**How to Read a Writing Prompt for a Timed-Writing**

**The Basic Steps**

1. reading the prompt

2. planning or pre-writing a response (outlining, mapping, listing, etc.)

3. drafting your response in paragraph form

4. revising your response for ideas, fluency, and mechanics and usage (spelling, punctuation, capitalization, etc.)

**Types of Writing Prompts**

1. a response to an idea

(EXAMPLE: How is summer one of the joys of childhood?)

2. a review of a specific reading passage

(EXAMPLE: Review an essay called "Summer" and determine if it effectively describes the author's change in attitude toward summer.

**How to Read the Prompt that Calls for a Response to an Idea**

The Parts of the Writing Prompt:

1. establishing the situation

2. inserting the writer into the situation

3. offering the writer options to consider

4. specifying points the writer is to address (who is the audience? what is the writerÕs thesis? what should the writer's body paragraphs cover?)

Sample Writing Prompt: (ISTEP+, Fall 1998)

*As more people work indoors, they seem to want more outdoor recreation. What do you think could be done to fill this need? For example, you might want to establish a nature preserve, a historical site, an athletic field, or some type of park.*

OR

*Write an essay to be submitted to the local city planning commission in which you describe the outdoor area you would like to see established. Include what people could do there, why you think it desirable, and where it could be located.*

STEPS

* **(Establishing the Situation)**

As more people work indoors, they seem to want more outdoor recreation.

* **(Inserting the Writer into the Situation)**

What do you think could be done to fill this need?

* **(Offering the Writer Options to Consider)**

For example, you might want to establish a nature preserve, a historical site, an athletic field, or some type of park.

* **(Specifying Points the Writer is to Address)**

Write an essay to be submitted to the (audience) local city planning commission in which you (thesis) describe the outdoor area you would like to see established.

(body paragraph 1) Include what people could do there,

(body paragraph 2) why you think it desirable, and

(body paragraph 3) where it could be located.

If you know the elements of a writing prompt, you can see that the prompt tells you EXACTLY what it wants you to write. Not only does it tell you what to write, the writing prompt tells you HOW TO ORGANIZE YOUR RESPONSE.

**Organizing Your Response to an Idea**

Introduction (3-5 sentences total)

1. Reword (DO NOT SIMPLY REWRITE) the general situation and the options youÕve been given in 2-3 sentences.

2. End the introduction with the specific choice you plan to explore in the rest of your essay. This statement of choice is your thesis.

*Whether people work in an cramped office, on the hectic floor of the stock exchange, or in a crowded classroom, they all crave the same thing: wide, open spaces where they can relax and enjoy life. Maybe they relax by birdwatching in a local nature preserve or by visiting a restored 19th-century village. Some people enjoy more active pleasures, perhaps playing soccer or baseball or rollerblading. Clearly, with so many people wanting to enjoy the outdoors, the local planning commission should seriously consider developing another recreational park serving both children and adults in our community.*

Body Paragraphs (5-8 sentences EACH)

The topic of each paragraph has already been given to you. Look at the prompt again and find phrases that direct you to address specific points.

Body 1: Topic: What people could do there -- SPECIFICS

Body 2: Topic: Why you think it desirable -- SPECIFICS

Body 3: Topic: Where it could be located -- SPECIFICS

Conclusion (3-5 sentences total)

1. Begin with a reworded statement of your thesis.

2. Continue by rewording the first sentence of each body paragraph.

3. Conclude by calling the audience to act upon or react to your suggestion.

*Therefore, the local planning commission should seriously consider reserving space that can be devoted for another recreational area for the citizens of our town. Our friends and neighbors could enjoy the many walking and cycling paths as well as the water park for summertime fun. Our community has so few places where people can relax and enjoy time with their families that one is desperately needed. Finally, locating the park in a central location, such as downtown, can allow many more people to enjoy its benefits. Overall, the planning commission should consider my proposal and create a new recreational area for families in our community.*

***Practice Prompt: Responding to an Idea***

*Everyone has dreams of striking it rich. What would you do if you suddenly received $1000? For example, you might purchase a new item, take your family and friends on a memorable vacation, or invest it wisely and watch the money grow.*

*Write an essay to a generous person whom you think would give you $1000 dollars in which you convince him or her that you deserve to be given the money. Include the use to which you would put the gift, why this is the best use, and how you or society would benefit.*

Which sentence in the prompt establishes the situation? (Write it out.)

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Which sentence inserts the writer into the situation? (Write it out.)

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What options-to-consider are offered to the writer?

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Specifying Points the Writer is to Address

Who is the audience? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What is the thesis? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What should body paragraph 1 be about?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What should body paragraph 2 be about?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What should body paragraph 3 be about?