

WRITTEN COMPOSITION

Rubrics and Sample Responses

Write an essay about a time you received encouragement from another person.

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 the assigned topic
- make your writing thoughtful and interesting
- make sure that each sentence you write contributes to your composition as a whole
- make sure that your ideas are clear and easy for the reader to follow
- write about your ideas in depth so that the reader is able to develop a good understanding of what you are saying
- proofread your writing to correct errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and sentence structure

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.

A time when I received encouragement from another person was when I was almost done with my Eagle Scout rank for Boy Scouts. My mother kept encouraging me to finish and keep going at it, although I wanted a break from all of the work temporarily. Mom used many different techniques to get me eager to finish my final rank. She used to say "you must finish this!" or "you've had a long enough break" when I only had 1 week of break. Whenever I needed encouragement on any matter, I could count on her being there to help me out with it head on. As affirmative as her help is to me, other times, when she isn't available, offers distraught. Although remembering previous times of her help instantly encourages me to take on any thing. I know of a lot more who have encouraged me, but my mother stands out the most even though some may of had more influence on me than others. My mother has helped me and encouraged me on countless things, most of which I can't recall. Knowing someone trustworthy is there to help is very reassuring when troubling times arise. My mother is who I think has encouraged me the most in my life.

Score Point: 1

This response remains primarily focused on the encouragement the writer has received from his mother, particularly about achieving Eagle Scout rank. It lacks depth in the description of the type of encouragement, only citing a couple of apparently frequently-used expressions ("You must finish this!" "You've had a long enough break"). The response remains vague and general after that, trailing off into barely connected references to others who might have encouraged the writer and forgotten ways the mother helped the writer.

You can get encouragement from lots of people, like your parents, your teachers, and even athletes from t.v. They can encourage you in different ways, which ever you think what's best.

Your parents are big part of your family, and they encourage me all of the time to do all of my work in school and behave. They tell me that after High School I must go to college in order to get a good job to support my family.

Your teachers can also be a big encouragement to your life. If I do not know how to do the work, they always help me out like Mrs Ruiz. If she sees me that I don't get the material, you would go straight to your desk and help you out.

And another person that encouraged me, was an athlete. His name is Tiger Woods, one of the best golfers in the world. Every time he plays, he encourage me to be the best when I go out and play golf. He always motivates me to go practice everyday.

because I want to be just like him.
In conclusion, there is a lot of people
who encourage me in different ways,
but I chose these three people.

Score Point: 1

This response does not have a unifying thesis beyond the prompt. The statement in the introduction that encouragement can come from lots of people in different ways, whichever you think is best, does not provide enough focus to qualify as a thesis. The attempt at development, despite the mention of several specific people, remains vague.

EVERYBODY needs encouragement to get passed that mindset of, "I can't" or "It's too hard." If you want to be better at whatever you do, no matter if it's any sport, any subject, or even any day, everybody needs encouragement.

I am encouraged everyday. We all help each other strive to get better in any form, shape or fashion, but everyone needs encouragement, it's always up to the person if they want to take it or not. We know everyone wants to be better than anyone else, but in sports it's always about helping each other, that way the whole team could become stronger, not just physically, but mentally as well. Everyone will have a good mindset and better goals. And it takes encouragement to get there.

Encouragement is something
that takes a brave person
to do. It is always useful
when someone hears your
words of wisdom. So encourage
everyone, sad or happy, down
or up, girl or guy, because
everyone needs encouragement.

Score Point: 1

This response has a thesis: you need encouragement in order to get better at whatever you attempt to do. However, the body of the response fails to develop beyond the general level. Weak sentence-to-sentence movement and repetition of ideas stall the progression. There is a brief mention that it takes a brave person to encourage others, but the idea is quickly dropped, leaving the reader with no idea how bravery and encouragement might be connected.

The only time I get encouragement is when I'm playing sports. I always get encouragement from my mom, friends, and people in the stands. They cheer me on even if I'm in last place which I usually am; but it still makes me feel good that they still care.

I play every sport but softball so it's kind of easy to get all of the encouragement I need. My favorite sport is Volleyball and I love getting encouragement there. When you play sports and you are active you get more than enough encouragement.

In order to play sports I have to pass academically so I also get encouragement there also. It wouldn't matter if I went to college academically or athletically just as long as I went. Encouragement is a very important factor in my life. The more encouragement I get in life, I think the harder I will try to do my best in grades, sports, and in life.

Score Point: 1

The writer primarily links personal experiences with encouragement to sports, although there is a statement that briefly mentions academic encouragement. The level of development remains vague, with most of the specific statements about the form encouragement takes (people calling from the stands) given in the introduction. There is no development of the concept of academic encouragement.

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.

Encouragement by my family and friends is what drives me to succeed. My confidence will soar and a sense of calm will come over me when I know someone believes that I can do it.

3 years ago I started playing volleyball. It, eventually became my passion, something that I needed everyday. Highschool competition has a much higher standard than middle school and, at try-outs, when I saw how incredible some of the other girls were doubt spread all over my body. That night my mom, who is always there for me told me that if I wanted this bad enough that I should attack at full speed, show no mercy. She said it was going to be hard work but it would be worth it. Most meaningful to me was that she knew I could do it. She believed in me. Being encouraged I went into try-out, not with fear & doubt, but with confidence and a learning attitude.

Being on the team now I know what Jamila in "My daughter the Hoopster" feels like. Both of our parents are extremely supportive, coming to games & encouraging us to aspire to higher & greater things. Encouragement is the best way I know of to help someone through a rough time.

Score Point: 2

This somewhat effective response focuses on the writer's personal experience as a volleyball player to illustrate the value of encouragement to an athlete. The writer compares her experience to Jamila's experience in the reading selection, but the development throughout remains at a superficial level. Conventions are generally appropriate.

We'll I have recieved alot of encouragement from alot of people. Especially from my friends. They have taught me no matter what happens just give it your best. My friend **SHERYL** encourages me to do better in school. When she tells me that I don't think about all the drama i'm going threuw. I concentrate on what's more important, my school work. Getting an education is the most best thing a person can get.

When i'm working with **SHERYL** sometimes I get distracted by other stuff that is going on, she helps me get back on target. I thought boys were more important. When I got into high school things changed. School work was harder, grades were more important. When I heard the seniors saying that they were excited about graduating, I thought to myself, "that's going to be me in a couple of years." So no matter what i'm going through, that stuff isn't important.

SHERYL and I have gotten through alot of stuff together. When i'm upset **SHERYL** is always there for me. When I need encouragement **SHERYL** gives it to me. **SHERYL** is a straight A student, and me well I don't

get straight A's But it makes me want to work harder, and do better at school, and in life.

I just hope whenever SHERYL is down, and needs some encouraging, i'm there for her as well. SHERYL is the bestest friend I ever have had. We never had gotten into an arguement, and I hope we won't ever do. Without SHERYL being there to encourage me, I think I would be totally lost.

Score Point: 2

The focus of this response is the encouragement the writer receives from her best friend, Sheryl. The reader has no difficulty understanding how all the ideas are related (Sheryl is an A student, Sheryl gets her back on target, Sheryl is there when the writer gets upset). However, the nature of the distractions (other stuff) and what Sheryl actually does in the way of encouragement (always there for me, when I need encouragement Sheryl gives it to me) remains superficial. There are some conventions errors in the form of awkward sentence construction.

I have many times that I have gotten encouragement from another person. One of them is trying out for solos in choir. My mom encourages me to get noticed in the choir department, so next year I can go to another level in choir. My dad also supports me in this area too.

Another thing I get encouragement is playing sports. In the story "My Daughter the Hoopster" the father encourages the daughter. My dad encourages me to play sports. He doesn't care which sport it is because he can help me in any sport. My mom also encourages me in this area because she use to play sports, so she cheers me on in the sports I play.

In the story "The Grid Who Can", the grandmother didn't start encouraging the girl until she won something. My grandmother does the same thing. She did start coming to my soccer games until I had finished a season and won

1st place, she started encouraging me more, so I had a lot of encouragement from her.

Another thing my parents encourage me to do is make good grades. I have been making good grades because I have my parents' support. They help me when I need help that way I don't make bad grades on my papers and they help me understand that way I understand the tests.

I get a lot of encouragement from a lot of people, like: friends, parents, sister, brother and family members. They all encourage me to do the best I can do to succeed.

Score Point: 2

This response addresses ways the writer's family members provide support in choir, sports, and making good grades. The progression of thought could be strengthened by including meaningful transitions. General statements (dad can help me in any sport, mom cheers me on, [grandmother] started encouraging me more) keep the development at a superficial level and also limit the sense of the writer's voice.

Encouragement can work both ways, depending on the person receiving it. Some people are better off with encouragement, and use it to work harder. Others, however, use encouragement to feel too good about themselves and therefore don't work hard enough. Personally, I work better with encouragement than discouragement. I am not one of those people that likes to be discouraged so that when I do get it done I can prove someone wrong. My parents have encouraged me in life. They have supported me through the long days and nights spent on homework. They have also been there to encourage me when I feel like the amount of work is not worth what I'm getting out of it. Friends can also be a great form of encouragement because they often times know you better than your parents do. Teachers should encourage their students, but most do not. Encouragement can not be taught, it must be inside the person. Some people have the ability to encourage while others do not. There are also some people who encourage but are discouraging. By using reverse psychology, those people can often create the same result but more painful. In conclusion, a person who encourages you can often change your life for the better and make your life easier.

Score Point: 2

The writer mentions various aspects of encouragement: how people react differently to encouragement, the writer's reaction to encouragement from parents, who can or should offer encouragement, and "reverse psychology" encouragement. These clusters are focused, but the writer shifts quickly from idea to idea, resulting in progression that is not always smooth and logical. Conventions are appropriate and there is some sense of the writer's voice, but because of the quick shifts from idea to idea, development remains superficial, limiting the reader's understanding and appreciation of the writer's thoughts.

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.

Trying out for a team could be one of the scariest things you ever do. You try your best and put yourself out there for others to judge. At times like those, losing faith in yourself is highly possible if no one is alongside you providing encouragement.

A little over a year ago I tried out for my school's drill team. There were two workshops to attend and once I learned that audition routine I did it over and over again. I was so scared that the moment I stood in front of those judges, I would go blank. The whole entire week preceding try-outs I was a nervous wreck. I kept thinking about how much I wanted to be a part of this team and how devastated I would be if I did not make it.

Throughout this entire process, both of my parents supported me one-hundred percent. They drove me to every workshop and dance class for last minute preparation for the moment of truth. They would toss in kind words here and there such as "we're so proud of you, sweetheart. You will do great! We love you." This gave me the courage keep going and never look back.

The two days of try-outs were extremely stressful. Everyone trying out stretched together

in the smaller gym before entering the bigger gym in groups of four for the audition. It was quite intimidating to be stared down by far adults you don't know that are watching your every move. But once the music starts, you forget all of your stress and nerves, and get lost into the movements of the dance you must perform. All of the sudden, no one else is in the room. It's just you and you are dancing for yourself. At least, that was what I liked to think.

I will never forget the day I found out that me and almost all of my friends made the team. All of the jumping and screaming and hugging going on in front of the wall where the lists were posted was only the beginning of the building excitement for the coming year. My parents still continue to support and encourage me in everything I do. They are a big part of how I got this far.

Score Point: 3

This personal narrative about trying out for the drill team is generally effective. The writer provides details about being nervous and insecure and the encouragement and practical support provided by her parents (they drove me to every workshop and dance class...; they would toss in kind words here and there). The writer's unique perspective is especially apparent in the description of her feelings during the actual audition, and there is a consistent command of conventions.

When I was five years old I was very small, skinny, and short, and unfortunately I still rode a bike with those two extra wheels which never seemed to hit the ground at the same time.

I watched as other kids rode their bikes without training wheels, and some of them even had speed bikes; while I was still on my little bike with training wheels.

Until one day I was determined to ride my bike with out the training wheels. I tried and tried, until I was ready to give up, but then my brother came outside.

He got me on my bike and said, "Keep pedaling and don't stop," He could tell I was scared and he promised not to let go. So I started pedaling, and all of a sudden I felt him let go. I turned to look back, and then Boom! I was on the ground.

He said, "Never look back", and so I got back up and tried again and again. until I could atleast make it to the end of the road.

During all of this time my brother was yelling "You can do it," "Don't Stop". He must have really had alot of patience because we

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were out there til dark, but he never gave up on me because he knew I could do it, and that is why I never gave up.

Score Point: 3

A tightly constructed narrative focuses on how a brother encouraged the writer to learn to ride a bike without training wheels. Some depth is provided in the description of the brother's teaching techniques and in the the writer's recognition of his brother's patience. A good command of conventions and a sense of the writer's individuality contribute to this generally effective response.

Ever since I was five years old I have been involved in livestock showing. I started out with pigs and then began showing steers. Livestock showing takes much time and dedication. One time when I was six years old I remember a time when I needed much encouragement.

I was showing a gilt, which is a female pig that has not had babies. We were at the _____ fair in _____ Texas. This pig I had was named "Firecracker" and she was the worst acting and shiniest pig I have ever had. Some people would tell me it was just like a female to act bad. I thought it was funny, but my mom didn't. The pig had bitten me, fought me and ran over me. With me being only six years old she usually did as she pleased. All my other pigs acted great. When I would go to work with her she did not like it and would not let me mess with her. Just a little bit before I was going to go show my dad gave me some words of encouragement. He told me he knew I tried to work with her, but she had an attitude that she didn't

want to be messed with. He also told me that I had the ability to show her. These words helped me and made me feel good. When I was in the holding pen about to go in to the ring she acted bad. I had to go in to the ring in an alley way thing. He did not want to go into the alley. I thought of the words my dad said. I took my pig whip and turned it over where the metal was. I hit her on the head where the pop could be heard through the barn. That pig acted fine and showed perfect. She won champion and acted fine the rest of the time I had her.

Those few words my dad told me helped my confidence and let me know I could get her shown.

Score Point: 3

How to handle a pig with attitude is the focus of this engaging personal recollection of a time encouragement solved a problem for the writer. The writer sets out the difficulties of dealing with an ornery animal and builds to the advice given by the father. The narrative progresses fairly smoothly from sentence to sentence, with sufficient development for the reader to generally understand and appreciate the writer's ideas.

I remember the first time I had ever gotten stage fright. It was horrible. Good thing I had my good friend ALICE there to help me and encourage me to continue on.

It started back when I was about fourteen. We had been doing casting callbacks for two weeks at a community theatre. It had come down to another boy and I, and the both of us were waiting on the final casting list to be posted. The play involved a knight rescuing a beautiful princess from Queen Mab, the fairy queen, who was trying to change the wheels of fate to her advantage. Soon a few more people arrived, and the list was finally posted, I had gotten the lead role as the knight! The princess was a girl named ALICE, and that's when we ran into each other. No literally, I was walking away and she knocked me over trying to get to the list.

Over the next few weeks ALICE and I became good friends. We rehearsed all the time. Then the day of the performance came, Act I scene I, the stage had darkened and everyone was waiting for me to walk onto the stage. The lights came on, there I was, there ALICE was. We were all ready to go except I had forgotten my line! The opening line and I had forgotten it! The room started spinning, my palms began to sweat, a chill ran up my spine for crying out loud. ALICE spoke out, and I was saved, "Doesn't it look beautiful today?"

That was my line and she had saved me and the show. After that, every thing was smooth sailing.

At the end of the play people were taking our pictures left and right. I still have a copy. I thanked ALICE and congratulated her on all the good work. IF I hadn't had her encouragement to continue my line I don't know how the show would've turned out. Everyday I look at that picture and think about how ALICE'S encouraging push made the show turn out perfect.

Score Point: 3

A personal narrative set on the stage of a community theatre provides an example of a single moment of encouragement that rescued the writer at a critical moment. The progression of ideas is smooth and controlled, and the development overall reflects some depth of thought. In addition, the writer demonstrates a good command of conventions.

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'm going to be frank with you. I like being encouraged. I like hearing someone say, "Hey man way to be," or, "Awesome catch man," or even, "I wish I was that smart". Due to my poor athletic ability and my average academic skills, however, I usually catch myself saying those exact words I long to hear. Being encouraging is not a bad thing, just being nice and all, but like most kids I'm at that awkward stage where I'm trying to find what exactly I "shine" at. There are a few sports I can do my part, and a few classes where I'm above average, but I haven't found what I'm the best at. So really I'm just experimenting, seeing what I can and can't do. That's probably why I went out for the track team.

My freshman year I had gone by without playing any sports. I was the camera guy for the football team, and I was in the band. To save myself from the all out nerd image, I put my doubts behind me and I signed up for the J.V. track team. Now my poor ability on sports of any kind had kept me from playing on a team of any kind for about three years. I was definitely not ready to run the mile. I chose the mile because it was the only race that didn't focus on how fast you could run, but how long. Sounded easy enough to me so I went along. For training our coach made us run all the way around the school campus, which was about 3.2 miles. I never did make it all the way, but I did improve. I was now faster than any of my friends, who, like me, played little or no sports and decided to take off season instead of running track. Now the team already had its four respected runners, so the coach placed me in the wonderful position of alternate. Why was it so wonderful? Since I was an alternate, any points I made for the team were not counted to our total score (not that I made many at all), which made

very little sense to me of why I had to run in the first place. I thought alternate meant "alternative". Not only was I giving no help to the team, I was also making a fool of myself. There wasn't a race I did better than last place in, which goes without saying is very embarrassing. It wasn't until the last race of the season that it all finally paid off. I had been in second to last for the majority of the race. I had about one hundred yards to go, when a kid from a rival school ran up beside me and threatened to take away my second to last place I had held for so very long. With the finish line closing in, both of us giving it every thing we had and then some, that's when I heard it. People in the stands began to cheer. Cheering for me. I heard my name called out, I heard them cheering me forward. It was at that moment that I knew what it felt like to be a winner. I ran with their cheers, all the way to the finish line.

This could've been made into one of those inspirational sports movies, except in the last few seconds the kid from the rival school pulled ahead of me. Sure I was disappointed, but I had gotten something else. I felt like a champion, and that's enough of a trophy for me. I didn't run track again this year, and I don't think I ever will. But as I look back on my small sports history, I'm positive this will be one of the most memorable.

Score Point: 4

This fluent, thoroughly developed narrative about the writer's efforts to take up track to avoid the image of being a nerd engages the reader from the thought process in choosing the sport to the last race of the season. The encouragement of the crowd in the final moments of the race lingers with the writer, who provides a thoughtful evaluation of the experience in the conclusion. A consistent command of conventions enhances the response.

Slugging through piles of homework, I rubbed my weary eyes and massaged my throbbing temples. It was nearly two in the morning, and my eyes burned behind the half-price reading glasses. My life is a junkyard, I thought and as I looked around the room through bleary orbs, it occurred to me that everything in there told a cheap plastic story of an owner down on her luck and hard up for money. I need money, I thought. I need money for CARRIE CARRIE, my daughter in the hospital, my sweet little girl, was undergoing chemotherapy that week. God knows how I'll pay, how I'll find the money to let the doctors kill the bad part of her to save the good part, I cursed. It would've helped if I hadn't been a divorced, single mom. Being a ninth grade English teacher is no picnic, I thought wryly.

For the next few days, I lived in a dream. Wake-teach-eat-sleep, in a never-ending cycle. What was I doing anyway in this job, I asked myself. Did I call myself a teacher? Heck, all I was doing was struggling to make hardheaded teenagers learn the difference between two, to, and too. And it didn't seem to make a difference, I sighed, marking down another 64 for THOMAS. I began to wallow in self-pity, bemoaning the thanklessness of such a job and the futility of trying to get ALEXANDER to use commas correctly — and that was when I decided to resign. I wanted a job where I could make a difference, I cried inwardly. And of course, there was always the ever-present concern of money. Money for CARRIE.

I arrived at school the next day fully resolved to leave my mudhole of a life and start anew elsewhere. As I resolutely began to compose my letter of resignation, I noticed an envelope, cream yellow with flowers pressed into the paper, sitting on the corner of my desk. It stared me straight in the eye, daring me to unleash its contents upon myself. And this is what it said:

Dear Ms. JONES,

^{writing}
I am, to let you know that I will not be in your class much longer, and I am sorry for it. My dad just got his new job in Korea, and so we'll be moving there soon. I just wanted to let you know... that you've been the best teacher I've ever had. I guess that might not mean much to you. I bet you've had hundreds of kids tell you the same thing. I can't thank you enough for all you've given me. You're the most patient teacher I know, and your explanations were always so clear that even I, stupid as I know I am, could understand. You put so much effort into your work and you're pretty and funny and just a wonderful person. But most of all, you love your work. We can all see it in your smile, your enthusiasm, and the pride you take in our success. Whatever you do, Ms. JONES, don't lose your love for your work. It makes you sparkle.

Your student,
DAE

I don't need to tell you how that made me feel. I couldn't stop reading it. It made me want to cry and laugh and shout: I make a difference! My work is NOT in vain! I took the letter home, and there, I basked in the freezing February temperatures and larded over my heater, and felt a right queen.

It has been ten years since then, and I still keep the letter. My hair is fading gray and my mind is not as quick as it used to be, but I fancy my ninth grade students don't care a jot, and neither will CARRIE, who is teaching fourth graders. Today, I think to myself, I will write DAE a letter.

Score Point: 4

This writer takes a compositional risk by skillfully handling a fictional narrative focusing on an example of unexpected encouragement that arrives at a critical time for the discouraged central character. The depth of development, the sentence-to-sentence progression, and the excellent conventions make this a highly effective presentation of the writer's ideas.

There is an aunt that every family has. She's over-inquisitive, over-opinionated, and visits way too much. You know the type, who talks and talks, thinking that what she says has the wisdom of centuries past, while everybody else just nods and smiles wondering when she'll stop. And I'd marvel for hours at the fact that she thought she was so important yet she had not done anything to prove it.

And one day, I was stuck with her on our way to an amusement park. Of course I got in expecting her to at once start with her usual banter, but instead she only said hi and was actually quiet. It was really awkward for me to sit there while she was so unusually quiet, until at last she started talking, but not about herself. "APRIL," she said "are you smart enough to be the best in your class?" "Um, maybe... I don't know," I told her. "And do you think APRIL, that you are talented enough to be the best in tennis?" she asked. "I... guess. Maybe," I said, growing uncomfortable at how lame my answers came out. "And APRIL, it doesn't bother you to know that maybe if you really wanted to, you could be the best?" she said softly. "But those people are way into what they're doing. I don't want that," I said with a little smirk, trying to regain my composure. "You think it's bad to try hard. You think there's such a thing as trying too much?" She wouldn't stop. "Well, I guess not, but I'm happy where I am." I answered, and I

wondered if I was telling the truth. "Really, you're happy being mediocre, average, when you know you can be the best?" "Well, not if you put it that way." I said. Something was happening. "I was like you, just like you, and look at me now. I just talk because that's all I can do. I haven't accomplished anything I'm proud of. There's no hope for me now. But you can still change, APRIL. You can be better," she said to me. She didn't say anything else for the rest of the ride.

And with that, I realized, I wasn't "happy" with just being average, one of the crowd; I wanted to be the best. I wanted to be better. And if I did not turn out to be better than everyone else, it did not matter because I would know that I am the best within myself and I made the best of what God gave me. What my aunt said in the car that day, it wasn't a lecture, a scolding, an order. It was simply a small push that I needed to get my life on track.

And maybe all the other aunts like her have their secrets too. Maybe they don't. All I know is that on that day, my aunt gave me the truth behind her talk, the jewels of her heart. And when I've gone far in life and had my success, I hope to give those jewels to another girl who's yet to realize her potential.

Score Point: 4

The unique perspective presented in this response is developed through effective use of dialogue. The writer sketches her aunt as a person who talks and talks and never says anything but then moves smoothly into a conversation with the aunt that results in a new way of thinking and acting for the narrator. The writer thoughtfully concludes that other aunts may also have valuable advice to impart, and that the writer could be in a position to pass that wisdom on to others. This well-organized response is thoughtful and insightful.

It happened at 8:37. I was in my office reviewing the marketing deals of the week, and preparing for the afternoon's conference call. The sky was blue, like any other day, and there were no clouds in the sky. As I turned from the New York skyline back to my desk, the building jolted, and sent me and my swivel chair back against the glass of the window - What was that, I thought. An earthquake in New York? As I picked my chair up from the ground I glanced out the window. Smoke was pouring out of my building 50 or so floors above me... I couldn't tell. Maybe a gas explosion? I left my office and was met with chaos: people on the phones trying to find out what happened, people holding icepacks to their heads, people rushing around the office doing absolutely nothing. "There's a fire a few floors above us," one man called. "We all need to get out of the building, and fast." As everyone rushed to go down the stairwell, I moved against the crowd up the stairs to see if I could help out. As I got higher in the building, I could tell something was wrong. I felt another jolt and exited the stairwell to look out the window. Not only were flames shooting out of my building, but now smoke was pouring from a gaping hole in the other building. What's going on? I thought again. A radio was on in the room, tuned into some news broadcast. "There's been an accident at the

Trade Towers. We think two small passenger planes flew into both buildings..." The nervous chatter went on and on. I was frozen with shock. Two crashes? Both buildings? I must've stood there for five minutes before I heard it. Someone yelling from the floor above! I ran up the stairwell and into the office space. Fire had already spread to the far end of the corridor, and there was a man yelling, his head bleeding, his leg broken in the hall. I picked him up and began the descent. It seemed much longer going down than it did going up. As I hurried down the stairwell, I heard a roar growing above me, and I knew the fire was spreading. The stairwell began to heat up, and the injured man began to get very, very heavy. Suddenly there was an explosion, and the wall to my left collapsed on me. As I dug my way out of the pile, I found an arm sticking out of the debris... no pulse. The man was dead. So without thinking I began to limp my way down the stairs, aching and bleeding. The fire was getting closer, and my feet began to drag. Suddenly my legs gave way, and I fell down the 5th to last flight of steps. I couldn't move, so I just lay there. A minute passed before I heard shuffling below me. A fireman, hacking his way through debris. "I found one," he said into his walkie-talkie. "Coron buddy, I've got you. We can make it together. Can you stand?" I could, on one leg. He put one arm around me and we descended the final flight of steps to freedom, all the while the fireman saying, "hang on" ^{you can} "make it."

Score Point: 4

This writer skillfully develops a narrative set in the World Trade Center on 9/11. The central character progresses from an ordinary work situation into chaos; he attempts to rescue someone else and winds up needing encouragement and rescue himself. The thorough and specific development of this small moment in a scene familiar to all displays a willingness to take a compositional risk. The sentence-to-sentence progression is strong, building tension from beginning to end, and the strength of the conventions contributes to the effectiveness of the composition.