

## EPT Sample Essay Topic

The sample topic below is similar to the topic students will be assigned in the Essay Section of the test. Other topics are listed on page 21. The topic is followed by six sample student essays at every score point (1-6). Each essay is followed by comments on the scoring.

Directions: You will have 45 minutes to plan and write an essay on the topic assigned below. Before you begin writing, read the passage carefully and plan what you will say. Your essay should be as well organized and as carefully written as you can make it.

“For many Americans, the concept of success is a source of confusion. As a people, we Americans greatly prize success. We are taught to celebrate and admire the one who gets the highest grades, the one voted most attractive or most likely to succeed. But while we often rejoice in the success of people far removed from ourselves—people who work in another profession, live in another community, or are endowed with a talent that we do not especially want for ourselves—we tend to regard the success of people close at hand, within our own small group, as a threat.”

Explain Mead’s argument and discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with her analysis. Support your position, providing reasons and examples from your own experience, observations, or reading.

## CSU English Placement Test Holistic Scoring Guide

The categories of each score are consistent with the following legend:

- a. = response to the topic
- b. = understanding and use of the passage
- c. = quality and clarity of thought
- d. = organization, development, and support
- e. = syntax and command of language
- f. = grammar, usage, and mechanics

### **Score of 6: Superior**

**A 6 essay is superior writing, but may have minor flaws.**

A typical essay in this category:

- a. addresses the topic clearly and responds effectively to all aspects of the task
- b. demonstrates a thorough critical understanding of the passage in developing an insightful response
- c. explores the issues thoughtfully and in depth
- d. is coherently organized and developed, with ideas supported by apt reasons and well-chosen examples
- e. has an effective, fluent style marked by syntactic variety and a clear command of language
- f. is generally free from errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

### **Score of 5: Strong**

**A 5 essay demonstrates clear competence in writing. It may have some errors, but they not serious enough to distract or confuse the reader.**

A typical essay in this category:

- a. addresses the topic clearly, but may respond to some aspects of the task more effectively than others
- b. demonstrates a sound critical understanding of the passage in developing a well-reasoned response
- c. shows some depth and complexity of thought
- d. is well organized and developed, with ideas supported by appropriate reasons and examples
- e. displays some syntactic variety and facility in the use of language
- f. may have a few errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

### **Score of 4: Adequate**

**A 4 essay demonstrates adequate writing. It may have some errors that distract the reader, but they do not significantly obscure meaning.**

A typical essay in this category:

- a. addresses the topic, but may slight some aspects of the task
- b. demonstrates a generally accurate understanding of the passage in developing a sensible response

- c. may treat the topic simplistically or repetitively
- d. is adequately organized and developed, generally supporting ideas with reasons and examples
- e. demonstrates adequate use of syntax and language
- f. may have some errors, but generally demonstrates control of grammar, usage, and mechanics

**Score of 3: Marginal**

**A 3 essay demonstrates developing competence, but is flawed in some significant way(s).**

A typical essay in this category reveals one or more of the following weaknesses:

- a. distorts or neglects aspects of the task
- b. demonstrates some understanding of the passage, but may misconstrue parts of it or make limited use of it in developing a weak response
- c. lacks focus, or demonstrates confused or simplistic thinking
- d. is poorly organized and developed, presenting generalizations without adequate and appropriate support or presenting details without generalizations
- e. has limited control of syntax and vocabulary
- f. has an accumulation of errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics that sometimes interfere with meaning

**Score of 2: Very Weak**

**A 2 essay is seriously flawed.**

A typical essay in this category reveals one or more of the following weaknesses:

- a. indicates confusion about the topic or neglects important aspects of the task
- b. demonstrates very poor understanding of the main points of the passage, does not use the passage appropriately in developing a response, or may not use the passage at all
- c. lacks focus and coherence, and often fails to communicate its ideas
- d. has very weak organization and development, providing simplistic generalizations without support
- e. has inadequate control of syntax and vocabulary
- f. is marred by numerous errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics that frequently interfere with meaning

**Score of 1: Incompetent**

**A 1 essay demonstrates fundamental deficiencies in writing skills.**

A typical essay in this category reveals one or more of the following weaknesses:

- a. suggests an inability to comprehend the question or to respond meaningfully to the topic
- b. demonstrates little or no ability to understand the passage or to use it in developing a response
- c. is unfocused, illogical, or incoherent
- d. is disorganized and undeveloped, providing little or no relevant support
- e. lacks basic control of syntax and vocabulary
- f. has serious and persistent errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics that severely interfere with meaning

Readers should not penalize ESL writers excessively for slight shifts in idiom, problems with articles, confusion over prepositions, and occasional misuse of verb tense and verb forms, so long as such features do not obscure meaning.