

## WritePlacer Essay Template

Below is a template for a 5-paragraph essay. While we recommend this format, you may opt for a shorter 4-paragraph version. Go with four paragraphs rather than blowing up your essay with unnecessary words just so you have five paragraphs. Likewise, don't do that to increase your word count. Whichever format you choose, keep the introduction and the conclusion short and sweet.

### Paragraph 1 – Introduction (3-4 sentences)

Begin your essay with one of the following: a generalization about the topic, a quotation, a short anecdote to set-up the correctness of your position, a historical framework, or a piece of news illustrating the importance of the issue. **Admit the complexity of the issue.** You have two goals in the beginning part of the essay: to introduce the topic, and to express your opinion on it. Be sure to place your thesis as the final sentence in your introduction. The thesis is your answer to the Assignment question.

### Paragraph 2 – First Example (4-6 sentences)

Start with your most-powerful or relevant example. **Be specific.** Your example can be from history, science, politics, business, entertainment, pop culture, current events, personal experience, etc. Anything can be an example, but choose only ONE for each paragraph. Pick an example you are knowledgeable about and that you believe strongly supports your thesis. You have three tasks in your body paragraphs:

- Introduce your example.
- Describe it.
- Explain how it fully supports your thesis.

You should spend the majority of your body paragraph accomplishing the third step: **explaining how it fully supports your thesis.** Aim to convince the reader through very concrete details how your position on the issue is correct. **Don't end your paragraph by referencing the next point.**

### Paragraph 3 – Second Example (4-6 sentences)

Use a transition word/phrase to introduce the second example. Describe it, and explain again how it fully supports your thesis. You may refer to your first example if you need to, but focus on your new example. **Don't mention your third example until you get to the third paragraph.**

### Paragraph 4 – Third Example (4-6 sentences)

Use a transition phrase again in the first topic sentence. Describe the example. Explain how it supports your thesis. Make sure you are clear how the example relates to the topic.

### Paragraph 5 – Conclusion (2-3 sentences)

**Introduce opposing ideas.** Explain and refute these ideas in general terms then reinforce the correctness of your idea. Note that transition words are highlighted in yellow.

To refute one opposing view: *Some have argued that \_\_\_\_\_, believing that \_\_\_\_\_. **However,** this viewpoint on the issue is negated by \_\_\_\_\_. **Rather,** \_\_\_\_\_. **Therefore,** in the long run, \_\_\_\_\_.*

To refute two opposing views: ***Although** \_\_\_\_\_ is correct, some have argued that \_\_\_\_\_, believing that \_\_\_\_\_. **However,** this viewpoint on the issue is negated by \_\_\_\_\_. **Rather,** \_\_\_\_\_. **Therefore,** in the long run, \_\_\_\_\_.*

# ACCUPLACER<sup>®</sup> WritePlacer Overview and Response Examples

## TEST OVERVIEW

The ACCUPLACER<sup>®</sup> WritePlacer test will determine your English/Writing course placement at Tulsa Community College (TCC). The WritePlacer test measures your ability to write effectively, which is critical to academic success. Your writing sample will be scored on the basis of how successfully it communicates to the readers about your assigned essay topic. A simple 4-5 paragraph essay will be more than sufficient.

The test is **not timed**.

You will first read a **short passage and an assignment question** that are focused on an important issue.

You will then **write a multi-paragraph essay of 300-600 words** in which you develop your own point of view on the issue. You should **support your position with appropriate reasoning and examples**. Again, **the position you take will not influence your score**.

Your essay will be given a holistic score that represents how clearly and effectively you expressed your position. WritePlacer **scores range from 1-8**. However, an essay that is too short to be evaluated, written on a topic other than the one presented, or written in a language other than English will be given a score of zero.

The following six characteristics of writing will be considered in the single WritePlacer score:

- **Purpose and Focus:** The clarity to which you present information in a unified and coherent manner, clearly addressing the assigned prompt.
- **Organization and Structure:** The clarity with which you order and connect your ideas.
- **Development and Support:** The extent to which you develop and support your ideas.
- **Sentence Variety and Style:** The effectiveness of your sentence structure and paragraphs demonstrating control of vocabulary, voice, and structure.
- **Mechanical Conventions:** The extent to which you express ideas using Standard American English.
- **Critical Thinking:** The extent to which you communicate a point of view and demonstrate reasoned relationships among ideas

A WritePlacer prompt (essay question) consists of a short passage adapted from some longer text. Following the passage is an assignment that requires you to focus on the issue addressed in the passage.

On the pages that follow, you will find descriptions of WritePlacer score points and sample essays written for the sample prompt below. [Click here](#) if you would like to see more samples.

## SAMPLE ESSAY RESPONSES

The following is a sample WritePlacer writing prompt. You will receive both a **Passage** and an **Assignment** in the form of a question. We've provided examples of scores of 1, 3, and 5. There's a link at the end if you would like to view all of the examples scores.

## Sample Prompt

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### Passage

*An actor, when his cue came, was unable to move onto the stage. He said, "I can't get in, the chair is in the way." The producer said, "Use the difficulty. If it's drama, pick the chair up and smash it. If it's comedy, fall over it." From this experience the actor concluded that in any negative situation in life, there is something positive you can do with it.*

Adapted from Lawrence Eisenberg, "Caine Scrutiny"

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### Assignment

Can any obstacle or disadvantage be turned into something good?

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### Score of 1

#### Grading criteria – Score of 1

A response in this category demonstrates *no mastery* of on-demand essay writing; the response is severely flawed by *many or most* of the following weaknesses:

- **Purpose and Focus and Critical Thinking:** Lacks a viable point of view on the issue
- **Purpose and Focus:** Demonstrates no awareness of audience
- **Purpose and Focus:** Fails to present a main idea
- **Organization:** Is disorganized and/or disjointed
- **Development and Support, and Critical Thinking:** Demonstrates flawed reasoning
- **Development and Support, and Critical Thinking:** Demonstrates no complexity of thought
- **Sentence Variety and Style:** Displays fundamental errors in word choice, usage and sentence structure
- **Mechanical Conventions:** Contains pervasive spelling, grammar, punctuation and mechanical errors

#### Sample Essay Response – Score of 1

The question is can any obstacle or disadvantage be turned into something good? Yes it can, because even in the story she couldn't get in because of the chair and the guy tells him if it's a drama, "Smash it and if it's a comedy fall over it. But when you think about it, if a girl was guilty and was pleading to say on how she was innocent and they catch her in a lie its practically the same thing. But that's not the point but you can change a negative into a positive someday.

#### What we learn from this response

This essay lacks a viable, coherent point of view on the issue. The writer attempts to explain that "you can change a negative into a positive," but the ideas provided are minimal and disorganized, resulting in a disjointed and, at times, incoherent essay (Yes it can....But when you think about it, if a girl was guilty and was pleading to say on how she was innocent and they catch her in a lie its practically the same thing). The response demonstrates flawed reasoning, no complexity of thought and displays fundamental errors in sentence structure (But that's not the point but you can change). In addition to all of these issues, this response is too short (only 96 words) and lacks multiple paragraphs. The test requires a minimum of 300 words.

### Score of 3

#### Grading criteria – Score of 3

A response in this category demonstrates *little mastery* of on-demand essay writing; the response is flawed by *one or more* of the following weaknesses:

- **Purpose and Focus and Critical Thinking:** Presents a vague or limited point of view on the issue
- **Purpose and Focus:** Demonstrates little awareness of audience
- **Purpose and Focus:** Attempts to develop the main idea, although that attempt is inadequate
- **Organization:** Is poorly organized and/or focused or demonstrates serious problems with coherence or progression of ideas
- **Development and Support, and Critical Thinking:** Provides inappropriate or insufficient examples, reasons, or other evidence to support its position
- **Developmental and Support, and Critical Thinking:** Demonstrates weak critical thinking with little complexity of thought or with flawed reasoning
- **Sentence Variety and Style:** Displays limited word choice and little sentence variety
- **Mechanical Conventions:** Contains many errors in mechanical conventions of usage, sentence structure, grammar, spelling and punctuation

### **Sample Essay Response – Score of 3**

I do believe that any obstacle or disadvantage can be turned into something good. I believe this is because people learn many things from their mistakes and that's the only way. In the example that is provided, the actor is obviously confused. The director makes a good point on how to work around it, and in a case where they make use of the chair that's in the way, which helps make it funny, exciting, or depressing. In a play or musical of any type, it adds meaning. Not only does an obstacle or disadvantage get turned into something good, but it can discover new things. Whenever any situation happens, such as in this case, I'd laugh if it's funny, cry if it's dramatic, make a joke out of it, or act like it didn't happen. Just keep in mind that the purpose of life is to learn from mistakes, which can turn into something good.

### **What we learn from this response**

This response is an improvement, but it still does not directly address the assignment question and provide quality support. Demonstrating weak critical thinking, this essay states a point of view (I do believe that any obstacle or disadvantage can be turned into something good) but offers little support beyond an insufficient discussion of the acting example given in the passage. Despite some attempt to develop the main idea, poor organization leads to serious problems in progression of ideas (Whenever any situation happens, such as in this case, I'd laugh if it's funny, cry if it's dramatic, make a joke out of it, or act like it didn't happen. Just keep in mind that the purpose of life is to learn from mistakes, which can turn into something good). The response contains many errors in usage and sentence structure. Also, like the score of 1 response, this score of 3 response is too short and lacks multiple paragraphs. This response is only 156 words, still short of the minimum of 300.

### **Score of 5**

#### **Sample Essay response – Score of 5**

In my lifetime, I have seen many ways an obstacle or disadvantage can be turned into a good thing. Sometimes when something bad happens, it can prepare you for the future obstacles to come. Here is an example: if a person gets a serious burn they would panic and not know what to do. If the same thing happened again, the person would be more prepared and have knowledge from the previous experience.

Another example is if someone is on crutches, about to open the door, would you open the door for them? If you are the person on crutches you would be at a disadvantage to others. But this can be turned into a good thing. You now have someone to open the door for you, and this is a good way to meet people and make

friends.

Sometimes when things aren't going your way, you have to improvise a little. For example, before a basketball game you see that the other team is much taller than your team. The coach might have only made up plays for a short team. The other team is tall, but slow. You use your speed to win the game. In the blink of an eye, you've change a disadvantage into a good thing.

The best comedians always turn an obstacle or disadvantage into a good thing. If the audience is not laughing at this performance, then he has to change what he's doing. This obstacle about the audience not laughing he could make a joke about, then making the obstacle into a good thing.

### **Grading criteria – Score of 5**

An essay in this category demonstrates *adequate mastery* of on-demand essay writing although it will have *lapses in quality*. A typical essay:

- **Purpose and Focus and Critical Thinking:** Develops a viable point of view on the issue
- **Purpose and Focus:** May stray from the audience and purpose but is able to refocus
- **Organization:** Is generally organized and focused but could lack coherence and logical progression of ideas
- **Development and Support, and Critical Thinking:** Demonstrates competent critical thinking, using adequate examples, reasons, and other evidence to support its position
- **Sentence Variety and Style:** Exhibits adequate but inconsistent control of language
- **Sentence Variety and Style:** Demonstrates some variety in sentence structure
- **Mechanical Conventions:** Contains some minor errors in sentence structure, grammar, spelling and punctuation

### **What we learn from this response**

This essay demonstrates competent critical thinking, providing adequate reasons and examples to support the claim that “an obstacle or disadvantage can be turned into a good thing.” Although the response offers a variety of adequate supporting examples, it demonstrates an occasional lack of progression of ideas as it jumps from one idea to the next (. . . if a person gets a serious burn . . . . If someone is on crutches . . . . The best comedians always turn an obstacle or disadvantage into a good thing). The essay demonstrates adequate but inconsistent control of language and features some minor errors (If the audience is not laughing . . . . This obstacle about the audience not laughing he could make a joke about, then making the obstacle into a good thing). Also, notice the multiple paragraphs; however, it is still short of 300 words. This response is only 262 words, still short of the minimum of 300.

## WritePlacer Tips and Strategies

- **The WritePlacer exam will NOT require any outside knowledge.** You are not expected to have any specific technical know-how or understanding of specific books or authors. You will be provided a writing prompt consisting of a passage and an assignment question to answer, which is everything you need to complete the essay.
- **You will not be scored on your opinion.** Don't worry if you feel you are choosing a less commonly held position on the topic. You will NOT receive a lower score based on your stance on the topic.
- **Select one side only.** Unlike real life where most of our opinions are a mix of gray, the WritePlacer essay requires you to take a strong stand on one side -- and only one side -- of the issue. You won't be able to adequately argue a middle-of-the-road approach, and, in doing so, you risk appearing indecisive.
- **Don't change your position mid-essay.** Even if you feel you're running out of energy and regretting your position on the topic, stay strong and finish the essay anyway. Don't back away from your original stance. You don't have time to go back and re-write the whole thing.
- **No example is too specific.** Unsuccessful essays are usually too general. As long as you can reasonably argue that your example supports your main idea (thesis), no example is too specific. Aim to make readers think, "wow, what extreme detail!" as they read. If you are using an example from personal experience, using some names, dates, places, and other concrete details can go a long way. Replace abstracts with absolutes.
- **Incorporate the opposing side.** A solid strategy to strengthen your argument is to acknowledge that there *is* complexity to the issue. However, if you bring up and describe the opposing side, make sure to criticize it effectively and reiterate that *your side* is the only one that is valid. Acknowledging opposing views is a solid closing strategy, although include them in an additional body paragraph is also acceptable.
- **Keep the introduction and conclusion brief.** You don't need a long introduction or conclusion. The function of an introductory paragraph is to introduce the reader to the topic in the prompt, and then to clearly and forcefully state your position on it. More than 3-4 sentences is too long. In the conclusion, 1-2 sentences is sufficient to reiterate your position and leave the essay with a closing idea. Save your writing-time for your body paragraphs because that's where the bulk of your writing lives.
- **Use Transition Words.** Scroll down to the bottom of this article to see a good list of common transition words. Use these transitions to signal to your readers that you are moving from one idea to the next. Use them between paragraphs as well as sentences. However, don't start every sentence with a transition. That would be weird. The goal is to use transitions as guideposts for your readers. For example *is* a transition. When you use it you signal to your readers that you are about to present an example. It's really that simple.

### Transition Words and Phrases

#### To show agreement

- not only ... but also
- as a matter of fact
- in addition
- coupled with
- in the light of

### To list

- first, second, third
- To begin, to conclude

### To show disagreement

- in contrast
- different from
- of course ..., but
- on the other hand
- on the contrary
- at the same time
- in spite of
- but

### To show cause and/or effect

- in the event that
- for the purpose of
- with this in mind
- in the hope that
- in order to
- if
- ... then

### To exemplify or clarify

- in other words
- as an illustration
- in this case
- to put it another way
- that is to say
- with attention to