

Analyzing Writing Prompts

EXAM BOOK

Name _____

Student ID _____

Course/Section _____

Instructor _____

Date _____

NOTES

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Some tests include writing prompts. A prompt tells you what to write about and why you are writing. A prompt might also tell the type of writing to create and who will read it.

Before you begin writing your response, you need to analyze the prompt to make sure you understand it. You can use the **PAST** questions.

Purpose: *Why am I writing? What is my goal?* Look for key words about your purpose.

- **argue:** present facts and reasons that support your opinion or position
- **compare:** tell how two things are alike
- **contrast:** tell how two things are different
- **define:** tell what something means, what it is, or what it does
- **describe:** tell how something looks, sounds, smells, tastes, and/or feels
- **explain:** tell how something works, how it happens, or how to do it
- **list:** give a number of facts, ideas, reasons, or other details about the topic

- **persuade:** give reasons that would convince someone to agree with your position
- **predict:** tell what you think will happen in the future

Audience: *Who will read the writing?* Some prompts will identify a specific audience: *Pretend you are telling the story to an older family member.* When a prompt does not identify an audience, it's safe to assume that your teacher is the audience.

Subject: *What is the subject of my writing?* Knowing the subject helps you focus on your topic.

Type: *What type of writing should I do?* Most prompts will tell you what form of writing to create (for example, a persuasive paragraph or a comparison-contrast essay)

Note how the **PAST** questions work with this prompt.

In an essay, explain to new students how certain things are done at your school. Choose three things you think any student should know about your school. Explain how each one works.

- **Purpose:** To explain
- **Audience:** New students
- **Subject:** Three things at your school
- **Type:** Essay

Your Turn Answer the **PAST** questions for each of the following writing prompts.

1. Smartphones, tablet PCs, and social media are changing the ways that people live, work, and connect. Write an essay that explains to your fellow students the ways that you connect digitally.
 - **Purpose:** To explain
 - **Audience:** Fellow students
 - **Subject:** How I connect digitally
 - **Type:** Essay
2. Pretend an editor at *National Geographic* magazine has asked you to write a feature article that describes a natural location that makes you feel happy. What does the place look like? How does it smell and feel? Why does it make you happy? Write so that magazine readers can picture your special place.
 - **Purpose:** To describe so readers can picture the special place
 - **Audience:** Readers of *National Geographic*
 - **Subject:** A natural location that makes me feel happy
 - **Type:** Feature article
3. Is it better to be a child, a teenager, or an adult? What are the benefits of each age? What are the drawbacks? Choose the period of life that you think is best and write a persuasive essay arguing why it is the best time of life.
 - **Purpose:** To persuade through argumentation

- **Audience:** Teacher
- **Subject:** The best period of life
- **Type:** Essay

- See more at <http://k12.thoughtfullearning.com/minilesson/analyzing-writing-prompts>