

## Academic Decathlon & Career Fair 2019 Essay Prompts and Guidelines

### Prompts

- **Grades 7 and 8** How would you improve your village? Persuade people to make your suggested changes.

States the issue and your position on it clearly in the introduction. Be awareness of the audience (teachers), voice, and purpose (persuasive). Support your position with facts, statistics, and reasons. Give credit to sources within the essay. Answer possible objections to your position. Show clear reasoning with the use of a persuasive tone. Concludes with a summary of your position or a call to action/clincher.

- **Grades 9, 10, 11 and 12** How would you improve your village? Persuade people to make your suggested changes.

States the issue and your position on it clearly in the introduction. Be awareness of the audience (teachers), voice, and purpose (persuasive). Support your position with facts, statistics, and reasons. Give credit to sources within the essay **as well as on the works cited**. Answer possible objections to your position. Show clear reasoning with the use of a persuasive tone. Concludes with a summary of your position or a call to action/clincher.

### Guidelines

Students will compete against others by grade level.

1<sup>st</sup> Place – Gold Medal

2<sup>nd</sup> Place – Silver Medal

3<sup>rd</sup> Place – Bronze Medal

### Student Requirements

- All students must participate in the Essay Competition.
  - *6-Trait Scoring Rubric* provided as self-assessment tools.
  - Pre-writing may be brought to the competition on a 3 x 5 index card, both sides may be filled.
  - Pre-writing is defined as notes, an outline or semantic mapping, *not a rough draft*.
  - Students will have 1 hour to compose, revise and submit a final draft.
- Judging by Grade Levels
- 6-Trait scoring rubric provided to teachers and students prior to event
  - 2 judges will score and scores will be totaled
  - In the case of tied high scores, the judges will reassess those essays and confer using the *6-Trait Advanced Rubric* to determine which students are awarded gold, silver and bronze medals.

As you write, remember your essay will be scored based on how well you:

- develop a multi-paragraph response to the assigned topic that clearly communicates your controlling idea to the audience.
- support your controlling idea with meaningful examples, reasons, and information based upon your research or readings.
- organize your essay in a clear and logical manner, including an introduction, body, and conclusion.
- use well-structured sentences and language that are appropriate for your audience.
- edit your work to conform to the conventions of standard American English.

Academic & Trades Decathlon

6-Trait Writing Scoring Guide

Student Number \_\_\_\_\_

Total Score \_\_\_\_\_

	<b>6 Exceptional</b>	<b>5 Experienced</b>	<b>4 Proficient</b>	<b>3 Developing</b>	<b>2 Emerging</b>	<b>1 Beginning</b>	Score
<b>Ideas &amp; Content</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>main theme</i></li> <li>• <i>supporting details</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exceptionally clear, focused, engaging with relevant, strong supporting detail</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear, focused, interesting ideas with appropriate detail</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evident main idea with some support which may be general or limited</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main idea may be cloudy because supporting detail is too general or even off-topic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose and main idea may be unclear and cluttered by irrelevant detail</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lacks central idea; development is minimal or non-existent</li> </ul>	
<b>Organization</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>structure</i></li> <li>• <i>introduction</i></li> <li>• <i>conclusion</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effectively organized in logical and creative manner</li> <li>• Creative and engaging intro and conclusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong order and structure</li> <li>• Inviting intro and satisfying closure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organization is appropriate, but conventional</li> <li>• Attempt at introduction and conclusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attempts at organization; may be a “list” of events</li> <li>• Beginning and ending not developed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of structure; disorganized and hard to follow</li> <li>• Missing or weak intro and conclusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of coherence; confusing</li> <li>• No identifiable introduction or conclusion</li> </ul>	
<b>Voice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>personality</i></li> <li>• <i>sense of audience</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expressive, engaging, sincere</li> <li>• Strong sense of audience</li> <li>• Shows emotion: humor, honesty, suspense or life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriate to audience and purpose</li> <li>• Writer behind the words comes through</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evident commitment to topic</li> <li>• Inconsistent or dull personality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voice may be inappropriate or non-existent</li> <li>• Writing may seem mechanical</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing tends to be flat or stiff</li> <li>• Little or no hint of writer behind words</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing is lifeless</li> <li>• No hint of the writer</li> </ul>	
<b>Word Choice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>precision</i></li> <li>• <i>effectiveness</i></li> <li>• <i>imagery</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Precise, carefully chosen</li> <li>• Strong, fresh, vivid images</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Descriptive, broad range of words</li> <li>• Word choice energizes writing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language is functional and appropriate</li> <li>• Descriptions may be overdone at times</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Words may be correct but mundane</li> <li>• No attempt at deliberate choice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monotonous, often repetitious, sometimes inappropriate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited range of words</li> <li>• Some vocabulary misused</li> </ul>	
<b>Sentence Fluency</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>rhythm, flow</i></li> <li>• <i>variety</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High degree of craftsmanship</li> <li>• Effective variation in sentence patterns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy flow and rhythm</li> <li>• Good variety in length and structure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally in control</li> <li>• Lack variety in length and structure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some awkward constructions</li> <li>• Many similar patterns and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often choppy</li> <li>• Monotonous sentence patterns</li> <li>• Frequent run-on sentences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficult to follow or read aloud</li> <li>• Disjointed, confusing, rambling</li> </ul>	
<b>Convention</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>age appropriate,</i></li> <li>• <i>spelling, caps, punctuation, grammar</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exceptionally strong control of standard conventions of writing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong control of conventions; errors are few and minor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Control of most writing conventions; occasional errors with high risks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited control of conventions; frequent errors do not interfere with understanding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequent significant errors may impede readability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Numerous errors distract the reader and make the text difficult to read</li> </ul>	

## Tips on Writing a Persuasive Essay

Writing a persuasive essay is like being a lawyer arguing a case before a jury. The writer takes a stand on an issue—either “for” or “against”—and builds the strongest possible argument to win over the reader.

In a persuasive essay, it’s the writer’s job to convince the reader to accept a particular point of view or take a specific action. Persuasive essays require good research, awareness of the reader’s biases, and a solid understanding of both sides of the issue. A good persuasive essay demonstrates not only why the writer’s opinion is correct, but also why the opposing view is incorrect.

Persuasive writing is a fixture of modern life—found in advertising, newspaper editorials, blogs, and political speeches. Often persuasive writing assignments and test prompts concern contemporary issues, for example: “The school board is debating on whether or not to ban cell phone use in school. Write an essay convincing the board to adopt your position.” As shown in this persuasive writing prompt, the main purpose is not to inform, but to “persuade” or “convince” an audience (the school board) to think or act a certain way.

## The Five-Step Writing Process for Persuasive Essays

At Time4Writing, we believe the five-step writing process is the best approach to learning how to write a persuasive essay. Here are persuasive essay tips for each phase of the writing process.

### 1. Prewriting for the Persuasive Essay

The prewriting phase of writing a persuasive essay is extremely important. During this phase, students should plan every aspect of the essay:

**Choose a position.** Students should think about the issue and pick the side they wish to advocate.

**Understand the audience.** In order to write an effective persuasive essay, the writer must understand the reader’s perspective. Is the reader undecided or inclined to favor one side or the other?

**Do the research.** A persuasive essay depends upon solid, convincing evidence. Don’t rely on a single source. Go to the library and enlist the help of the librarian. Speak with community experts and teachers. Read and take notes. There is no substitute for knowledge of both sides of the issue.

**Identify the most convincing evidence,** as well as the key points for the opposing view.

### Organizing the Persuasive Essay: Outline and Structure

Next, create an outline. Organize the evidence to build the strongest possible argument. If the teacher has specified an essay structure, incorporate it into the outline. Typically, the persuasive essay comprises five or six paragraphs:

#### Persuasive Essay Outline

##### Introductory Paragraph

- Grab the reader’s attention by using a “hook.”
- Give an overview of the argument.
- Close with a thesis statement that reveals the position to be argued.

## **Body Paragraphs**

- Each body paragraph should focus on one piece of evidence.
- Within each paragraph, provide sufficient supporting detail.

## **Opposing View Paragraph**

- Describe and then refute the key points of the opposing view.

## **Concluding Paragraph**

- Restate and reinforce the thesis and supporting evidence.

## **2. Drafting the Persuasive Essay**

- When writing the initial draft of a persuasive essay, consider the following suggestions:
- The introductory paragraph should have a strong “hook” that grabs the reader’s attention. Open with an unusual fact or statistic, a question or quotation, or an emphatic statement. For example: “Driving while talking on a cell phone, even hands-free, is the equivalent of driving drunk.”
- The thesis statement should leave no doubts about the writer’s position.
- Each body paragraph should cover a separate point, and the sentences of each paragraph should offer strong evidence in the form of facts, statistics, quotes from experts, and real-life examples.
- Consider various ways to make the argument, including using an analogy, drawing comparisons, or illustrating with hypothetical situation (e.g., what if, suppose that...).
- Don’t assume the audience has in-depth knowledge of the issue. Define terms and give background information.
- The concluding paragraph should summarize the most important evidence and encourage the reader to adopt the position or take action. The closing sentence can be a dramatic plea, a prediction that implies urgent action is needed, a question that provokes readers to think seriously about the issue, or a recommendation that gives readers specific ideas on what they can do.

## **3. Revising the Persuasive Essay**

- In the revision phase, students review, modify, and reorganize their work with the goal of making it the best it can be. Keep these considerations in mind:
- Does the essay present a firm position on the issue, supported by relevant facts, statistics, quotes, and examples?
- Does the essay open with an effective “hook” that intrigues readers and keeps them reading?
- Does each paragraph offer compelling evidence focused on a single supporting point?
- Is the opposing point of view presented and convincingly refuted?
- Is the sentence structure varied? Is the word choice precise? Do the transitions between sentences and paragraphs help the reader’s understanding?
- Does the concluding paragraph convey the value of the writer’s position and urge the reader to think and act?