

WY-TOPP ELA EXEMPLARS

Grade 9



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2.0 Overview

The WY-TOPP ELA assessment includes a writing component in grades 5, 7, and 9. Each writing task contains one or more passages related to a prompt. Students read the passages and write a response to the prompt, using evidence from the texts to support their ideas. Students do not answer comprehension questions about the passages before responding.

This document provides examples of Grade 9 student responses to a WY-TOPP ELA writing task and illustrates how responses are scored using the WY-TOPP writing rubric.

3.0 Passages & Prompt

3.1 Passage 1

Freshmen: Across the Pond

by S. E. Wendel

1 Carson Fields shrugs away from his mother’s incessant, fussing fingers as they try to straighten the collar of his jacket. He resists the urge to tap his foot as he waits with his parents near the baggage carousel. If he’d had his way, they would already be walking to the awaiting bus, one bag in hand. But no. His mother had packed him two suitcases, stuffed to the brim. What use she thought he’d have for his father’s old Packers jersey, he couldn’t say.

2 “Well, they play *football* there,” she’d said.

3 Carson hadn’t the heart to correct her. . . .

4 With a little “Aha!” Carson’s father pounces on the second suitcase, lifting it off the carousel with a mighty heave. Clicking up the handle, he gives Carson a wink before wheeling it away from the other passengers on their international flight.

5 Carson checks his wristwatch, then wishes he hadn’t. Running an agitated hand through his hair, which feels brittle thanks to recycled airplane air, he says, “We gotta hurry up; the bus leaves in ten minutes!”

6 “Right,” his father says, scanning the directions overhead. “This way, I think.”

7 Following dutifully behind, Carson just hopes there aren’t any knickknack booths between them and the bus. His mother never could resist a knickknack booth, as the cluttered cabinet in their computer room back home—boasting shelves full of snow globes, bobble heads, and all manner of commemorative mugs—can attest to.

8 They navigate the escalators and hallways at a hurried power walk, Carson feeling downright bewildered by the labyrinthine Heathrow. Finally, they spill out into a roofed parking lot with bus-length spaces. Only one sits in the first row, and Carson breathes a sigh of relief to see Ms. Billings, one of the coordinators for the American Scholars Abroad program, talking to the driver.

9 Catching sight of them, Ms. Billings turns and smiles as Carson’s father lets out a loud, friendly, “Hello, there!”

10 “Oh, lovely!” Ms. Billings says as the Fieldses come scurrying along. “Now everyone’s here, and we can get started!”

11 She hustles Carson and his mother onto the bus as his father helps the driver load suitcases. Hopping up the steps, Carson realizes with no small amount of chagrin that they’re the last to arrive. The bus is already filled with excited, anxious faces, and Carson slumps into the last empty seat, close to the front, slouching so that the people behind can’t see his burning ears.

12 Nearly missing the bus—not the way he wanted to start his first year at the University of Oxford.

13 His mother slides in next to him, and he shifts in his seat closer to the window, jamming his hands deep into his jacket pockets, just in case she has any ideas of holding hands for the hour drive up to Oxford.

14 His father, Ms. Billings, and the driver are the last to board. Once his father is situated in the seat in front of him, Ms. Billings takes the little handheld radio from the driver. Into it she says, “Hello, everyone! I’m so excited for us to get started. It’s going to be a little over an hour to reach Oxford. In the meantime,” she sways as the bus driver puts it in reverse, “I’ll be passing around some material

for you. Nothing to sign, thankfully, though Joe’s driving is as smooth as silk. I’ve got a map here with all the colleges highlighted. Not all of you are at the same college, though we did try to cluster you. When we arrive, I’ll be directing you to your college and then I’ll come check in on you later, to make sure I didn’t lose anyone down the Thames!” She gets a few nervous laughs for that. “I’ve also got some pamphlets about your college, along with papers with your registration numbers, IDs, all that good stuff.”

15 Giving the radio back to the driver, Ms. Billings starts to expertly work her way down the aisle with a large stack of papers.

16 “Yes, Fields,” she says when Carson, the first up, gives her his name. She shifts the papers in her arms, leafing through. “Put these in alphabetical order. I guess it’d be too much to expect everyone to sit in alphabetical order,” she says with a laugh. Hitting about the middle of the stack, she extracts a small packet. “Here you are.”

17 Ms. Billings puts the packet into his expectant, slightly clammy hands, and Carson immediately flips to the map. There’s a little red X on a section of High Street, then a dotted red line down several more roads, finally ending with a circled . . . college.

18 His enthusiasm ebbs when his mother tips the map toward her with a finger. “I don’t understand why you’re getting split up into different colleges. I thought you were all going to Oxford.”

19 “We are,” Carson says. “Oxford is spread out over a bunch of separate colleges.”

20 “Is [yours] the writing college?”

21 He shrugs. “No, It’s not really based on subject matter.”

22 “Then how is it organized?”

23 “It isn’t really.”

24 She frowns. “That’s not how we do it.”

25 He shrugs again, having already figured out where this is headed. “Well, they’ve been doing colleges a lot longer than we have.”

26 “Hmph,” she says. It’s the noise she makes when she hasn’t come up with a counterargument yet, so he shouldn’t think he’s gotten away. Her put-a-pin-in-it noise.

27 Carson glues his eyes to the clogged streets of London. He knows from his careful research and slight addiction to Google Maps that Heathrow is outside of London proper, that they won’t cross over London Bridge or spy Big Ben on the drive out into the English countryside. Still, it’s slightly disappointing to settle for the meandering concrete of airport terminals and gangways. It is fun, albeit disorienting, to be driving on the wrong side of the road, however.

28 He smiles to himself as they enter a roundabout, going almost all the way through before spilling out onto another road. They pass cars and buses and throngs of people before finally, after coming out from yet another concrete tunnel, Carson spots green fields. England opens up before them, and he doesn’t care that he’s craning his neck . . . , trying to take in the soft, rolling hills. He breathes easier, the thrumming panic of having almost missed the bus subsiding.

3.2 Passage 2

Beginners Luck

by Emily Hahn

In the 1920s, Blake has unexpectedly left college and is traveling from New York to Santa Fe, New Mexico, where his mother has recently moved.

1 He stepped off the train at Lamy expecting nothing at all. He had no idea of the city he was entering: what it looked like, how one passed the time, what people one would know—it was all unexplored. He had never in his life been west of Buffalo. Mary, his mother, had written him a few letters about it, but she had not had time to write much, and anyway she was very busy finding out for herself. Mary expected to settle down in Santa Fe for a long time; it was good for her health out here and she liked it.

2 Blake, on the other hand, had no plans. He was not supposed to have any: he was too young to have plans. Mary had plans for him, no doubt, but as yet he had no notice of them.

3 He stood for two forlorn minutes on the platform at Lamy, wondering what to do next. A chauffeur—a stranger—found him and took him in hand and put him away, with the baggage, in a new limousine. The limousine then turned around and began to drive up a winding hill, toward Santa Fe, Mary, and revelation.

4 It was a beautiful drive up a long hill, the road twisting and leading up and down in an intriguing manner. Blake tried hard to appreciate it, but his mind would not behave. It kept reverting to another theme; a tiresome theme; a threadbare theme. His mind was an independent disagreeable thing with a passion for theatrical revivals. . . .

5 . . . Up ahead there was a group of buildings that looked as if it might be the outpost of Santa Fe. It occurred to him that he might ask the chauffeur to point things out to him. On second thought he decided to wait and pick up his knowledge in a different way. . . .

6 So in silence they rode down the hill into town, past the first little adobe houses and then by way of the outskirts to his mother's house. He liked the outside of it: irregular and old-looking, with a wall that started at the side and enclosed—imperfectly—a garden. Mary heard the car and came to the door, in quite a hurry. That was nice of her and it made Blake feel better. . . .

7 She kissed him and didn't mention school. She asked after his aunt in New York, disapproved of his tie, and sent him to his room to get acquainted. There were three pieces of furniture in it: a low bed with straight brown posts, a light dressing table, and a wardrobe. The walls were painted a light yellow, and he walked all the way around, wondering how to decorate them with murals. He would need a bookcase: he could paint it himself, purple to match the mountains. But now as he looked from the window the mountains were not purple. They were blue, a deep expressionless color. They were like pieces of passe-partout about the edge of the valley, cut out in great rolling curves and pasted over the disorderly meeting of sky and land. He leaned out of the window and sniffed. His nose expected an odor of pine and wet ground; instead there was a faint parched perfume of burning wood and sunburnt clay. It was almost dark. He changed his tie and went in to tea.

3.3 Prompt

You have read the excerpts from *Freshmen: Across the Pond* and *Beginners Luck*.

Write an essay in which you explain how the characters of the mother and the son in each passage are developed through their interactions and how these interactions change throughout each passage. Use details from both passages to support your essay.

4.0 Reading ECR Informative and Opinion/Argumentative Writing Rubric (Grades 3-10)

4.1 Reading Comprehension and Written Expression

	4	3	2	1	0
Reading Comprehension and Written Expression	The student response to the prompt is characterized by all or most of these criteria: • shows full comprehension of ideas stated explicitly and inferentially in the passage by providing an accurate explanation (G3) or analysis (G4–10) • responds to the prompt and provides effective and complete development of the claim or topic that is consistently appropriate to task, purpose, and audience • uses clear reasoning supported by appropriate text-based evidence in development of the claim or topic • uses appropriate organization, with clear and coherent writing • establishes and maintains an effective style	The student response to the prompt is characterized by all or most of these criteria: • shows comprehension of ideas stated explicitly or inferentially in the passage by providing a mostly accurate explanation (G3) or analysis (G4–10) • responds to the prompt and provides mostly complete development of the claim or topic that is mostly appropriate to task, purpose, and audience • uses mostly clear reasoning supported by appropriate text-based evidence in development of the claim or topic • uses good organization, with mostly clear and coherent writing • establishes and maintains a style that is mostly effective	The student response to the prompt is characterized by all or most of these criteria: • shows basic comprehension of ideas stated explicitly or inferentially in the passage by providing a generally accurate explanation (G3) or analysis (G4–10) • responds to the prompt and provides some development of the claim or topic that is somewhat appropriate to task, purpose, and audience • uses some reasoning and text-based evidence in the development of the claim or topic • is somewhat organized, with somewhat coherent writing • has a style that is somewhat effective	The student response to the prompt is characterized by all or most of these criteria: • shows limited comprehension of ideas stated explicitly or inferentially by providing a minimally accurate explanation (G3) or analysis (G4–10) • responds to the prompt and provides minimal development of the claim or topic that is limited in its appropriateness to task, purpose, and audience • uses limited reasoning and text-based evidence • uses limited organization and coherence • has a style that is minimally effective	The student response to the prompt is characterized by all or most of these criteria: • shows no comprehension of ideas and provides an inaccurate explanation (G3) or analysis (G4–10) or no explanation or analysis • is undeveloped or inappropriate to task, purpose, and audience • uses little to no text-based evidence • lacks organization and coherence • has an inappropriate style

A response is considered unable to be scored if it cannot be assigned a score based on the rubric criteria, including but not limited to those responses that are blank, illegible, indecipherable, off topic, written in a language other than English, insufficient, or state a refusal to respond.

4.2 Knowledge of Language and Conventions

	3	2	1	0
Knowledge of Language and Conventions	The student response to the prompt shows full command of the conventions of standard English at an appropriate level of complexity. There may be minor errors in spelling, mechanics, grammar, and usage, but the meaning is easily comprehended.	The student response to the prompt shows some command of the conventions of standard English at an appropriate level of complexity. There may be errors in spelling, mechanics, grammar, and usage that occasionally impede understanding, but the meaning can usually be comprehended.	The student response to the prompt shows limited command of the conventions of standard English at an appropriate level of complexity. There may be errors in spelling, mechanics, grammar, and usage that frequently impede comprehension.	The student response to the prompt does not show command of the conventions of standard English at the appropriate level of complexity. There may be many errors in spelling, mechanics, grammar, and usage that impede comprehension.

A response is considered unable to be scored if it cannot be assigned a score based on the rubric criteria, including but not limited to those responses that are blank, illegible, indecipherable, off topic, written in a language other than English, insufficient, or state a refusal to respond.

5.0 Student 1 – Score Point 4/3

5.1 Student 1 – Response

In both passages, the interactions between the mothers and sons develop the characters and show different stages of growing up. In *Freshmen: Across the Pond*, Carson wants more independence as he begins college. In *Beginners Luck*, Blake is returning to his mother after leaving college. He feels unsure about what comes next. Both passages show some tension between mothers and sons. However, the relationships change in different ways. Carson moves farther toward independence, while Blake moves from worry toward comfort.

In *Freshmen: Across the Pond*, Carson is shown as a young man who wants to be treated like an adult. At the start, he pulls away when his mother fusses with his collar. This shows that her care makes him feel crowded. He also worries that she will stop at a knickknack booth and make them late. When they are the last to get on the bus, he feels embarrassed and tries not to be noticed. Carson wants his mother to stop acting like he is still a child.

Carson's mother is caring, but she is also too involved. She packs extra things for him, including his father's old Packers jersey, because they play "football" in England. This shows that she wants to help, even though she does not fully understand his new life. When Carson explains Oxford, she compares it to home and does not really accept his answer. By the end of the excerpt, Carson starts looking past her worries. He notices the green fields and feels less panicked. This shows that he is beginning to focus on his own future.

In *Beginners Luck*, Blake begins the passage feeling uncertain. He has left college and does not know what will happen next. The passage says, "He stepped off the train at Lamy expecting nothing at all." This shows that he feels empty and unsure. He thinks Mary probably has plans for him, but he does not know what they are. Before he even sees her, he expects her to decide what comes next.

Mary welcomes Blake when he arrives, and this helps him relax. She kisses him and does not bring up school. Instead, she asks about his family and shows him the room she has prepared. This matters because Blake expected pressure, but Mary gives him space. As he imagines decorating the room, he starts to feel more comfortable. He thinks about murals, a bookcase, and the colors outside the window. Mary's welcome changes the mood. Blake moves from fear of her plans to a calmer feeling that he might belong there.

The relationships in the passages develop in opposite ways. Carson wants distance from his mother as he starts a new stage of life. Blake finds comfort in returning to his mother during an uncertain time. Carson's mother shows love by hovering, so he pulls away. Mary shows love by making room for Blake, so he relaxes. Together, the passages show that growing up can mean needing space, support, or both. Small moments between parents and children can reveal a lot about how the characters are changing.

5.2 Student 1 – Annotation

Reading Comprehension Written Expression

Score Point 4

The response shows full comprehension of ideas stated explicitly and inferentially in the passage by providing an accurate analysis (*Both passages show some tension between mothers and sons. However, the relationships change in different ways. Carson moves farther toward independence, while Blake moves from worry toward comfort*). The writing provides effective and complete development of the topic (*Carson is shown as a young man who wants to be treated like an adult.... Carson's mother is caring, but she is also too involved.... Blake begins the passage feeling uncertain. He has left college and does not know what will happen next*). The response uses clear reasoning supported by appropriate text-based evidence (*She packs extra things for him, including his father's old Packers jersey, because they play "football" in England. This shows that she wants to help, even though she does not fully understand his new life. When Carson explains Oxford, she compares it to home and does not really accept his answer.... The passage says, "He stepped off the train at Lamy expecting nothing at all." This shows that he feels empty and unsure. He thinks Mary probably has plans for him...*). The writing is consistently appropriate to task, purpose, and audience (*Together, the passages show that growing up can mean needing space, support, or both. Small moments between parents and children can reveal a lot about how the characters are changing*). It uses appropriate organization, with clear and coherent writing. The response establishes and maintains an effective style.

Conventions

Score Point 3

The response shows full command of the conventions of standard English at an appropriate level of complexity. Sentences are controlled. Minor errors in mechanics and grammar (*...but Mary gives him...*) do not affect meaning and comprehension.

6.0 Student 2 – Score Point 1/1

6.1 Student 2 – Response

In both stories the mom and son are mostly the same cause the moms are trying to make the boys go places. Carson's mom packs two suitcase and his dad's jersey. That shows she wants him to play Oxford, but Carson don't tell her she is wrong. I think the Mom changes because first she is fixing his clothes and then she is trying to learn the map. The son changes too because he stops being mad when he sees the roundabout and green fields.

Blake and Mary are also like that. Blake leaves college because he wants to travel. Mary sends a chauffeur and a new limousine, which proves she is in charge. she comes to the door fast and kisses him but then she disapproves his tie and sends him to his room. that means she is still mad about school. Blake likes the walls and wants murals, so he forgets the problem. the mountains are blue not purple so his plan is wrong.

Both moms develop by being bossy but caring. the sons develop from annoyed to okay. The interactions change because they stop arguing and just look out windows.

6.2 Student 2 – Annotation

Reading Comprehension Written Expression

Score Point 1

The response shows limited comprehension of ideas stated explicitly or inferentially by providing a minimally accurate analysis (*In both storys the mom and son are mostly the same cuase the moms are trying to make the boys go places*). The response provides minimal development of the topic that is limited in its appropriateness to task, purpose, and audience (*I think the Mom changes because first she is fixing his clothes and then she is trying to learn the map.... Blake likes the walls and wants murals, so he forgets the problem. the mountains are blue not purple so his plan is wrong*). The writing uses limited reasoning and text-based evidence (*Carson's mom packs two suitcase and his dads jersey. That shows she wants him to play Oxford, but Carson dont tell her she is wrong....Blake leaves college because he wants to travel. Mary sends a chauffeur and a new limousine, which proves she is in charge. she comes to the door fast and kisses him but then she disaproves his tie and sends him to his room*). The response uses limited organization and coherence. The writing has a style that is minimally effective (*Both moms develop by being bossy but caring. the sons develop from annoyed to okay*).

Conventions

Score Point 1

The response shows limited command of the conventions of standard English at an appropriate level of complexity. There are be errors in spelling (*storys. cause, disaproves*), mechanics (inconsistent capitalization of the first words in sentences), grammar (*Carson don't tell*), and usage that frequently impede comprehension.