

Temple University

English Placement Assessment Information and Sample Essays

The English Placement Assessment consists of one written essay. When you sign on to the Placement Assessment website to complete your assessment, you may choose to write on one of two prompts presented to you. You have a total of 90 minutes to both read your chosen prompt and to write your essay. Student essays generally fall within the range of about 250 - 450 words.

Each prompt presents an author's position on an issue. You are asked to:

- (1) summarize the author's argument** and then
- (2) take and develop a position** in response to the author's argument.

Your summary should state (or "paraphrase") the most important parts of the author's argument in your own words, except perhaps for a phrase or two from the passage that you may wish to quote directly. As you develop your own position, some of the issues you might address include: Do you agree or disagree with the author's opinion totally, or only to a certain extent? Are the reasons the author offers to support their argument persuasive or weak? Can you offer a personal experience or alternate evidence that either supports or otherwise responds to what the author has said? Make sure to acknowledge the original author and to distinguish your argument from theirs.

Essays are not evaluated based on having the "correct" position on an issue, but on how accurately they summarize the author's argument and how clearly they present your argument in an organized and grammatically correct manner. Essays are also evaluated on how clearly they distinguish the original author's argument from your own argument.

We have included in this document one sample essay that serves as an example of English 802 writing and two sample essays that serve as examples of English 701 writing.

A sample prompt is presented below, followed by three sample essays and comments on all essays. The comments illustrate how the evaluation criteria apply. The first essay meets the basic requirements of the assessment and would result in placement into English 802, Analytical Reading and Writing. The last two essays do not meet the basic requirements of the assessment in different ways, and they would each result in placements into English 701, Introduction to Academic Discourse.

Sample Prompt

The NFL is more successful now than at any time in its 95-year history. Professional football consistently draws more viewers, and more revenue, than any other professional sport in the US. Despite these achievements, the league is embroiled in controversy. Most notable is growing scientific evidence that playing football significantly increases the likelihood of long-term brain injury. Scientific research, along with compelling anecdotal stories about players who have suffered brain trauma, is raising new worries about football's violent nature. But those who debate changing the rules or introducing new technologies to make the game safer are missing the point. That we are discussing ways to make an intentionally violent contest safer only highlights our confusing relationship with the sport. From the perspective of its governing body, the NFL, the game is a multi-billion-dollar product. And those of us who love it are not innocent fans rooting for our teams to prevail. We're consumers. Our money and attention are what subsidize the game. Football is becoming more dangerous, not less, because, at least in the NFL's view, viewers find it entertaining to watch people suffer brain damage. Players are getting bigger, stronger, faster, and more technically proficient in dishing carnage, because that's what gets them on the highlight reels, and that's how they keep their jobs. Rules may change, but the thirst for faster, bigger hits isn't going anywhere. That's why the only way to make football more safe is to stop watching it. If you don't watch, they won't play.

Sample Essay 1

The NFL is one of the most popular sports franchises in America but Steve Almond believes it is also one of the most violent. A lot of scientific evidence has shown that hard tackles caused by playing football can lead to long-term brain injuries later in life. According to the author, the NFL is making the effort to “make an intentionally violent contest safer” by increasing padding and regulations. However, he believes that the only way football will actually be safer is if viewers stop supporting the violent nature of the game by not watching. Unfortunately, much of the game’s popularity comes from fans encouraging big hits and major plays that can lead to injury. Almond says that football will continue to be violent as long as viewers financially support this spectacle. The only way to prevent brain injuries caused by football is for fans to stop watching.

I agree with much of what the author is saying but I think it’s unlikely that fans will stop watching professional football. Many football fans are committed to the game because of family or local traditions. Additionally, even though Almond thinks that the game is more dangerous because players are getting better at “dishing carnage,” I don’t agree that fans want to see these types of hits. Many times big hits cause dedicated fans to worry about the player’s well-being. Finally, the technology developed to protect players, such as pads and helmets, seems to be improving as the game has gotten more violent. Overall, the NFL should continue to put proper precautions in place to keep players safe and fans interested.

Explanation:

Based on the evaluation criteria outlined above, the student who wrote this essay would be placed into English 802. The essay satisfies the basic requirements of the assessment by summarizing the author’s argument and then articulating the student’s own position on the issue. This summary succeeds in focusing on the author’s main points (evidence confirms that playing professional football presents a high risk for dangerous head injuries, the NFL believes that hard hits lead to greater audience entertainment and greater revenue, and therefore Almond believes that the only way to stop head injuries is for audiences to boycott the NFL). The student quotes selectively from the argument and accurately represents that argument without omitting any significant parts or oversimplifying the argument. The student also acknowledges the author by name. In the latter portion of the essay, the student presents and develops their own position in direct response to some of the author’s main points.

Sample Essay 2

The popularity of the NFL is growing every day. Ticket costs are rising and new stadiums are being built because fans love to watch the harsh content. Sports are entertainment in America. The excitement, roughness, and fast pace of the game keeps fans coming back. There has been a lot of controversy over the NFL and how it treats and protects its players. The author is trying to say that football is violent and players are getting injured more and more. He brings in scientific data to show that even though there has been improvements in the equipment used in the game, players still risk long-term brain injury due to big hits. This is an excellent topic to discuss. There are many negative effects to playing football. I have heard stories of linemen breaking fingers and then going back to play. But, the players decided to sign up to play the game because they love it so they are choosing to put themselves at risk, so the decision should be up to them. To tell them to stop would be unfair. If we start picking at the game then it could ruin what the sport is about. In conclusion, there are many sports, like hockey, that are just as dangerous as football yet we still play them. Any sport can be dangerous so to stop playing football would be unjust and un-American.

Explanation:

Based on the evaluation criteria outlined above, the student who wrote this essay would be placed into English 701. The essay does not meet the assessment requirement to summarize the passage. While the essay engages with the topic found in the prompt, it neglects to explain Almond's specific argument. As a result, this essay primarily focuses on a minor point in the prompt (head injuries in the NFL): the student writes "The author is trying to say that football is violent and players are getting injured more and more." This is one of the observations that Almond makes, but it is not his main argument. The author's main argument is a call to action. Almond argues that in light of the increasing rates of dangerous head injuries in professional football, viewers should stop watching the NFL, thereby cutting off the league's financial support. The student does not engage with this argument. Instead, the essay responds to the idea of "telling [football players] to stop" playing, which is not part of the author's original argument. By focusing on one of the minor points in the prompt, the student does not offer an accurate summary of the author's argument. In order to meet the assessment requirements, the student would need to identify the author's argument about viewers boycotting the NFL.

Sample Essay 3

Due to recent research, NFL viewers are increasingly aware of the harmful effects of football on the health of players. Since the NFL depends on fans to earn money for the league, this raises serious questions. Are fans basically encouraging football players to shorten their own lives? And if so, are fans obligated to stop watching?

In my opinion, fans should feel conflicted about supporting such a dangerous sport. Across the country, young adults and children are learning to play a sport that might be doing long-term damage to their brains. And every fall, fans cheer and eat nachos as elite athletes slam their bodies together for our entertainment. It's like an American version of the ancient gladiators! We might feel better when there are improvements to helmets or padding. But even improved equipment or concussion protocols don't remove the risks that players face every time they step on the field.

Sure, fans will miss the sport if a boycott is effective. But fans won't miss the sport anywhere near as much as families miss players who have died from numerous head injuries. The U.S. will find another national pastime. But people are irreplaceable.

Explanation:

Based on the evaluation criteria outlined above, the student who wrote this essay would be placed into English 701. The student does not acknowledge that there is a separate argument to which they are responding. The assessment instructions ask students to "summarize the author's argument": this requires that the student acknowledge the author and attribute the original argument to the author. In other words, the student needs to acknowledge that this idea comes from someone other than themselves, in this case the author, Steve Almond. Instead of attributing the argument to Almond, here the student presents the main points of Almond's argument in the first paragraph as if they were the student's own commentary on current events. As a result, they do not credit the author, Almond, or mention the prompt itself. In order to meet the assessment requirements, the student would need to acknowledge that they are responding to the argument of Almond and provide a summary of that argument.