

Sample Extended Response Passages and Prompts for Classroom Practice - RLA

Help your students get ready for the extended responses on the GED® test – Reasoning Through Language Arts test by practicing with these sample prompts and source materials in the classroom.

Fully answering an ER prompt often requires 4 to 7 paragraphs of 3 to 7 sentences each – that can quickly add up to 300 to 500 words of writing! A response that is significantly shorter could put your students in danger of scoring a 0 just for not showing enough of their writing skills.

Passage #1 - Are Tweens Ready for Cell Phones?

Extended Response Stimulus Materials:

Source Material #1

Speech: “Tweens” Are Ready for Cell Phones by Deborah Pendergast
“Safer Kids Summit”

Thank you for inviting me to the first “Safer Kids Summit.” We are here to discuss ways to keep our children safe in an increasingly complex world. Today’s focus is on technology— specifically on the ideal age to give kids their own cell phones. As a representative of a large telecommunications company, I receive many inquiries from parents on this topic, and this is what I tell them: It depends on the child, of course, but in general, age 10 is just about right.

A 2012 survey by the National Consumers League backs me up. The survey found that almost 60 percent of children ages 8 to 12 already have cell phones. These “tweens” can contact their parents at any time, and vice versa, giving the kids a sense of empowerment and their parents a feeling of security. Caroline Knorr, of the group Common Sense Media, says, “We want our kids to be independent, to be able to walk home from school and play at the playground without us. We want them to have that old-fashioned, fun experience of being on their own, and cell phones can help with that.” Picture the following scenario: You told your fourth-grader that you would pick her up after school, but you are stuck in traffic. She is waiting for you ...and waiting, and waiting. But if you both have cell phones, you can call her to let her know you are delayed, and she can go back inside the school, where there are adults around. You both breathe a sigh of relief.

Psychologists tell us that the period between ages 10 and 12 is one of growing independence. It is a time to teach children about responsibility, and to give them opportunities to earn our trust. Providing a 10-year-old with a cell phone offers an ideal way to achieve these goals and gives parents peace of mind as well.

Source Material #2

Speech: Wait Until They Are Older by Linda Sidner
“Safer Kids Summit”

Good morning! I come to this topic as a parent and a veteran teacher of so-called “tweens.” I love kids this age for their curiosity and energy, but those same qualities can lead to trouble if not overseen by adults. That’s why giving children their own phones actually makes them less safe, not more. I believe that the best age for a cell phone is 16, the point at which we consider kids grown-up enough to learn to drive — and even then, parents must set firm limits on phone use!

Why are tweens with phones less safe? For one thing, parents may be lulled into a false sense of security if their kids have phones. They may become careless about knowing where their child is and who he is with, thinking, “I can always reach him on his phone.” For another, cell phones give children access to all the frightening, dangerous, and inappropriate sites on the Internet, with no parent nearby to monitor this activity. But perhaps the most worrisome aspect of giving cell phones to children is the rise in “cyberbullying” or “text bullying.” Text bullying means using a cell phone to send cruel, embarrassing, or false text messages to or about someone. In one study, researcher Elizabeth Englander found that by middle school, over 90% of children report that they use their cell phones to text or go onto the Internet. She also found that in grades 3 through 5, between 14 and 19 percent of children reported being victims of cyberbullying. What if it’s your child on the receiving end of this cruelty? Or, perhaps worse, what if your child is the bully? Children of this age are simply not mature enough to handle this technology, and we shouldn’t expect them to be. It’s our job as adults to protect them. That’s why I say: It’s better to wait.

Extended Response Prompt:

Analyze the arguments presented in the two speeches.

In your response, develop an argument in which you explain how one position is better supported than the other. Incorporate relevant and specific evidence from both sources to support your argument.

Remember, the better-argued position is not necessarily the position with which you agree. This task should take approximately 45 minutes to complete.

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Passage #2 – Game-Based Learning

Extended Response Stimulus Materials:

Source Material #1

Game-based Learning Is Merely a Fad
Solomon Robles, Ed.D., Professor of Education at Winborne College
Workplace Training Journal

Electronic learning, or “eLearning,” was sold to many CEOs as the wave of the corporate future. There’s no need to hire human beings to train staff, managers were told. All the information you require can be accessed online — at a reduced cost for the company, and more flexible scheduling for employees. It sounded too good to be true — and it was. As one writer noted, “most eLearning is nothing more than online lectures or course notes.” To teach skills beyond basic facts, the person-to-person method is still more effective than any form of electronic learning.

And yet, along comes the next eLearning fad: “gamification,” which means using video games to teach. Video-game-based learning is already widely used in schools, and has spread to corporations as a tool for training workers and motivating customers. This approach is even used in the military. But does it work?

Most research on game-based learning has looked at schools. Results have been inconsistent but not especially encouraging. One 2013 study found that “students who completed the gamified experience got better scores in practical assignments and in overall score, but ... performed poorly on written assignments and participated less during class activities.” This makes sense: If you’re playing video games, you are not developing the so-called “soft skills” —also known as “people skills” — that are necessary for success in any job. In a traditional classroom, on the other hand, students can ask questions and engage with the teacher and with other learners.

In the workplace, game-based learning is yet another wedge driven between younger employees, who might applaud gamification, and older workers, who may now feel obsolete. What’s more, the prestigious magazine *The Economist* points out that “many of the aspects of gamification that do work are merely old ideas in trendy new clothes.” For example, the points and other rewards that are selling features of video games are just online versions of sales contests or “employee of the month” perks. Like other trends, game-based learning is likely to fade away as the next new teaching fad appears on the horizon.

Source Material #2

Game-based Learning: An Effective Training Strategy
Janette Morgan, Ph.D., Professor of Business, Saratoga State University
Innovative Trends in the Workplace

Already a multi-billion-dollar business, game-based learning in the corporate world continues to grow at a steady pace, and is here to stay. Executives are smart — they

are not going to waste resources on training methods that don't work. Let's look at some of the advantages of "gamifying" workplace training.

First, many people are "gamers" in their non-work lives, so playing video games is something they are already comfortable with and enjoy. This makes game-based learning in the workplace more attractive and motivating than traditional instruction. And according to the Entertainment Software Association, despite the image of video-game players as teenaged boys, "the average gamer is now 37 years old." Further challenging the stereotype, nearly half of gamers are girls or women. Even 29 percent of those over age 50 are getting into the video-game habit. Teenagers and young men, in fact, make up only 15 percent of the over 190 million video-game users in the United States.

Evidence supporting the effectiveness of game-based learning is starting to emerge. Researchers point out that video games have "compelling storylines, attainable challenges, rewards, recognition and control," all of which stimulate learners. A 2012 report on game-based learning notes that "there is research evidence demonstrating positive impact on higher order skills such as decision making and problem solving." The report adds that using video games can also reduce training time, an advantage for both managers and employees.

Finally, unlike one-time training in a classroom, game-based learning is infinitely repeatable. If employees miss something or need more practice, they can always start the game again, using the feedback provided by the game to gauge their progress. This leads to a sense of accomplishment and creates a supportive learning environment, which is what we all want in an education strategy.

Extended Response Prompt:

Analyze the arguments presented in the two journal articles. In your response, develop an argument in which you explain how one position is better supported than the other. Incorporate relevant and specific evidence from both sources to support your argument.

Remember, the better-argued position is not necessarily the position with which you agree. This task should take approximately 45 minutes to complete.

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Passage #3 – Parenting Education

Extended Response Stimulus Materials:

Source Material #1

Guest Column: Parenting Education Should Be Mandatory

Kai Fernandez, APRN

The Freeport Times

As a nurse practitioner in a pediatric office, I had to complete extensive training and obtain a license before I could examine my first toddler. Many jobs, from barber to pilot, involve specific training. But for the most important job — raising children to be responsible adults —no training is required, and children and society suffer the results of this lack of knowledge. The time has come to correct this situation. Before they can be discharged from the hospital, first-time parents should be required to take parenting classes.

Just as we equip new drivers with a learner’s permit and instruction, we must also equip new parents with the skills they need. While some people might believe that this is the “nanny state” stepping on the rights of individuals, I am not suggesting that there is only one “correct” style of parenting. But there is basic information about infants and children that every parent should be required to know, including nutrition, health and safety, and stages of child development. Knowing how to safely bathe a baby, for example, would prevent many tragedies. Understanding that babies are crying to communicate, not to be “naughty,” helps parents adjust their expectations and their behavior.

And parent education works. According to the Centers for Disease Control, for example, the “Safe To Sleep” campaign has reduced the number of deaths from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome by fifty percent since 1994 just by teaching parents to put babies to bed on their backs. Conversely, uninformed parenting hurts not only children, but the rest of us as well. A study by the Department of Education in England found that children whose parents use harsh or inconsistent discipline are more likely to have poor attention spans, low levels of literacy, and anti-social behavior.

In cultures where extended families are the rule, raising children is a group effort. But in the modern world, new parents are on their own. It is our obligation as a society to make sure they have the skills to do their best in this challenging job. Making parenting classes mandatory is a step towards this goal.

Source Material #2

Guest Column: Leave New Parents Alone

Sophie Thomas

The Freeport Times

I am writing in response to the op-ed essay by Kai Fernandez advocating mandatory parenting classes for new parents. As the mother of three, I speak with experience about raising children, and I strongly object to the idea that a random instructor knows

my family and my circumstances better than I do. Just like New York City's efforts to ban the sale of large sodas, a law requiring parents to take parenting classes is yet another example of some government bureaucrat determining what is best for the rest of us. Freedom of choice is a fundamental American value; forcing all parents to learn the same information about children conflicts with this basic right.

While it is true that there are many challenges facing new parents, there are also many ways to learn how to handle these challenges. There are shelves full of parenting books in every bookstore; enter the word "parenting" in the search box on any Web browser, and millions of resources will pop up. Then there are family members and friends to turn to for advice, as well as good old trial and error. Hospitals, community centers, and houses of worship also offer a variety of parenting classes — but the important point is that these are voluntary.

There are also the problems of funding and enforcing this proposal. Would parents have to pay for the classes themselves? This could pose a financial burden for many people. And what if parents refused to take the classes? Would they be fined? Arrested? Even if these practical aspects of mandatory parenting classes could be worked out, however, the issue of government intrusion into family lives makes it a non-starter. After all, parents have been raising children for millions of years without the government's help.

Extended Response Prompt:

Analyze the arguments presented in the two guest columns.
In your response, develop an argument in which you explain how one position is better supported than the other. Incorporate relevant and specific evidence from both sources to support your argument.

Remember, the better-argued position is not necessarily the position with which you agree. This task should take approximately 45 minutes to complete.

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Passage #4 – Internet Filtering in the Workplace

Extended Response Stimulus Materials:

Source Material #1

Email

From: Justine Timmons, CEO

Sent: Monday, September 24

To: Employees of Niagara Equipment Corp.

Subject: Workplace Internet Use

Beginning next month, we are instituting a new policy for all employees regarding Internet use at work. To limit access to inappropriate and social media websites, we are installing new filtering software that will block those sites on every company-owned computer.

Although management recognizes that the Internet is a valuable tool, especially for our creative department and sales team, we are also aware of the potentially costly downsides to unlimited access. According to a survey by Salary.com, at least 64 percent of employees nationwide admit to visiting non-work-related websites while on the job. This “cyberslacking,” as it is called, hurts productivity and wastes company resources. Workers who are distracted by checking their social media sites are clearly not giving their full attention to their jobs.

The other important reason that we are installing filters is to promote a positive workplace for all of our valued employees. When staff members use their computers to access offensive or inappropriate material that can be seen by their fellow workers, this creates a hostile workplace environment, thereby exposing the company to expensive and demoralizing lawsuits. Even social networking sites can lead to legal jeopardy if they are used to bully fellow workers. Other businesses have already faced harassment suits for just such activities.

A committee comprising representatives of each team will be formed to determine which sites to block. Please tell your team leader if you are interested in serving on this committee.

Thank you all for your cooperation and for your commitment to making Niagara Equipment the best place to work in Buffalo!

Best,
Justine Timmons, CEO

Source Material #2

From: Honoria Bell

Sent: Tuesday, September 25

To: Justine Timmons, CEO

CC: Employees of Niagara Equipment Corp.

Subject: Workplace Internet Use

Dear Ms. Timmons,

We, the undersigned employees of Niagara Equipment Corp., urge management to reconsider the installation of Internet-filtering software. While we recognize that it is in all our interests to promote productivity and a positive workplace environment, we believe that blocking our free access to the Internet is the wrong way to go about this. First, there is more to that Salary.com statistic that you cite than meets the eye. Most of the “cyberslackers” in that survey surf the Internet for only one hour per week. This is comparable to taking a walk to the water cooler or chatting about last night’s game with a colleague. According to author Laura Vanderkam, “no one can get through a whole workday without taking a break.” In fact, one 2009 study found that workers who could occasionally check the Internet were happier at work than those who could not. Another study, this one from the National University of Singapore, found that Web-surfing refreshed employees, actually making them more productive, not less.

Second, one important function of the Internet is as a communication tool, just like the telephone. Just as workers are permitted to make brief personal calls at work, so should they be allowed to use the Internet for the same purpose.

Third, we believe that the best way to grow as a business and protect the company from lawsuits is to hire responsible employees and then demonstrate your trust in them. Instead of treating us like children, why not establish clear guidelines concerning Internet use? All employees can understand the reasons that offensive websites are off limits.

Finally, installing an Internet filter may create resentment and tempt some employees to find ways around the filters. It is an unnecessary solution in search of a problem.

Thank you for your attention.

Honoria Bell, Chief Designer and the undersigned 53 employees

Extended Response Prompt:

Analyze the arguments presented in the two emails.

In your response, develop an argument in which you explain how one position is better supported than the other. Incorporate relevant and specific evidence from both sources to support your argument.

Remember, the better-argued position is not necessarily the position with which you agree. This task should take approximately 45 minutes to complete.

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Passage #5 – Hosting the Olympics

Extended Response Stimulus Materials:

Source Material #1

Guest Column: Let's Put Our City On The Map
Igor Kreswesi, CEO, The New World Group
The Portland Gazette

Our mayor and city council are debating the wisdom of putting together a bid to host the Summer Olympics. If they decide to go forward, it will be the smartest decision our city has ever made. As chief executive of a company that develops large shopping centers, I understand the hard work that goes into planning an enormous project – but I also know that the rewards are worth it.

Many people might think that hosting an international event of this size is too expensive. And there's no question that there are significant costs at the outset. But these kinds of events bring positive attention to their host cities, attracting visitors — and their wallets — before, during, and long afterwards. Those tourist dollars benefit the city at every level, from hotels to taxicabs. As one Canadian planner wrote after the 2010 Winter Olympics, “[L]ooking back at other Olympic cities such as Barcelona, Salt Lake City, and Sydney, all have established themselves as world cities through the hosting of this major event.”

While some residents may be inconvenienced by stadium construction projects or temporary road closures, these nuisances are more than balanced by the excitement and sense of community pride engendered by becoming a host city. Think, too, of the jobs these projects provide, improving our local economy. And because of the number of volunteers needed to carry out a huge event, there are opportunities for thousands of citizens to get involved. This sense of “pitching in” often leads to a general rise in volunteerism.

Finally, and maybe most important, when cities host events like the Olympics, they gain not only new sports venues that can be used for years, but they are also motivated to carry out those road and transportation projects that they have been putting off. So, after the event, we all live proudly in a better and more efficient city. It's a win-win.

Source Material #2

Guest Column: The Olympics Are a Losing Proposition
Genevieve Dupont, Chief Economist, Bennett & Greene Investments
The Portland Gazette

When we drive around our city, it is doubtful that many of us say, “Why not spend billions of dollars constructing new stadiums and swimming pools?” And yet, isn't that what bidding to host the Olympic Games boils down to?

Let's start with the cost of building facilities for the events. Of course, we can use the stadiums that we already have, but many more would be required. As other economists have pointed out, the "costs of Olympics have a tendency to rise over time and be much greater than expected." In some host cities, this has meant an increase in taxes to cover the losses, despite promoters' rosy promises.

Proponents claim that tourists will flock to our region and spend their money here. While this may be true during the games themselves, there is little evidence that this carries over to increased tourism afterwards. Tourism after the 2008 Beijing games, for example, rose only two percent. Then there is the additional cost of security for visitors and athletes while they are here.

How about the other economic selling points, like job creation? While construction companies would benefit in the short term, those jobs are temporary. And what do we do with a giant stadium once the Olympics are over? Would it become a monument to fiscal foolishness? The 90,000-seat "Bird's Nest" stadium built in Beijing at a cost of \$480 million — plus \$11 million a year since then to maintain — is now an empty "museum piece," according to The New York Times.

Let's return to our drive around the city. Aren't we more likely to say, "Let's use our resources to repair the sidewalks, replace that damaged bridge, and improve our schools"? These are projects that benefit the entire community, not just a handful of construction firms and developers. Seen from nearly every angle, hosting a large international sporting event is a losing proposition, and our city leaders should nip this idea in the bud.

Extended Response Prompt:

Analyze the arguments presented in the two guest columns. In your response, develop an argument in which you explain how one position is better supported than the other. Incorporate relevant and specific evidence from both sources to support your argument.

Remember, the better-argued position is not necessarily the position with which you agree. This task should take approximately 45 minutes to complete.

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