



Grade 7 Written Composition

Scoring Guide

Spring 2006

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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 your favorite memory.

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 your favorite memory
- 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.

My favorite memory was when I met Dirk Nowitzki. I went to a Mavericks game. It was the Supers vs. the Mavericks. I have a poster with Dirk Nowitzki's picture and autograph. He was giving out autographs to kids so I got in line and got his autograph on my poster. Dirk Nowitzki is my favorite player in the NBA. That is the main reason I have written about Dirk Nowitzki's autograph.

Score Point: 1

In this brief response, the writer focuses on meeting a famous basketball player. The writer provides very little development of the main idea (He was giving out autographs to kids so I got in line and got his autograph); more detailed information about the poster, the autograph, or the game would be needed for an effective response. The limited word choice gives the reader only a vague sense of the importance of the autograph to the writer.

It was January 10, 2002 morning was great be-
cause it was time to pack for camp in I had
just come home from Terrene I was so happy
so when I got to school it was already time
to go to camp I was so happy when we got
on the bus I went to sleep but I was so glad
to get away from home but when I woke up
we were putting into the drive way it was
so pretty people were so joyful and so sweet
we meet new people, new teachers it was
great and I love it when we go to lunch
breakfast and when the lights blink on and
off that means that there are left overs
then after we eat lunch we go out side and
play B-ball, Volley ball, foot ball which I
love are we go and play hid-a-go-see but
what ever we did was great the next day we went
fishing and every time me and my friend we'll put
the bait on the pole some how the fish kept getting
the bait and I kept getting mad and mad
I got so mad I throw the pole into the water
then we went back to the cabin for nap time
I was so mad cause we are to big to be
having nap time well we look about one hour
I was so mad I almost cryed but I was

oh then when I fell asleep it was time
to go out again I was so mad boy I want
ed to go home but again I was so we went
hunting in the woods it was so cool but
when my friend got hurt we had to take her
to the doctor she had sprong her leg and had
to go home she was so up set the next
day we went again it was so cool I
got most points and after the game we
went to see the deer but we didn't see any
so we went back to our cabins the next
day was great but the next day it was
time to go back home I was going to
miss all of my new friends, teacher, leader,
lunch lady, every body I enjoyed all
that day but when I got home I was
kind of grade that I was there but
I could not wait till next year summer
I will be so glad to see all my old
friends again but tell them I will have
to wait but I think I can manage

Score Point: 1

This response is limited to a score point 1 because there is no evidence the writer can correctly apply the conventions of the English language, especially punctuation. There are no sentence boundaries, which makes the response difficult to understand, even though it is focused on experiences at camp. In addition, although the writer lists many events, little development is provided; the writer's expression of ideas is also limited by frequent use of similar phrases (I was so happy...I was so happy...I was so glad...I got so mad...I was so mad).

I'm Here to write a composition about my favorite memories. So let's get started.

My first favorite memory is when I was three. I remember I use to go around trying to fight grown ups. My parents use to laugh there heads off. My mom said I would say "Come you want to fight" to people I didn't even know she said they didn't think nothing of it they thought it was funny. Now it's funny to look back on.

The next memory I remember was when I was five and my grandma told me not to watch scary movies at night. Well one night I watch chucky and I had a bad dream that he was chasing me. So I woke up in my sleep all sweat in it felt like I was really inside the dream. Why I was in there somebody was saying PAUL, PAUL wake up. I woke up and there was my grandma and she said "I told you not to watch no scary movies at night. From then on I listen to her. Now I sort of like scary movies.

My last favorite memory is when I use to live in _____ Tx. I had this really cool teacher. Her name was Mrs. THOMPSON We use to have show & Tell and she would bring her pet Iguana and let the hold class pet it. I also use to beat on the tables with my pencil in when they had teachers & parents conference she would tell my any that I need a drum set. That's all my favorite memories maybe

next time we can hear yours till then, The End

Score Point: 1

In this unfocused response, the writer describes three unrelated memories: wanting to fight everyone at age three, experiencing a bad dream at age five, and having a favorite teacher. The perfunctory transitions (first, next, and last) do not contribute to any sense of organization other than a chronological presentation of three random ideas. Development within each paragraph is insufficient to allow any of the memories to be considered an effective presentation of the writer's ideas.

When my family and I went skiing in Colorado 4 years ago. I remember that I didnt like my ski instructor. I think there was only two things I liked about skischool that was the hot chocolate breaks and skiing.

The funnest thing was when I got to go ski with my parents for the reist of the day. It take twelve huors boring trip but if you have a tv its not that boring.

I remember that its so cold on top of the ski slopes that your fingers and toes hurt bad. When my family and I went skiing is my favorite memory.

Score Point: 1

This response is focused on a family ski trip to Colorado; however, the events of the trip are presented in a haphazard way. The writer moves from disliking the ski instructor, to chocolate breaks, to skiing with parents, to the long drive to and from Colorado, and then back to how cold it was on the slopes. In addition to a lack of organization, the writer fails to add depth to the development. Each idea is presented as a bare fact about part of the trip, followed quickly by another superficial statement. This response would need an organizational strategy and more depth to be considered a somewhat effective presentation.

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.

Tippy

Some memories fade away with time but it's the best memories that stay for ever.

It all started when my sister MICHELLE came to live with me and missed her dog. So my mom thought that it would be a good idea to get me and MICHELLE a puppy. I was so excited I had never had a dog before! The next day we went to the pound, we looked at hundreds puppies but didn't see any that we really wanted until we turned the corner and out of my eye I saw a cute little, tan, ball of fur shivering from loneliness I turned around looked at my mom and said I want this one. my mom looked at MICHELLE and she said alright she's the cutest puppy I've seen all day. On the ride home I became a little jealous because MICHELLE got to hold the puppy until we got home. As soon as we got home I started to play with her when my mom noticed a white tip on her tail. I decided to name her tippy. My dad didn't like her for a long time because she tore up \$200 in shoes! After we her housebroken and got her to stop chewing they were the best of friends! Today Tippy is a healthy 10 yr old dog (except for the fact that she had a little arthritis in her back legs) I love her very much! I'm not even shere of when she became my dog we got her for MICHELLE!

This is my favorite memory the one that stuck

in my head and will stay forever!

Score Point: 2

In this composition the writer focuses on the memory of acquiring a puppy. The narrative organizational strategy is an effective way to present the reflective piece. There is some depth in the discussion of finding just the right puppy, and the writer's voice engages the reader (I was so excited. I had never had a dog before! On the ride home I became a little jealous because Michelle got to hold the puppy until we got home). However, errors in punctuation, particularly with regard to sentence boundaries, and some misspelling of common words weaken the overall fluency of the composition, although they do not cause the writing to be unclear.

One day on Summer of 2004 my parents told me that we were going to Miami. Then me and my brothers started to pack our things so we could leave already. We were so happy because we had never gone to Miami before. My dad went outside, turned on the car, packed our things, and off we went to Miami.

Later that day we arrived at Miami already. It took us about 20 hours to get there. My mom and dad rented a hotel near the beach. Me and my brothers wanted to go to the beach already and go swim and play in the beach. My parents said no because we had to get some sleep. After we woke up my brothers and I put on our clothes and went to the beach to go swim and play. When we were in the beach it felt good because you could feel the sand and water going between your toes. The water was blue you could see what was under water. It felt good. We stayed in Miami for a week and shopped for clothes.

and we ate seafood it was good to.

After the week was over it was time to leave. Me and my brothers did not want to leave. Then when we were leaving my mom told us we would come again. My dad wanted us to have fun and we did.

Score Point: 2

In this focused response, the student describes a family trip to Miami. Although there is an attempt to develop depth using sensory imagery (you could feel the sand and water going between your toes), much of the development remains superficial (We stayed in Miami for a week and shopped for clothes and we ate seafood). The overall fluency is weakened by occasional run-on sentences and the frequent use of awkward wording (Then me and my brothers started to pack our things so we could leave already. Later that day we arrived at Miami already. Me and my brothers wanted to go to the beach already...).

Have you ever had a favorite memory? I've had plenty.

My first favorite memory was December 25, 2005. When I got up Christmas morning I was really sleepy. But I was also really excited. I ran downstairs as fast as I could racing my younger sister NATASHA. (I won) We wasted no time ripping into all of our presents. I got almost everything I wanted, including a brand new cell phone. After I opened that one it was really hard paying attention to anything else that I opened or anyone else opened for that matter. I just couldn't wait to take my new phone out of the box and start calling all my friends to brag. Besides the phone though the highlight of the day was having lunch with all of my relatives. It really reminded me of what the true meaning of Christmas is all about. Friends and family and love and giving. It was a truly joyfull day.

My second favorite memory is definately the first time I learned to ride a horse. I went on a vacation to Colorado with my church youth group and at the resort where we staid they had trail rides. I was pretty scared going out there the first day because I was only 7 and the horses looked enormous to me back then. There were 15 or 20 horses there, black ones, brown ones, and even a white. Once I got up the courage to get close enough I ended up choosing a dark brown one with a white marking on his head. The trail guide told me his name was Buckwheat and it didnt take long for us to become fast friends. We rode for about an hour in the mountains through winding trails and forest. Buckwheat even galloped once! We stopped and ate breakfast and then rode back to our cabin. It was thrilling!

My final favorite memory would have to be when my younger sister was born. I remember how small she was and I remember the first time I ever held her and got to feed her. She was born early so we spent the first week or so visiting her in the hospital. When she finally got to come home my grandparents through a surprise welcome home party. The house was decorated with pink streamers and there was a pink cake. Sure she's a brat sometimes and we don't get along a lot of the time but I still love her because she's my only sister and I'd do anything for her.

So those are my three favorite memories.

Score Point: 2

In this unfocused response, the student writes about three unrelated memories: Christmas 2005, a horse ride, and a sister's birth. There is no unifying link between ideas other than that they are all memories, nor is there logical order for the presentation of the memories other than listing them numerically (first, second, final). This limits the coherence of the composition and prevents it from being considered generally effective. However, development of the ideas within the body paragraphs does reflect some depth of thought that goes beyond general and vague (Once I got up the courage to get close enough I ended up choosing a dark brown one with a white marking on his head). In addition, the writer engages the reader throughout most of the composition (After I opened that one, it was really hard paying attention to anything else that I opened or anyone else opened for that matter).

My favorite memories

"Daddy daddy look what I can do!" - I said eagerly to my dad who come from a long day at work. "Show me son what can you do?" I replied my father with the most excited face I had seen him since I learned how to walk. We went inside the room where the computer was in, so then I went to the computer desk sat down on the chair and turned on the computer, for you this might seem a little too normal but I was the only 3 year old who could do that. A few seconds later my father asked "Do you want to play a game?" I said "yes! Dad but please sit down I know how to do this already." Later on at lunch time my dad asked my mom "Honey, did you teach NATE how to use the computer?" "No ERIC" said my mom "He learned it from you." Along with that and other memories of my father and I together those are the only things that don't make me give up on finding him because like the old saying goes "remembering is living again." I think memories are the best things we have and without them our lives would be nothing.

but liveless shells.

Score Point: 2

In this response the writer recalls showing his father his computer skills at age three. The use of dialogue is effective, but the development of this anecdote remains somewhat superficial; in addition, the writer leaves a substantial gap in the response by jumping from a conversation between his parents to a time when the father apparently is no longer part of the family. This missing information limits the reader's understanding and appreciation of the sentiment expressed at the close of the response. There is a sense of the writer's voice (I think memories are the best things we have and without them our lives would be nothing), but the reader is jarred by the abrupt switch from happy memory to missing father.

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.

"Tickets please" chanted the flight attendant. I am on the first plane ride in my life. Well, the only one I remember anyway. The plane is headed for Albany, the capital of New York. My relatives moved up there about two years ago, and we've been wanting to visit them ever since. I've never been outside of Texas and I've never seen snow, so this trip is a huge thing for me.

Once the plane landed I was relieved. I have to admit that I was a little nervous. In about an hour I was already at my cousins' house. It was pretty big, considering its exterior look. And, now the fun begins. Right away I asked if we could have a snowball fight and right away, I was turned down. "The snow isn't wet enough" said Jesse, my twelve year old cousin. "We'll see if tomorrow, the snow gets a little thicker." Let's go sledding. "YEAH!" everyone exclaimed. "There's a hill that is perfect for sledding" added my aunt. At the hill, everyone was eager to get started. The first time I went down, the sled broke. Ah, well, plenty more where that came from. We all sledded for hours, doing tricks and contests. It was only the first day and I was already having a blast. Even though I fell out one time, scratched the whole left side of my face on ice, and bruised my frontal lobe, it was still really fun.

Six days of snow, snow, and more snow, made me sick. I got the flu and had a fever of about 104 degrees Fahrenheit. Let's recap this whole trip. I busted my pinky, playing basketball, scratched my face on ice, got sick, got hit in the face with a volleyball, and had to endure negative six degree weather.

Wow! My Christmas break New York trip was definitely my complete and utter-most favorite memory off all.

Score Point: 3

A Christmas break trip to New York is the focus of this generally effective narrative. In such a short piece, the tightly organized presentation and the smooth progression of ideas, from the initial plane ride through all the fun activities, make the response easy to follow. Thorough development of the entire first day provides depth (We all sledded for hours, doing tricks and contests... Even though I fell out one time, scratched the whole left side of my face on ice, and bruised my frontal lobe, it was still really fun). The writer's voice is engaging and evident throughout the response. In addition, the writer's command of conventions, including brief instances of controlled and effective dialogue, further strengthens the composition.

It was when I was born and I saw my grandfather's eyes for the first time. I had always remembered the expressions that would always be on his face. Everytime that he would say something to me I would smile. Even when I cried he would brighten up my days.

On my first birthday he took me to Kiddy Land a place that was made for kids under the age of seven. I had so much fun. I was wishing that I knew how to talk, so that I could tell him thanks. That was the first time I saw rides that were made just for me. That was the best day of my life.

As I'm living a good life with my family I've been noticing that the older I get the more I grow. I am now four years old and I know how to do what I wanted to do. I could help around the house, and I could also help out with other things. When I saw my mom in her room I had told her that I have been noticing that grandpa hasn't been spending that much time with me for the past few weeks. I was thinking that he had just forgot about me but he hasn't. As I was walking out of my mom's door I came back and that was when I heard a drop in the hall way. Everyone ran out of their rooms it was me, my mom, my grandma, and

my aunt. When we all came out I saw my grandpa laying on the floor.

We started to call the fire station nearby but my aunt had already called them. As I gently started to slide my hands under his head he started to cough and I had started to cry. We heard a noise outside. My mom said that it was the ambulance, so my aunt let them inside the house, and took my grandpa to the hospital.

We all had stayed at the hospital with him that night. The doctor told us that something had gone wrong so the doctors told us to leave. We went home and they called to tell the family that he didn't make it. That weekend we had his funeral and every Memorial Day we went to see him. That's when I said to myself that I would always remember his face.

Score Point: 3

The writer's remembrance of a grandfather is the focus of this generally effective response. The use of flashbacks is a risky organizational strategy that strengthens the response (On my first birthday he took me to Kiddyland; I was wishing that I knew how to talk, so that I could tell him thanks). Both the introduction and conclusion add depth to the composition and create a sense of completeness. Although there are some errors in verb tense as the writer moves around in time, the development overall reflects some depth of thought. The writer's voice is evident throughout the response.

Did you know that everyone on this world has a favorite memory? Whether it is staying home with mom and dad or going on a vacation. I have one memory that will be in my head as long as I am alive. I am going to tell you about my adventures most exciting and one of my favorite memories.

Beep... Beep... we just arrived at my aunt's house in _____ Tx. one day before the trip to Tennessee. We started unloading the truck while at the same time talking about how memorable the trip was going to be. By the time we were done unloading it was already six o'clock and we were all famished. After dinner we all went back to my aunt's house to hit the sack and be ready for the next day. After ten or more hours on the road we had finally reached our destination. We stayed in a cabin that was quite big and at the very top of the hill surrounded by nothing but trees, grass and very scary animals. At first during the day the cabin seemed very nice and quiet, but as the night grew darker and darker we realized how scary it was to be up there. My parents and my cousins parents went to go get us dinner and left us there alone. We were so scared we turned on all the T.V's and radios so we would not hear the noises that were coming from outside. My cousin who was about fifteen was so scared because of all the noises had to come sleep with my sister and I. At night all you could hear was bears growling, wolves howling, and gigantic trees brushing against the windows. When morning came we were all excited about making it through the night without being eaten by a bear or a big bad wolf. We were supposed to stay there for a week and I dreaded every night that came. That morning we all went out onto the balcony and the scenery was awesome. It was the most beautiful scenery I had ever seen in my whole entire life. I thought I was going to pull out my

eyeballs to clean them to see if what I was seeing was real. While we were outside I heard something in the bushes. I did not say anything because I pictured it wasn't anything. Then all of a sudden a big brownish-blackish bear pops out of the trees. I had never seen a real bear before. It was as tall as three humans put together. I was so scared that I just ran inside and covered my eyes. Finally the week was up and it was time to go back home. When I went to school about a week later almost all the kids thought my vacation was awesome. Some kids said it wasn't good enough to be a memory never to forget, but I didn't care that they said that because it is not everyday you get to see a real life bear or stay in a cabin in the woods.

Some of these reasons are why this vacation was my favorite memory. The trip I took was the best no question about it. Without that trip I wouldn't have been able to write this story.

Score Point: 3

This generally effective response is focused on the writer's vacation in Tennessee. The writer combines strong voice with an effective organizational strategy that emphasizes how pleasant the cabin was in the afternoon and how frightening it became later on. (At first during the day the cabin seemed very nice and quiet, but as the night grew darker and darker we realized how scary it was to be up there.) There also is an effective contrast between the calm and beauty of the morning and the big bear that pops out of the bushes. Although the writer carefully sets up the suspense of a possible confrontation with a wild animal, the actual sighting of the bear and the author's reaction to it is dropped very quickly, causing the response to have the uneven development that often characterizes a score point 3 composition. There is some depth of thought, and the generally controlled use of conventions also strengthens this response.

"Boys, hurry up", shouted my mom. My mom loves to shout. My Dad is almost always angry. My brother is either making fun of me or beating me up at all times. I'm the little one in the family. My mom was shouting at my brother and I because she thought we would miss the flight to Florida. We ended up making it with lots of time to spare.

Once we arrived, we were greeted by our family. My grandma, aunt, and cousin were so happy to see us. After we loaded our stuff into the car, we decided to go eat. We went to a restaurant my grandma once owned. While eating, I noticed a stand down on the docks. It was selling tickets to go snorkling. We purchased some tickets and an underwater camera. After we returned to my grandma's house, My brother and I beat our cousins in Halo 2.

The next morning I was the first one awake. I was so excited to go snorkling I was jumping up and down. Once we arrived at the docks we introduced ourselves to the captain of our boat. When we reached the jetties we all jumped into the water. There were fish everywhere. My mom just watched. Then I thought I saw a shadow fly by. When I reached the surface of the water, I heard my mom shout shark. We all got back on the boat and, the captain said it was a nine foot bull shark. When we got back to the docks we purchased more tickets and some snorkling equipment.

Our last day in Florida we went snorkling the second

time. When we reached the jetties we saw a mantee, dolphin, and gar fish. While under water I got about a foot away from a sea turtle. I saw a really neat trick. My dad, brother and I saw a fish skeleton. Then we had lunch.

When we got back in, my brother and I went out really deep. One minute he was right next to me the next he was gone. I started to freak out, and swung my hand a round. As I was freaking out I cut my arm open on a rock. I now have a permanent scar. I had to get out of the water because I was bleeding. I got bandage on it and I was fine.

When we arrived back at the house, we packed all our things. My grandma gave me a picture of two dolphins. When we got to the airport, we hugged and said good bye. While on the plane, I was pulling stuff out of my backpack, trying to find some batteries. Instead I ended up finding five really cool sea shells to remind me of my trip.

Score Point: 3

In this response the focus is on a family trip to Florida. The narrative is generally clear and controlled, with smooth progression of thought. Although some sections move quickly (While under water I got about a foot away from a sea turtle...My dad, brother, and I saw a fish skeleton), other ideas are developed more thoroughly and specifically, such as the section describing the writer losing sight of his brother and injuring his hand. Overall, the writer provides a generally effective overview of an action-packed vacation, with a conclusion that adds some depth and 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.

It was just one of those days when you just feel like sitting at home playing Xbox and watching TV. Last night, at Boy Scouts, my leader talked to us about our upcoming trip to Yosemite National Park. We would set up tents on Friday, sleep until 6:30, and hike in the early morning to one of Yosemite's mountains to climb on. Sounds like the perfect weekend right? Not to me it doesn't. I've hated climbing since I first heard the word.

"Yeah Right!" I mumble to myself. "Like I'm going to spend my weekend at a stupid park to climb at!"

Just then my mom walked through the door.

"Pick up the clothes in your room!" she screamed.

"Can I pick them up later?" I asked.

"Oh yeah, you're going to that climbing thing no matter what. No questions asked!" my mom announced.

What kind of mom is she? Doesn't she know that I hate climbing?

"Don't worry, you'll have fun there and learn something in the process!" my mom exclaimed.

Without any questions asked, I walked up the stairs to my room to pick up my clothes. It was going to be a terrible weekend!

Friday came by in what seemed like a couple of hours. The previous day I had already packed for the climbing trip, and I was ready to go! My mom dropped me off in her new Acura at the Wal-Mart parking lot. My ride to Yosemite was waiting for me, so I grabbed my belongings, said bye to my mom, and rushed to the other car. We were off to Yosemite in a split second.

The car slowed down to a stop a couple hours later, and I knew that we had reached Yosemite. I slowly got out of the smelly truck to

grab my belongings in the trunk. We found a peaceful camping ground and set up tents. After a couple of hours we ate dinner, set up sleeping bags, and finally slept. Ahhh, it felt good to sleep. It was 12:30 PM!

My scout leader woke me with a start.

"Mr. JONES, its only 5:53 AM! What are we doing this early?"

I asked.

"I want to get a head start on climbing," he answered.

I had forgotten all about climbing! Oh my gosh, what was I going to do? Once everyone had gotten up we started the hike to the mountain.

We reached the mountain about 30 minutes later.

Mr. JONES, our scout leader, talked to us about the climb, gave us instructions, and told us how to put on our climbing gear. I didn't really pay attention though. (What does he know that I don't!) When we reached the base, I gazed at its majestic look. I better get this over with! When it was finally my turn to climb, I took one last look at the top and started my climb. The first parts were easy until I got to the middle. It took me a while, but I finally reached the top. When I came down I felt like I had really achieved something. Climbing was easy, and from then I loved to do it. In fact, it became one of my favorite hobbies!

I learned from this experience that you can do anything you try. My day of climbing went from bad to the best day of my life! I hated climbing, and now it has become one of my favorite hobbies. This experience shows that even the worst day can become your favorite memory!

Score Point: 4

A good portion of this narrative about climbing in Yosemite National Park is expressed in a combination of internal and external dialogue smoothly controlled by the writer. The composition progresses from the writer waking up and dreading going climbing (I've hated climbing since I first heard the word) to ultimately loving the whole experience (My day of climbing went from bad to the best day of my life!). The depth of thought revealed in these conversations allows the reader to fully appreciate the writer's ideas about learning to love climbing. Appropriate conventions enhance the fluency of the composition.

"The winners of this year's Youth American Grand Prix
Semi-final Competition is..... COMPANY'S "Rodeo Ballet"
dance," the superintendent announced. I couldn't believe it.
That was us! My ballet company had won! "I would like
to personally invite them to travel to New York City on
a full scholarship to compete in the YAGP Finals." This time,
the whole company's breathing ceased. WE WERE GOING TO
NEW YORK CITY!

We worked hard for months, making slight alterations to
the dance, building up stamina, and ultimately, preparing for what
could be the best experience of our lives. Soon, we were ready.

The company nervously arrived at the airport at five-o'clock
to catch our flight. The ride seemed to go so slow, but
at about the half way mark, things spiced up a little with,
yet another surprise. All of a sudden, the pilot of the air-
plane announced over the intercom, "I would like to
thank the _____ Ballet Company for flying with us
today." My eyes widened, a smile overwhelmed my face, and,
once again, I lost my breath. (I tended to do that quite
a few times on this trip.) However, I laughed when I
was informed that one of my friend's father just
happened to be piloting our plane, and he had made
the exhilarating broadcast that put our trip to a good,
exciting start.

After arriving, we went to our fancy hotel called
"Park Central." At first, I thought the was quite

An unusual name until I actually got there. The hotel was literally central. ~~It~~ was smack dab in the center of New York City, which was cool. Two blocks to the left was Central Park where we ate lunch. The place was HUG-E. There were even mini roads winding through it for bikers and roller-bladers, even including stoplights. Two blocks to the right was Times Square. During the day, it wasn't much to look at, but after sun-down — wow! It was truly amazing. It was so pretty, we didn't want to leave, so instead of finding a deli somewhere, we went to Planet Hollywood right there for dinner, so we could look out the window at the beautiful lights. The company and I also visited Lady Liberty, who made us look like ants. Ground Zero was on our list of things to see as well. It was so sad to see that memorial. Tears even came to some of our eyes. The attraction was very moving.

The next day, our group competed in the Youth American Grand Prix New York Finals. Hundreds of people showed up to watch the event, but the minute I stepped onto that magical stage, it was like I was dancing all alone in my room just for me. We didn't end up winning, but to me, we had won more than a trophy. We worked hard to accomplish something that even in our wildest dreams we thought was impossible. I will never forget my trip to New York or how we earned our way there.

Score Point: 4

A trip to New York City with a ballet company includes a bit of travelogue as well as the writer's reflection on the dance competition. The narrative strategy is enhanced by smooth progression within and between paragraphs. Thorough development of ideas helps the reader appreciate the writer's experiences. The thoughtful conclusion adds depth and provides a strong sense of the writer's perspective (the minute I stepped onto that magical stage, it was like I was dancing all alone in my room just for me). A consistent command of conventions contributes to the effectiveness of the composition.

I have some pretty crazy memories from my past. I usually remember awkward memories of when I was a young child. I came up with some wild ideas, but I was determined to experience something new. One of my favorite memories of all was creating a sport, somewhat similar to hockey and golf.

I was about seven years old on a hot summer day. There I sat, bored out of my mind, trying to figure out what to do next. You would think two siblings would keep you busy, but neither would play with me. Suddenly, a light bulb flashed on in my head. I started to search the house for supplies I needed. I found my dad's old 4-iron golf club along with a golf ball and a cardboard box. I put the bottom of the box facing up, so I could cut a small hole from the side. In my house, I set the box at the end of a hallway. With the golf club clutched in my hand, and the golf ball rolling across the floor, I took off. I ran through the hallway, controlling the ball with my club, and finally shot the ball toward the box. As I barely missed the hole, my dad came from his room, yelling at me for playing my game inside. He told me to play outside, and so I did. I grabbed my roller blades, and headed out the door.

While I was outside, I decided to play my game at the park across the street. I layed my box against the basketball post on the court. I skated around the concrete, hitting the golf ball at the hole in the box. After awhile, two men came over to play basketball on the court. For both of us to play there, I let them shoot the ball while I skated around them and

played my sport. It must have been a hilarious sight watching me swerve right in front of them to shoot the golf ball wildly. A few times I got hit in the head with the basketball, but I didn't mind. I became a master at my own game, shooting one-handed shots, and making the goal almost every time.

My dad eventually came and brought me home. He also insisted that I apologize to the men for interrupting their game. This memory sticks inside my head every time I get bored. It brings up some creative ideas for what to do. Most importantly though, it reminds me to keep trying and never give up.

Score Point: 4

In this concise, well-constructed response, every word counts as the writer focuses on a new game he invented. Progression is smooth and controlled, from the initial conception of the game to the writer being scolded by the father for interrupting the adults' basketball game. The writer's voice is engaging throughout the piece (You would think two siblings would keep you busy, I became a master at my own game). Varied and effective sentence structure (With the golf club clutched in my hand and the golf ball rolling across the floor, I took off), vivid word choice (hilarious, swerve, insisted), and a consistent command of conventions enhance the composition.

A favorite memory. It seems like it would be something that you would hold close to your heart and never let go - a perfect moment when life passed by as quickly and easily as a sailboat coasting across a calm lake. My favorite memory is a perfect day. But it is not one I want to hold close to my heart forever. It is one I want to forget - one I want to leave my mind forever so that I can live in peace again.

Picture a peaceful day towards late July. The warm sun is reflected on a clear blue swimming pool. Three girls sit by the pool, licking ice cream off their fingers. They are talking, laughing, giggling.

The first girl has her feet skimming the surface, the cold water tickling her soft feet. A half-finished ice cream cone rests in one of her hands. The other girls splash impatiently, waiting for her to finish so that they can swim. They are having a party for no reason at all.

I can still see it clearly in my mind - my friends, RENEE and LACY, the only two people in the world who really understood me.

The people in that memory are gone now. LACY and RENEE have different cares, different hopes, and, most importantly, different friends. Like almost everyone does in middle school, they changed. They do not care anymore about the things

they cared about then. They changed so much that soon we had nothing in common, and soon we stopped being friends at all.

It is a bittersweet memory. We are so different now that we act as if we had never met. But it can never really be that way. For every day I pass them in the hallway, and every day I see shadows of a time gone by. Every day I remember what it was like when I had everything I wanted. My past acts as a spirit that haunts me, and that is why I want to forget.

Yet no matter how I much it bothers me every day, no matter how much it haunts me when I see them, it is my favorite memory. It is what it is: a perfect day, a beautiful afternoon. No matter how much things have changed since then, if I search the depths of my mind I must admit to myself that I do not want to lose it. It is better to have loved and lost, they say, than to never have loved at all. Every word of that is true. It is harder - it is much, much harder - but it is better that way.

Score Point: 4

In this reflective response, the writer recalls the memory of a special day spent with two friends and the subsequent breakup of that friendship. This unique twist to a favorite memory is both engaging and a compositional risk. The writer expresses herself with descriptive and specific word choice (a perfect moment when life passed by as quickly and easily as a sailboat coasting across a calm lake). The specifically detailed development (The first girl has her feet skimming the surface, the cold water tickling her soft feet. A half-finished ice cream cone rests in one of her hands) enables the reader to appreciate the writer's ideas. In addition, the writer demonstrates a consistent command of conventions.