



Grade 7 Written Composition

Scoring Guide

Spring 2003

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INTRODUCTION

Writing is a life skill. As students move from grade to grade, writing skills are critical for academic progress. Students who have difficulty putting their thoughts into writing struggle to succeed in social studies, science, and many areas other than English language arts. Because good writing requires good thinking, the act of writing helps students learn to clarify their thoughts and focus their ideas.

The composition section of the TAKS writing test assesses Objectives 1 and 2. Objective 1 focuses on the quality of the composition's content, while Objective 2 focuses on how clearly and effectively the student communicates his or her ideas. These objectives are inextricably linked because good writing must be both substantial and mechanically sound.

Objective 1

The student will, within a given context, produce an effective composition for a specific purpose.

The ability to communicate thoughts and ideas through writing helps students become successful, not only in school but throughout their lives. In order to communicate effectively, students must organize and develop ideas in a logical, coherent, and interesting manner that is easy for the reader to follow and understand. Objective 1 tests each student's ability to produce an organized and well-developed composition in response to a prompt. The prompt is worded so that students have broad latitude in crafting an individual response. Students can use any organizational strategy that allows them to write an effective piece—they can write a story, a description, a philosophical piece, an expository piece—or they can combine approaches. However students choose to respond, it is important that the composition they write is uniquely theirs—that it is authentic and represents their best thinking and writing.

Objective 2

The student will produce a piece of writing that demonstrates a command of the conventions of spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, usage, and sentence structure.

To write well, students must be able to apply the conventions of the English language. This means that students must have the following skills. First, when students write a composition, they have the ability to follow the rules of correct capitalization, punctuation, spelling, grammar, usage, and sentence structure. Second, they have the ability to write effective sentences and use words and phrases that enhance the reader's understanding of their ideas. Although students are not expected to produce absolutely error-free writing on the test, they are expected to write as clearly and correctly as possible. The stronger the writing conventions are, the more likely it is that students will be able to produce an effective composition.

TAKS compositions are holistically scored on a scale of 1 (ineffective) to 4 (highly effective). For each score point, the scoring guide presents the rubric as well as four student compositions with explanatory annotations. Using this scoring guide will help you to better understand your students' writing development and the strengths and weaknesses of your school's writing program. However, it is important to remember that readers assign scores to compositions based on overall effectiveness. Because these judgments are holistic, compositions at a particular score point generally do not reflect every characteristic listed on the rubric for that score point.

Write a composition about a time when something unexpected happened.

The information in the box below will help you remember what you should think about when you write your composition.

REMEMBER—YOU SHOULD

- write about a time when something unexpected happened
- make your writing interesting to the reader
- make sure that each sentence you write helps the reader understand your composition
- make sure that your ideas are clear and easy for the reader to follow
- write about your ideas in detail so that the reader really understands what you are saying
- check your work for correct spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and sentences

The names of individuals mentioned in the compositions have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the students whose responses appear in this guide.

SCORE POINT 1

EACH COMPOSITION AT THIS SCORE POINT IS AN INEFFECTIVE PRESENTATION OF THE WRITER'S IDEAS.

Focus and Coherence

- Individual paragraphs and/or the composition as a whole are not focused. The writer may shift abruptly from idea to idea, making it difficult for the reader to understand how the ideas included in the composition are related.
- The composition as a whole has little, or no, sense of completeness. The introduction and conclusion, if present, may be perfunctory.
- A substantial amount of writing may be extraneous because it does not contribute to the development or quality of the composition. In some cases, the composition overall may be only weakly connected to the prompt.

Organization

- The writer's progression of thought from sentence to sentence and/or paragraph to paragraph is not logical. Sometimes weak progression results from an absence of transitions or from the use of transitions that do not make sense. At other times, the progression of thought is simply not evident, even if appropriate transitions are included.
- An organizational strategy is not evident. The writer may present ideas in a random or haphazard way, making the composition difficult to follow.
- Wordiness and/or repetition may stall the progression of ideas.

Development of Ideas

- The writer presents one or more ideas but provides little or no development of those ideas.
- The writer presents one or more ideas and attempts to develop them. However, this development is so general or vague that it prevents the reader from understanding the writer's ideas.
- The writer presents only a plot summary of a published piece of writing, a movie, or a television show.
- The writer omits information, which creates significant gaps between ideas. These gaps prevent the reader from clearly understanding those ideas.

Voice

- The writer does not engage the reader, therefore failing to establish a connection.
- There may be little or no sense of the writer's individual voice. The composition does not sound authentic or original. The writer is unable to express his/her individuality or unique perspective.

Conventions

- There is little or no evidence in the composition that the writer can correctly apply the conventions of the English language. Severe and/or frequent errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, usage, and sentence structure may cause the writing to be unclear or difficult to read. These errors weaken the composition by causing an overall lack of fluency.
- The writer may misuse or omit words and phrases and may frequently write awkward sentences. These weaknesses interfere with the effective communication of ideas.

Something that was really unexpected to me was when I moved to Texas. I have lived in Mississippi all my life, but last year I moved to Texas. It was really unexpected to me, cause I never knew about any other place but SMALLTOWN, Mississippi. I never thought that I would move to DALLAS, Texas. I have lived in Texas for two year and I am still not use to it yet, cause DALLAS is a big city and there are all kinds of crimes going on everyday you wake up. I thought I would stay in SMALLTOWN Mississippi all of my life cause I am use to small towns like SMALLTOWN Mississippi. I am not use to a very large city like DALLAS, Texas. I never thought that I would move to DALLAS, Texas when I am still young I thought I would move some where when I was grown up. DALLAS is a really scary place to live in when you're young.

Score Point: 1

This response, focused on an unexpected move to Texas, includes related ideas regarding how this change affected the writer's life. However, the repetition of ideas (I am still not used to it, I am not used to a very large city) and a disorganized presentation stall the progression of the response. General and vague statements (it was really unexpected to me, cause I never knew about any other place; there are all kinds of crimes going on) provide little or no development and limit the expression of the writer's voice.

On a Saturday afternoon my dad told me something unexpected he told me if I wanted to go fishing and were we go there a place that has woods and my dad told me to bring my bebe gun to shoot over there to hunt for birds, rabbit and squire and other animals. I have a pistol bebe gun and my dad has a rifle bebe gun were are going to fish to but before we left over there we went to buy some bebes, (COC) and some drinks and something to eat then we went over there it take like 30 minutes. Just to get there and was we got there I put a new COC At my bebe gun and we started shooting at bird we got a few same to the rest we got a few after a while we started fishing it was almost nighttime we like we like going over there it was fun. I that we were leaving since it was night we did not we staid we just kept staid and my dad and me left till 12:30 when we got back we watch a movie and made popcorn after the movie we got ready to go to bed.

Score Point: 1

In this brief and general response, the writer recounts a day that began with an unexpected offer of a fishing trip. There is a sequenced narrative, but the details are vague (a place that has woods, we got a few, it was fun). Numerous conventions errors, including omitted words and the lack of appropriate sentence boundaries, interfere with the effective communication of ideas.

Unexpectedness

Unexpected is defined as unforeseen or happening without warning. Unexpected things happen all the time to everybody all over the world. Unexpected things happen because no one can know or predict everything.

I first became aware of life being filled with unexpected events when I was two years old. I was at my first movie, Robin Hood, it was the crusades scene at the beginning when they were in a prison. Right then a man's hand was chopped off, immediately I exclaimed "he got a big boo-boo" this event was very unexpected. Another example would be September 11, 2001, when the World Trade Centers were hit by airplanes and collapsed. This event was unexpected because there had never a terrorist attack on the US of this magnitude. Life without unexpected events would be life without risk, life without risk would be life without excitement, I believe excitement is worth the risk and unexpectedness. Unexpected events can be good by helping people, curing diseases, or even saving lives. Bad can also come from unexpectedness people can be injured, get new diseases, die, or kill one another.

Therefore unexpectedness will continue to change the way we live our lives. It will

-continue to affect us and harm us in good or bad ways. Whether we like it or not we cannot stop unexpected events and theres nothing we can do.

Score Point: 1

In this unfocused response, the writer attempts to define the concept of "unexpectedness" through various strategies. First the writer offers two anecdotes of unexpected events. The writer then includes a comparison of good and bad consequences of random unexpected events, but this explanation is not linked to the previous examples. The lack of an organizational strategy, along with very general development of ideas (Unexpected events can be good by helping people, curing diseases, or even saving lives), prevents the reader from clearly understanding what the writer intended to communicate.

When I got a gamecube I was shocked and unexpected. Still now I can't believe I have one. There has been many more unexpected things that have happened to me. I never expected to get a gamecube because it is fun and expensive.

The gamecube is a really fun toy. To begin, the gamecube has a lot of games. The games I usually buy are the sport games. Also on some of the games you can play multiplayer. It's fun to play on multiplayer so you can challenge your friend. Finally, the graphics make it fun because it looks real. So people when they see me playing they think I am watching a real football game. That is why gamecube can be so fun.

A gamecube is also very expensive. To begin, a gamecube cost \$200.00. When you buy it all you get is the system, one controller and sometimes a game. Also a reason it is expensive is because it has good graphics. Usually the better graphics the more expensive. Finally, it is expensive because it is new. It is one of the newest systems. That is why it is so expensive.

I am glad my parents made me unexpected with a gamecube. That is why I never expected to get a gamecube.

Score Point: 1

In this response the writer focuses on the unexpected gift of a Game Cube. A redundant list of the toy's attributes stalls the progression of thought in the composition (Finally, it is expensive because it is new. It is one of the newest systems. That is why it is so expensive.) The writer's lack of specific development (To begin, the game cube has a lot of games. The games I usually play are the sport games) and limited voice fail to engage the reader.

SCORE POINT 2

EACH COMPOSITION AT THIS SCORE POINT IS A SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE PRESENTATION OF THE WRITER'S IDEAS.

Focus and Coherence

- Individual paragraphs and/or the composition as a whole are somewhat focused. The writer may shift quickly from idea to idea, but the reader has no difficulty understanding how the ideas included in the composition are related.
- The composition as a whole has some sense of completeness. The writer includes an introduction and conclusion, but they may be superficial.
- Some of the writing may be extraneous because it does not contribute to the development or quality of the composition as a whole.

Organization

- The writer's progression of thought from sentence to sentence and/or paragraph to paragraph may not always be smooth or completely logical. Sometimes the writer needs to strengthen the progression by including more meaningful transitions; at other times the writer simply needs to establish a clearer link between ideas.
- The organizational strategy or strategies the writer chooses do not enable the writer to present ideas effectively.
- Some wordiness and/or repetition may be evident, but these weaknesses do not completely stall the progression of ideas.

Development of Ideas

- The writer attempts to develop the composition by listing ideas or briefly explaining them. In both of these cases, the development remains superficial, limiting the reader's understanding and appreciation of the writer's ideas.
- The writer presents one or more ideas and attempts to develop them. However, there is little evidence of depth of thinking because this development may be somewhat general, inconsistent, or contrived.
- The writer may omit small pieces of information that create minor gaps between ideas. However, these gaps do not prevent the reader from understanding those ideas.

Voice

- There may be moments when the writer engages the reader but fails to sustain the connection.
- Individual paragraphs or sections of the composition may sound authentic or original, but the writer has difficulty expressing his/her individuality or unique perspective.

Conventions

- Errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, usage, and sentence structure throughout the composition may indicate a limited control of conventions. Although these errors do not cause the writing to be unclear, they weaken the overall fluency of the composition.
- The writer may include some simple or inaccurate words and phrases and may write some awkward sentences. These weaknesses limit the overall effectiveness of the communication of ideas.

Score Point 2 Guide Papers

When something unexpected happens to a person, they go through the steps of surprise. For example, KIM walks into her house and hundreds of people jump out from behind her couches shouting, "Surprise!" First, KIM is shocked. Then, she starts to comprehend what happened. Finally, KIM is happy to see all these people there for her. These are the steps of surprise. Unexpected things happen to many people everyday, whether it be ironic, funny, or a world tragedy.

Irony is when the opposite of the assumed happens. My brother ALAN and I were in New Mexico with our father. For dinner, we went to a restaurant that had outdoor seating. It was such a nice day outside, so my dad and I wanted to sit outside. ALAN was absolutely opposed to this idea, but, since majority rules in my house, we sat outside as soon as the delicious food arrived. A bird flew right over our table. Everyone at the table was so busy watching the bird, we didn't even realize the bird left a present on ALAN'S nice white shirt. This is ironic because, on most occasions, sitting outside does no harm to a person. That is the assumed. What happened to ALAN was very unexpected.

My friend, JONI, was taking a survey to see what people answered to the question, "How are you?" Most people answered, "fine" or "good". There were some very interesting answers like "cold" and "life couldn't be any better."

The most eccentric answer came on the last day of the survey. JONI'S mom was driving to go pick up JONI'S little sister from her elementary school. To everyone walking down the street, JONI yelled, "How are you?" Most people just gave her strange looks. Some third graders were riding their bikes and JONI asked them the oh so well-known question and one very outspoken boy replied in a harsh tone, "Get Lost!" Everyone in the car laughed hysterically. This response was very unexpected. Unexpected events are usually fun or funny because they are surprises.

One unexpected event happened on a well-known date. This date was September 11, 2001. Four American planes were hijacked and used to terrorize the United States of America. Thousands of people died on this tragic day and many people became heroes. This was an unexpected tragedy that effected the whole world. Because of this depressing event, the United States has become stronger and a better country.

There are different kinds of unexpected events. There are the kind that are ironic and that make you not want to sit outside anymore. There are the funny events where you learn that third graders have a high vocabulary. And, the unexpected tragedies that happen to the world that remind us how great a country the United States of America is.

Score Point: 2

In the introduction, this writer presents an example of a surprising event and suggests three other types of unexpected events (irony, humor, tragedy). Each of the following three body paragraphs is focused on one of the concepts mentioned in the introductory paragraph. However, because the concepts are not linked to each other, the response as a whole lacks focus and coherence.

That summer day, I was helping my mom out at the furniture store, where she works. Suddenly I see MARY and ROSA walk in. MARY is the mother of my friend JESSICA and ROSA is JESSICA'S grandmother. I thought they came to look at the furniture. It turned out they went to the furniture store, to ask me, if I would like to take part in JESSICA'S Quinceñera that following Saturday. "Wow," I thought. It would be my first time. Without a moment's hesitation I said "Sure, why not." Then MARY said, "Okay, I'll pick you up at 6:30 p.m. for practice, today." "Okay," I replied. That night they introduced me to my partner. His name was BRAD. He had braces, 5'4", dark brown hair and eyes. He was cool to talk to, especially if that was the first time I had ever seen him. Everyday after that, I was picked up for practice. In these four days of practice I learned everything I had to know. They gave us Friday off so we could rest for Saturday. The Quinceñera was fun, I had a blast.

But the scary part was when it all started... Unexpectedly!!

Score Point: 2

This writer focuses on an invitation to participate in a friend's *Quinceñera*. Although the writer's narrative organizational strategy is generally effective, the development of ideas in the composition remains general and superficial throughout the response (In these four days of practice I learned everything I had to know). The writer occasionally engages the reader (Without a moment's hesitation I said "Sure, why not.") but does not maintain a consistently strong voice.

A ART contest

There was a art contest coming up in January 10, 2002. January 10 came up we had to draw a drawing about saying no to drugs and if you see a weapon dont touch it call adult. The art contest had A First place winner, second place and Third place winner. If you won first place you would win Fifty dollars, second place you win Forty dollars and third place you win thirty dollars. SO we started drawing. I was drawing a drug Free sign and a drug Free person. The sign said don't do drugs stay COOL Be in school. EveryBody else drew nothing But weapons and Drugs BUT they never put anything that was drug Free or weapon Free. When I turned in my drawing I had to wait until it comes in the mail so when it came I could know IF I won First place, second place or third place. As soon As the mail came I went and got it I opened it very slowly and Read it and it said That I have won the Fifty dollars I helped my mom to buy groceries and I spended some of the money on clothes. There will be another ART contest soon.

Score Point: 2

This composition, focused on an art contest, progresses smoothly from the description of the theme of the contest to what the writer did with the first place prize. That level of development does provide some sense of completeness, even though the one-line introduction and conclusion do little more than set the scene. The limited conventions, including some usage errors and some missing sentence boundaries, reduce the overall effectiveness of the composition.

An Unexpected Visit

It all happened one day when we were all at the table having breakfast, like every morning. It was a nice beautiful and really sunny day like to have a picnic outside at the park. That day something "Unexpected" was going to happen, and no one at the house knew about it. It was like a big surprise at a party but it wasn't like that it was really different. That Saturday my grandmother had a feeling that something was going to happen and it did. By the middle of the day I was cleaning my room, my mom and dad had left to the store and my grandfather was outside in the backyard. No one was inside the house only me and my grandmother when someone knocked at the door. "It was my grandmother's sister" She had come all the way from Michigan just to visit us. It was really nice to see her again. I mean my grandmother called her and wrote to her every once in a while but we were too busy to go visit her. After my parents came back from the store they couldn't believe it. They said "It's nice to see you" and they talked for a long time then she said that she was going to stay for maybe a month. Then she showed us some pictures of her daughter and grandchildren. "It would be nice

to see them too" my grandmother said. My grandmother and her sister had a really good time together in that hole month "August", we also had fun and happy moments with her and it would be really nice to see her again and i know that we will soon.

Score Point: 2

In this somewhat effective response, the writer uses a narrative organizational strategy that is focused on an unexpected visit from a relative. The writer's wordy presentation (it was like a big surprise at a party but it wasn't like that it was really different) and repetition of ideas (it was really nice to see her) at times weakens the progression of the response. In addition to the weak progression, the attempt at development remains superficial (my grandmother and her sister had a really good time together, we also had fun and happy moments with her).

SCORE POINT 3

EACH COMPOSITION AT THIS SCORE POINT IS A GENERALLY EFFECTIVE PRESENTATION OF THE WRITER'S IDEAS.

Focus and Coherence

- Individual paragraphs and the composition as a whole are, for the most part, focused. The writer generally shows the clear relationship between ideas, making few sudden shifts from one idea to the next.
- The composition as a whole has a sense of completeness. The introduction and conclusion add some depth to the composition.
- Most of the writing contributes to the development or quality of the composition as a whole.

Organization

- The writer's progression of thought from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph is generally smooth and controlled. For the most part, transitions are meaningful, and the links between ideas are logical.
- The organizational strategy or strategies the writer chooses are generally effective.
- Wordiness and/or repetition, if present, are minor problems that do not stall the progression of ideas.

Development of Ideas

- The writer attempts to develop all the ideas included in the composition. Although some ideas may be developed more thoroughly and specifically than others, the development overall reflects some depth of thought, enabling the reader to generally understand and appreciate the writer's ideas.
- The writer's presentation of some ideas may be thoughtful. There may be little evidence that the writer has been willing to take compositional risks when developing the topic.

Voice

- The writer engages the reader and sustains that connection throughout most of the composition.
- For the most part, the composition sounds authentic and original. The writer is generally able to express his/her individuality or unique perspective.

Conventions

- The writer generally demonstrates a good command of spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, usage, and sentence structure. Although the writer may make minor errors, they create few disruptions in the fluency of the composition.
- The words, phrases, and sentence structures the writer uses are generally appropriate and contribute to the overall effectiveness of the communication of ideas.

Have you ever had anything unexpected happen before? I have had lots of times when something unexpected happened. Like the two times when I had to get stitches.

One day my family and I went to the grocery store. We got our food and went home. After we got home, my mom and dad put up the food or groceries. Then they went to watch T.V. in the living room and left a cabinet door open. My brother and I got on our brand new red tricycle and rode it around on the kitchen floor. My brother peddled and I stood up on the back. I held on to his shirt because he was going faster and faster everytime he passed the refrigerator. Then suddenly I lost my hold and fell on the cabinet door that was open. I saw blood coming out and I started to cry. Then my parents heard and came running. They picked me up and got a rag, ran to the car, got all in and took me to the emergency room.

The second time was when my brother, a friend, and I were playing tag. This time we had two tricycles the red one, a black one that had nails sticking out of the wheels. We were playing passing through narrow pathways. We were going out, in, and around the house. My mom would tell us to slow down but we wouldn't hear her. Then my brother's friend

though the black tricycle with the nails sticking out and then I fell on top of it! When my mom saw she helped get me on the chair. She pulled up my pants and could even see blood dripping down my leg. On my knee you could see a big hole and some white. Then again we all three got in the car, went to my cousins house, picked her up so she could tranlet my moms speaking. When they put the stiches in I was yelling and screaming, but at the end I got crayons, a coloring book and a bunny made out of a rag.

These were two of my unexpecting days, but at the end it was all better.

Score Point: 3

In this unified response, the writer presents two different unexpected experiences that are thematically connected by the need for a trip to the emergency room to get stitches. Each body paragraph is focused on a personalized recounting of an accident. The incidents are developed through the use of specific detail (suddenly I lost my hold and fell on the cabinet door that was open, she pulled up my pants and could even see blood dripping down my leg). Although there are minor errors in conventions, they create few disruptions for the reader.

I remember how I used to fall asleep with my dad, sitting in the spacious winged chair in the corner of my room, telling me stories about what it was like when he was growing up. How ice cream used to be only a nickel, and how he and his friends would leave ^{dead} possums on neighbors' doorsteps.

But now things are different. It feels like everyone had to grow up about 2 years after September 11, 2002. I know that I did. I don't think even having all the dads in the world making sure I could go to sleep would make me feel safe.

There are rumors out there, crazy rumors. Like, don't drink Coke until Christmas because the Al Qaeda broke into a Coke factory. People are scared, really everyone is, but they're just pretending they're not. When people think you're not looking, you can see them cringe whenever they see an enormous building like the World Trade Centers.

I don't like to watch the news anymore either. Now there are other things going on that hadn't happened as much before. For example, all of these girls being kidnapped not even a mile from their homes. Or all the fighting in the Middle East, which we're now involved in more than ever.

People still seem happy though. I mean, there will

always be ice cream, even though it may not be a nickel anymore, and silly tricks you can play on people. I don't think this country has changed that much, considering all the problems we're facing right now.

Score Point: 3

This reflective composition focuses on the writer's profound emotional response to 9/11/2001. The effective introductory paragraph adds depth and engages the reader's interest. A meaningful transition into the first body paragraph (but now things are different) further strengthens the response. The thoughtful presentation of ideas and the writer's engaging voice (I don't think even having all the dads in the world making sure I could go to sleep would make me feel safe) create a generally effective piece. However, the final body paragraph is quick and superficial (girls being kidnapped, all the fighting in the Middle East). The conclusion (I don't think this country has changed that much) actually contradicts the ideas presented in the rest of the paper.

On the Fourth of July I was planning to shoot off my multitude of fire-works. I had been yearning for this very day all year. Now is the time I display my amazing array of pyrotechnics. But unfortunately there is still time left before I get to shower the sky with my special effects. I spend my time setting up my fire works and making sure I have plenty of punked about a foot long, used for lighting fire works) for the lighting of fire works. The time is right, I can now shoot off my fire works. At first, I shoot off little things like bottle rockets and I light the sparklers for my little brother and his friends. But now as the night falls upon us I feel as if the time is right to see what my \$75.00 worth of fire crackers can do. I blow up my remaining bottle rockets and make my announcement of the big fire works. I shoot off my Chinese UFO's and my Bumblebees. My super Bottle Rockets 5.0 from Germany are next. Then the finale is about to come. I get the Numero Uno La Fineractus out. It's a gigantic sized rocket that emits sparks, whistles, spins in the air, shoots smoke out of the top and then explodes into a 100x100 ringed red, white and blue circle. But wait, where is it? I remember feeling the life drain out of me. I searched everywhere for and never found it. And I remember that day even 2 years later and still to this day have not found that rocket.

Score Point: 3

In this concise response, the writer's July 4th fireworks display ends anticlimactically when the writer's largest rocket inexplicably disappears. The specific development of ideas throughout much of the response (I shoot off my Chinese UFO's and my Bumblebees. My super Bottle Rockets 5.0 from Germany are next.) engages the reader and provides a strong sense of the writer's enjoyment. However, the quick and general ending leaves the reader wanting to know more. Overall, the proper use of conventions and the student's engaging voice (I get to shower the sky with special effects) contribute to this generally effective composition.

One Saturday morning my parents and brother were up cleaning the house. I woke up and decided to help them. I asked my parents what we were going to do that day. They said we were staying around the house. A few minutes later I said that we have never been to Corpus Christi. The next minute my mom told us to go pack our bags because we were going to Corpus Christi.

We packed our bags and were headed out the door. It was a long drive. My mom drove the first half of the way, and my dad drove the last half. It took us four hours to get there. We got there around one forty-five. We checked in a hotel, left our bags, and were off to have fun.

I wanted to go in one of my favorite recording studios. My mom wanted to go to the beach. My brother wanted to go ride the ferry. And my dad was willing to take us where ever. We had fun at all of those places. For dinner we ate at this fancy seafood place. We went back to the hotel and got some sleep. The next day we checked out of the hotel, and got some breakfast. We went shopping for the rest of the time. We left around three, and were back by seven-thirty.

My family and I had an unexpected vacation to Corpus Christi, and loved it. All of us had a great time and are soon going back to Corpus Christi. My parents say we should do that more often, just pick up our bags and go out of town. Whether its Corpus Christi, Padre Island, San Antonio, or even just to

go driving. I know our next let's get up and go vacation
will be San Antonio. But this time it's all planned
out.

Score Point: 3

An impromptu family vacation to Corpus Christi is the subject of this writer's focused, coherent narrative. The writer's progression of thought is smooth and controlled, although some sections are a bit wordy (The next minute my mom told us to go pack our bags because we were going to Corpus Christi. We packed our bags and were headed out the door.). The level of development allows the reader to generally understand the writer's ideas, and a good command of conventions contributes to the overall effectiveness of the composition.

SCORE POINT 4

EACH COMPOSITION AT THIS SCORE POINT IS A HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PRESENTATION OF THE WRITER'S IDEAS.

Focus and Coherence

- Individual paragraphs and the composition as a whole are focused. This sustained focus enables the reader to understand and appreciate how the ideas included in the composition are related.
- The composition as a whole has a sense of completeness. The introduction and conclusion are meaningful because they add depth to the composition.
- Most, if not all, of the writing contributes to the development or quality of the composition as a whole.

Organization

- The writer's progression of thought from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph is smooth and controlled. The writer's use of meaningful transitions and the logical movement from idea to idea strengthen this progression.
- The organizational strategy or strategies the writer chooses enhance the writer's ability to present ideas clearly and effectively.

Development of Ideas

- The writer's thorough and specific development of each idea creates depth of thought in the composition, enabling the reader to truly understand and appreciate the writer's ideas.
- The writer's presentation of ideas is thoughtful or insightful. The writer may approach the topic from an unusual perspective, use his/her unique experiences or view of the world as a basis for writing, or make interesting connections between ideas. In all these cases, the writer's willingness to take compositional risks enhances the quality of the content.

Voice

- The writer engages the reader and sustains this connection throughout the composition.
- The composition sounds authentic and original. The writer is able to express his/her individuality or unique perspective.

Conventions

- The overall strength of the conventions contributes to the effectiveness of the composition. The writer demonstrates a consistent command of spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, usage, and sentence structure. When the writer attempts to communicate complex ideas through sophisticated forms of expression, he/she may make minor errors as a result of these compositional risks. These types of errors do not detract from the overall fluency of the composition.
- The words, phrases, and sentence structures the writer uses enhance the overall effectiveness of the communication of ideas.

I remember very distinctly the day that changed our lives forever. On 9/11/01, we had just come back from break at around 8:30 am. without a worry in the world. Class had begun like any other day, but what we didn't know was that a sleeping giant so powerful, had just awakened.

After our 1st period class, released everything was still fine, but as we entered our 2nd period class, things began to change. Our principal talked to most of the teachers and staff members, and after that they looked kind of worried for some reason. Then we learned why. As our teacher related to us what the principal had told him, we grew angry with questions such as who and why. Four major air-planes had been hijacked early that morning. All planes had passengers on board with about 2 terrorists on each plane. The first plane knew nothing about what would happen next, and then they crashed straight through one of the WTC towers. The 2nd plane crashed into the 2nd tower a few minutes later. Passengers on the 3rd plane were able to find out what had happened, and they knew what they had to do. They knew they were going to die, so they decided to fight back. They were able to take the plane down in Pennsylvania without hurting anyone. The fourth plane was taken down into the Pentagon. There were no survivors. We all went home as different people. We had to stay strong for our country.

After the 9/11/01 attacks, there were so many questions. Who did this? Why did they do it? The press was going crazy and people were in mourning. Where the WTC Twin Towers once stood, now lay a huge pile of rubble now called "Ground Zero." The people of America were standing strong and cleaning up the mess of the terrorist attacks. The U.S. Government already had a prime suspect, "osama Bin Laden." He had already tried to bomb the towers before, but failed. He swore to the fact that it wasn't him, but we already had evidence proving that he was the one. Lessons on how to fly an airplane written in Afghanistan languages were found, and a picture of Bin Laden was found too. Who's to say that it wasn't him? President

Bush made many speeches on how America was now stronger than ever, and how we would have revenge. U.S. Army troops were being trained now, and we were all starting to feel a little bit safer. The truth was starting to show more clearly on how everything was planned, and major U.S. airlines were ~~opened~~ again after closing down. Many things had changed in just several days. Gas prices ~~went~~ ~~back~~ down, and people were being more careful now. But we all knew that we were safe again.

Well, the day was planned and we attacked the Taliban. Osama Bin Laden ran scared and was living in a cave hiding scared the last that I heard. I'm not so afraid anymore, and neither is anyone else. We've all matured greater than you could ever imagine. Tributes were payed to all of the people whom lost their lives, and America is now stronger than ever before. President Bush was right. Even though we were attacked unexpectedly, we grew in ways you wouldn't imagine. Besides the Middle East, everyone was on our side of the war. The terrorist attacks of September 11th were horrible, and we lost many people. But we never lost our faith and pride. Those two things were our food when we were hungry. But in the end, who was running scared? Not us. I've lived through something ~~amazing that~~ I'll tell my grandchildren about one day. Osama bin Laden still threatens us to today, but I learned something very important since September 11, 2001. Our union is very strong, and even though the Pentagon and WTC towers had fallen, America stood strong too and held its own.

Score Point: 4

In this thoughtful, insightful composition, the writer offers a focused and cohesive account of the events of 9/11/2001. The first body paragraph is a thorough and specific chronological account of that morning. The following two paragraphs focusing on the aftermath of the attack and the subsequent attack on the Taliban are developed with the same level of detail, with good control and progression from sentence to sentence. The writer's strong sense of voice and the overall strength of the conventions contribute to the fluency and effectiveness of the composition.

Lyzabelle was a quiet girl an introvert if you will. She had only one friend at school; a chatterbox-know-it-all that nobody else liked. Lyzabelle lived with her mother in the country on 001 Backroad Drive. It was a small house but it suited the needs of her and her mother. The one thing she actually looked forward to everyday was sitting and relaxing in her secluded lounge in the forest. It was merely a stump that she sat on but it was her light at the end of the tunnel all the same.

She arrived home on the afternoon of April 25th which was exasperatingly close to summer break. After she had finished her homework (twenty multiplication problems and a paper explaining what an advert was) she put her three-year-old hiking boots on and was soon off to her lounge.

When she finally reached her stump, which was long dead, she sat upon it indian-style and awaited the usual breeze to unstraighten her hair and wisper the language of the forest into her ears. No wind arrived. For years she had come to this spot and every day there was a breeze, but not today. She waited longer and still nothing.

Since there was no wind chatter to keep her company, she started exploring areas of the forest to which she had never been. She found a variety of trees she had never seen and a clearing full of butterflies. She saw yellow

ones, orange ones, red ones, and some which had colours she could not describe because she had never seen them before. Then she saw something out of the corner of her eye. She turned and saw a black butterfly that was oddly enough staring at her. It was floating and barely moving its wings. She thought it was creepy and walked away.

After a while she was ready to return home; but where was home? She was lost and like wind of fear, terror nearly blew her over. It was getting dark and mother would be worried. She ran at a full sprint at the direction she thought was home. She ran for what seemed like an eternity. When she stopped she wasn't home but at an enormous knarly oak tree. The tree scared her but she thought it would make good shelter through the night. She cried herself to sleep and, when she awoke, could not see very clearly from all of her tears she shed the night before.

When she could see clearly again the tree somehow looked different. It had grown a small leaf at the end of one of its hand-shaped branches. It was pointing, and she knew it. She ran in the direction the tree indicated and, when she got off course, just looked up at the pointing tree.

Score Point: 4

The writer of this focused response engages the reader by describing Izabelle and providing a sense of who she is (a quiet girl who looked forward to sitting and relaxing in her secluded lounge in the forest). As the adventure begins, the writer sets the scene with specific detail (...when she finally reached her stump, which was long dead, she sat upon it Indian-style and awaited the usual breeze to unstraighten her hair and whisper the language of the forest into her ears). The word choice expresses the individuality and voice of the writer. The narrative organizational strategy is an effective way to lead up to the unexpected event, Izabelle's losing her way in the familiar forest. The overall strength of the conventions contributes to the fluency of this response.

Have you ever had something unexpected happen? Were you glad that it happened or were you upset. Were you ashamed or sad. Well I have, and let me tell you, it was the most exciting day of my life.

It all started about 3 years ago when I lived in Atlanta, Georgia. Although I was only about eleven years old, I can still remember it as if it just happened yesterday. My sister and I cheered for the "Cheer Tyme Jaguars." Now I know your wondering why our coach spelled the word time t-y-m-e. The reason was because we weren't the only "Cheer Tyme" team. There were at least 5 to 10 other teams with the name Cheer Tyme. So she spelled it different to make our team's name sound more unique, in which we were. My coach, Coach LISA, held practice every week day from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. It was always hard trying to learn the new routine, but after a day or two everyone, I mean all 30 of us had it down pat. At this particular competition we were going against our rivals, the "Wild Cats." We had already had the opportunity to cheer against them and we won first place. So we knew there was a possibility of winning. All we had to do was stay focused. Before every competition we always warmed up by exercising and doing a couple of stunts. Then we would go behind stage while the team before us performed, and we would pray. We always prayed that everything would go well and that no one got hurt. As we ended our prayers we noticed that everyone was screaming wildly for our rivals, but in a situation like this we had to just tune all of the noise out.

When we stepped on the floor everyone was at ease, in their positions, waiting for the music to begin. Once the music actually started the crowd loosened up and we all got more cheerful. We were hitting every more and sticking almost every stunt. Earlier in the routine the girls next to me struggled to stick a stunt, but there wasn't much they could do. The girl in the air already lost her balance. Once we finished, we spirited off the stage. We were always the last team to perform so after we finished we would just go back on the floor and wait for the announcement of the winners. At this point in time I just knew we had gotten second place because of the stunt that we didn't stick. As the announcer grabbed the microphone everyone of my team members crossed their fingers. He announced the third place first. It was the team that went first in the competition. Then he announced second place. It was another team from earlier in the competition. That was disappointing, I really thought we would be second. In slow motion, he opened the first place envelope. And he took out the piece of paper. Then he brought the microphone up to his mouth and said, "Cheer time." Everybody on our team jumped up and started hugging and screaming, except for me. I saw the girls from The Wild Cats were jumping & screaming also. Then he said "Wild Cats" and our hearts sank.

Looking back, I'm glad we didn't win because that motivated us to work really hard. And I also learned that no matter how hard you work, there are just some things you can't control.

Score Point: 4

This highly effective response, focused on a cheerleading competition and the valuable lessons learned by the writer from losing it, is framed with a thoughtful introduction and conclusion which add significance to what the event means to the writer. The body of the composition is a suspenseful first-person narrative, which progresses smoothly—initially providing background regarding the team's hard work in preparing for the contest, moving to the contest's hopeful beginning, and ending with its disappointing conclusion. The strong, vivid development of ideas and sustained voice keep the reader engaged throughout. The overall strength of conventions contributes to the fluency of the response.

Every year my family and I go on a 2 week trip to Montana. We stay at the ROARING RIVER Ranch, a small guest ranch an hour from HELENA. I love going to the ranch the weather is so much cooler there, and the mountains are gorgeous. It's also fun to swim in the river, but my favorite thing to do is ride horses. There are a variety of trails you can take, the most exciting, however, is the Caves Ride. During this ride you take a 2 to 2½ hour ride up the mountain, then you hike up to the biggest of 3 caves, previously inhabited by Indians. It usually takes little more than 3 hours to complete the ride, but it took more than 8 hours once.

It started out like a normal ride, ^{the path} weaving between trees and taking us through flower littered meadows. In a small grove we tied our horses to trees and took the short hike up to the caves. We stayed in the Indian Caves about 10 minutes before heading back to the horses, when we realized one rider, DR. SOONG, wasn't with us. We had to hike all the way back up the path looking for him. I was checking the caves when I saw his wife running toward me. She was breathing heavily, but I could tell she had found him by the way she was pointing. When she had found her husband, she told me between gasps he was "laying on his back with a huge rock on his knee." Apparently an overhanging rock he was walking on had given way, and he had tumbled 10 feet to the ground. I sent Mrs. SOONG back to the horses. Then

she explained the situation to a wrangler who had to hike all the way down to get help. he came back in about an hour with 4 ranch hands and a stretcher. They had decided to carry the man down the mountain on the orange stretcher, but first 2 of the doctors on the ride made an quick splint out of sticks + belts. When they finished this we were allowed to ride back down, but we realized some of the horses had broken their reins! It turned out ~~2~~ of us had to walk back down.

When we finally reached the ranch it was almost 2 o'clock and lunch was over. Even though I was very hungry I reminded myself of how Dr. SOONG must feel. It took until 4 for the ranch hands to carry him all the way down, and when they finally did get him to the road the ambulance was ready and waiting.

In HELENA, Dr. SOONG got X-rays where they found out he had a severe tibial plateau, a type of fracture. In the end they had to fly him down to DENVER to get surgery done. It's funny how a normal day can suddenly turn exciting.

Score Point: 4

In this tightly focused chronological narrative, the writer describes an accident witnessed on vacation. The writer prepares the reader by purposefully setting up the situation (It usually takes little more than 3 hours to complete the ride). Specific details (I saw his wife running toward me, she was breathing heavily, she told me between gasps) create a sense of sustained urgency that engages the reader throughout the response. In addition, thoughtful commentary is woven into the narrative (I reminded myself of how Dr. Soong must feel). The writer's proper use of conventions enhances the effectiveness of communication.