

South Dakota, 2026
Performance Level Descriptors
ELA: Writing

Text Types and Purposes: Argumentative

The ACT writing test requires an argumentative essay. The reporting categories identified in this section are specific to the [ACT writing test scoring rubric](#).

Reporting category	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Ideas and Analysis	Students write an argument that: • Points toward a central claim but does not take a position • Summarizes the issue	Students write an argument that: • Identifies an arguable position or establishes a central claim • Introduces multiple perspectives and/or counterclaims • Identifies strengths and limitations of the perspectives	Students write an argument that: • Establishes a central claim which takes an arguable position • Develops multiple perspectives and/or counterclaims • Explores strengths and limitations of the perspectives	Students write an argument that: • Establishes a central claim which takes a nuanced or complex position • Integrates multiple perspectives and/or counterclaims with nuance • Synthesizes implications, complexities, tensions, values, or assumptions of the perspectives

Reporting category	1	2	3	4
Development and Support	Students write an argument that: • May summarize some evidence or offer only opinion	Students write an argument that: • Provides some general, vague, or inaccurate evidence, including examples, to support the central claim • Explains some connections between the evidence and the central claim	Students write an argument that: • Provides accurate, specific, and relevant evidence, including examples, to support the central claim • Explains connections between the evidence and the central claim	Students write an argument that: • Skillfully integrates accurate, specific, and relevant evidence, including examples, to support the central claim • Consistently explains connections between the evidence and the central claim • Offers insight into the significance of the issue

Reporting category	1	2	3	4
Organization	Students write an argument that: • Uses a limited structure	Students write an argument that: • Uses an unclear or inconsistent structure • May include elements of an introduction, body, and conclusion	Students write an argument that: • Exhibits a structure specific to audience and purpose • Introduces, develops, and concludes the central claim	Students write an argument that: • Exhibits a sophisticated structure specific to audience and purpose • Creates unity and coherence through introducing, developing, and concluding the central claim

Reporting category	1	2	3	4
Language Use and Conventions	Students write an argument that: • Uses words inaccurately and includes flawed sentence structures	Students write an argument that: • Uses basic word choice and sentence structures • Inconsistently demonstrates command of grammar, punctuation, and spelling	Students write an argument that: • Reflects stylistic choices made for a specific audience and purpose • Demonstrates command of grammar, punctuation, and spelling	Students write an argument that: • Integrates stylistic choices made for a specific audience and purpose and to create an engaging voice • Demonstrates command of grammar, punctuation, and spelling

Text Types and Purposes: Informative/Expository

1	2	3	4
Students write an exposition that: • Points toward a topic • May summarize some evidence or offer only opinion • Uses a limited structure • Uses words inaccurately and includes flawed sentence structures	Students write an exposition that: • Identifies a topic • Includes concepts and ideas that support the central focus and purpose • Provides some general, vague, or inaccurate evidence, including examples, to support the focus • Explains some connections between the evidence and the focus • Uses an unclear or inconsistent structure • May include elements of an introduction, body, and conclusion • Uses basic word choice and sentence structures • Inconsistently demonstrates command	Students write an exposition that: • Establishes a central focus and purpose • Examines concepts and ideas that support the central focus and purpose • Provides accurate, specific, and relevant evidence, including examples, to support the central focus • Explains connections between the evidence and the central focus • Exhibits a structure specific to audience and purpose • Introduces, develops, and concludes the central focus • Reflects stylistic choices made for a specific audience and purpose	Students write an exposition that: • Establishes a nuanced central focus and purpose • Synthesizes concepts and ideas that support the central focus and purpose • Skillfully integrates accurate, specific, and relevant evidence, including examples, to support the central focus • Consistently explains connections between the evidence and the central focus • Offers insight into the significance of the topic • Exhibits a sophisticated structure specific to audience and purpose • Creates unity and coherence through

	of grammar, punctuation, and spelling	● Demonstrates command of grammar, punctuation, and spelling	introducing, developing, and concluding the central focus ● Integrates stylistic choices made for a specific audience and purpose and to create an engaging voice ● Demonstrates command of grammar, punctuation, and spelling
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Text Types and Purposes: Narrative

1	2	3	4
Students write a narrative that: • Points toward a problem, situation, or observation • Summarizes a plot • May include minimal use of literary techniques • Uses a limited structure • Uses words inaccurately and includes flawed sentence structures	Students write a narrative that: • Identifies a problem, situation, or observation and suggests it is significant • Introduces multiple points of view • Introduces a narrator and characters • Uses some literary techniques to develop a message or purpose • Uses an unclear or inconsistent structure • May include elements of a beginning, middle, and end • Uses basic word choice and sentence structures • Inconsistently demonstrates command of grammar,	Students write a narrative that: • Establishes a problem, situation, or observation and its significance • Explores multiple points of view • Develops a narrator and characters • Uses a variety of literary techniques to develop a message or purpose • Exhibits a structure specific to audience and purpose • Introduces, develops, and concludes the message or purpose • Reflects stylistic choices made for a specific audience and purpose • Demonstrates command of grammar,	Students write a narrative that: • Establishes a complex problem, situation, or observation and its significance • Synthesizes multiple points of view • Illustrates relationships between characters or between a narrator and one or more characters • Skillfully integrates literary techniques to develop a nuanced message or purpose • Exhibits a sophisticated structure specific to audience and purpose • Creates unity and coherence through introducing, developing, and concluding the message or purpose

	punctuation, and spelling	punctuation, and spelling	● Integrates stylistic choices made for a specific audience and purpose and to create an engaging voice ● Demonstrates command of grammar, punctuation, and spelling
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