each essay. A third judge will read essays when scores vary more than 200 points. Scores of the two judges in closest agreement are reported for scoring.

Explanation of the USAD Rubric

As with each of the three subjective events, it is important to study the essay rubric in detail. Judges score the essay based on a standardized rubric provided by USAD. The essay accounts for 1000 of the possible 10,000 points a competitor can earn at competition.

Components 1-7 of the Scoring Form address the content/development of the essay

Introduction/Thesis: (0-4 points) • Original, insightful, and /or interesting • Not merely restating the prompt
Response to Prompt*: (0-4 points) • Conveys understanding of the prompt and tasks • Clearly addresses all aspects of the prompt
Evidence*: (0-4 points) • Specific and accurate examples • Evidence supports thesis and main ideas
Analysis/Commentary: (0-4 points) • Ideas explained thoroughly • Points argued effectively
Cohesion: (0-4 points) • Articulate and clearly focused • Assertions equivalently developed
Organization: (0-4 points) • Paragraphs have topic sentences • Paragraphs have thoughtful transitions
Closing: (0-4 points) • Intentional finish • Not repetitive or merely summarizing

**USAD publishes essay scoring guidelines for essay readers/judges, which include details student writers may include in response to each prompt.*

Components 8-10 of the Scoring Form address writing skills applied to the essay

Word Choice/Diction/Voice: (1-4 points) • Diction appropriate to topic • Student knows/owns the words used
Spelling/Punctuation: (1-4 points) • Accurate spelling • Proper punctuation
Grammar/Sentence Structure: (1-4 points) • Subject/verb agreement • Varied sentence structure

Further details about scoring form:

- Some components have a scale of 0-4 and others 1-4. This is intentional. A writer could receive a "zero" for Introduction/Thesis, for instance, for having no visible or articulated introduction and/or thesis, but a writer could not receive a "zero" for Spelling/Punctuation, as at least some of the words must be spelled correctly and some appropriate punctuation used, warranting a "one" to be the lowest possible score in that category.
- Consider these point descriptors:
  4 = excellent, superior 2 = attempted, fair 0 = insufficient
  3 = acceptable, effective 1 = barely, minimal
- Essay judges are directed to give a clear and complete "zero" score to any essay that is "off prompt" or "non-scorable."
  - An "off-prompt" essay does not respond to the prompt selected.
  - A "non-scorable" essay is either insufficient, illegible, too brief, or has utilized profanity/foul language.

Discussion of the ten scoring components for students:

Introduction/Thesis – Most writers know that a good introduction is necessary for a great essay. The introduction creates for the reader the important first impression of its author and what to expect of the essay that follows. Whatever you decide to do at the start of your essay to engage your audience right away – create an insightful comparison, highlight interesting details, ask a question, or something else – do not merely parrot the prompt. Be original. And also be certain that your essay includes, and very near its start, a clear thesis in which you state your essay's primary assertion, the essence of your essay's primary point and purpose, what you will "prove" with the rest of your essay.

Response to Prompt – It is very important that you respond specifically and completely to the prompt. One of the biggest challenges students encounter with essay writing deals with response to the prompt. Be certain, first, that you completely understand what the prompt is asking you to do, and second, that you completely answer the questions(s) asked by the prompt. This may sound ridiculous, but without first reading the prompt very carefully and looking for keywords, there is great risk in writing an essay that does not meet the requirements of the prompt.

Evidence – Providing evidence is your opportunity to show how well you have prepared for the competition by reading and studying the USAD materials. Develop the assertions that support your thesis by providing specific examples – evidence from the USAD resource guides or literary work – as the prompt directs. Your essay's readers/judges will know which details to expect you to include, and your essay will score very low in this component if you either do not include evidence or include evidence that is either not supported by or contradictory to the USAD resources. Seize this opportunity to synthesize what you have learned from your studies into your own written ideas; transfer that understanding into your confident voice in the essay.

Analysis/Commentary – For each piece of evidence you use to support your main ideas, you will need to analyze and then explain and provide commentary on how it provides support for your thoughtful response. This typically takes two to three sentences per idea, following and supporting a topic sentence; it should not merely state the evidence but provide support for why and how this evidence is the most valuable to include in your essay.

Cohesion – Cohesion is the flow of the essay or how the words, sentences, and paragraphs – as well as the individual ideas – "cohere" or fit and stick together. Consider the shift from one sentence to the next and the transitional words used between paragraphs. (There are examples of transitional words and phrases for improving cohesion toward the end of this guide.) Purposefully construct each of your assertions – each one related to and developing your thesis – to be equivalently and valuably developed.

Organization – Every essay you write should be constructed in a manner that aids its reader in following your thinking. The best essays proceed logically, are organized into paragraphs, and include transitions that also provide a sensible chronology for the essay as a response to the prompt or task. It makes great sense for each body paragraph's topic sentence to be an assertion that "proves" as well as supports the essay's thesis.

Closing – Consider the closing paragraph your last chance to make a favorable impression on the reader. Do not simply summarize what you have already written. Consider how you can leave the reader pondering an aspect of the essay that was not absolutely resolved, questioning something that could be an inference from something in the essay, or feeling the need to look into the topic further. Whatever you do, bring your essay to an intentional finish with your closing statements.

Word Choice/Diction/Voice – Selecting your words carefully and using a vocabulary most appropriate for the subject is a skill used by proficient writers. Get to know the vocabulary for the content you are studying. It can be difficult to use the "right" or "best" words for a particular discussion if those words are not your own and your use of them "clunky" at best. However, word choice is a very important aspect of your voice in writing and how confidently you "speak" about any subject.

Spelling/Punctuation – While we know this particular type of essay – especially due to its being timed – can feel more like a "rough" than "final" draft, it still needs to be your "best" draft, and the spelling and punctuation errors should not distract the reader from the details of the essay. The best advice is this: leave yourself at least a few minutes to review what you have written. You will be surprised what mistakes may be caught and fixed when you reread your own work.

Grammar/Sentence Structure – This category examines how well you put your sentences together and that you have mastered subject/verb agreement. It improves your essay to understand how to and then vary sentence structure to aid your argument, at times building your point through an intricate weaving of ideas, and at other times poetically dropping the mic with a very simple statement. In other words, this is where your essay can lose points if something in your writing does not follow the accepted rules of English or you submit a very choppy essay full, solely, of simple sentences.

Using the Scoring Form to Guide Your Writing

The first thing to consider is that even if you are not an eloquent writer, you can still score well overall if you know your content and how to organize it. Remember that the first seven scoring components have to do primarily with the composition of your ideas AND that they are supported with evidence from the text being addressed. Communicating clearly and writing well as the final three scoring components indicate, is definitely important, as well, if you want a score that will win you a medal in this event.

ESSAY

PRACTICE ESSAY PROMPTS

Decathletes will be asked to write essays that are based on any subject area including art, music, literature, science, social science, and economics. Below are sample essay prompts that are illustrative of prompts students may encounter on the essay test.

Instructions to Students

Do **not** write your name or prompt on your essay. It is **not** necessary to include the quotation or language from the prompt in the body of your essay.

Explain the meaning of the prompt and support your position in several well-developed paragraphs with specific examples from your experiences and/or your reading. Provide a final paragraph that offers a logical conclusion to your essay. Be sure to include adequate transitions between your ideas; and follow the accepted rules of standard English sentence structure, usage, spelling, and punctuation. Allow yourself time for proofreading and correcting your essay.

You will be graded on your ability to:

1. Organize ideas in logical patterns appropriate to the purpose of the assignment.
2. Present these ideas using effective vocabulary and written structures appropriate to formal standards of written communication in English.
3. Use mechanical skills of standard American English (*punctuation, grammar and spelling*) that facilitate communication and are acceptable in formal writing.

(The following Sample Essay Prompts are prompts that have been used in previous competitions.)

ESSAY #1

Compare and contrast Li Po's "Sent to My Two Little Children in the East of Lu" with Ezra Pound's translation of "The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter." In a well-organized essay, discuss format, narrator, imagery, and theme for both poems.

ESSAY #2

Compare and contrast nineteenth-century European expansion in Africa and East Asia. Use details from the USAD *Social Sciences*™ *Resource Guide* to support your essay.

ESSAY #3

Define postcolonial theory. How is the postcolonial perspective relevant in the art world today? Be sure to cite examples from the USAD *Art Resource Guide* to support your essay.