



nth Degree Tutoring

Essays

Two essays, each scored 1 – 6, your reported score is their average.

A score of 3 or below is given to papers that clearly have flaws. ☹️

4 means “competent” 😊

5 is “quite good” 😊

6 means “nobody could have done better!”



Practice each essay at least once (preferably once untimed and once timed) before the exam. The first time, you should mind the word count more than the clock. A good target length is 500 words. After you have a sense of how to pace the essay with words, next practice it on the clock.

Don't try to write like a PhD. Use language that is natural to you, as long as it is correct. It is much more important to be clear than to be scholarly.

“Analyze an Issue”

A short, broad / abstract principle is presented. You must construct your own argument relating to it. This is an exercise in arguing persuasively. You may use “reasons” and / or “examples”. You can draw from history, news, or your own life experience.

See grading rubric, p. 37; Sample issue, p. 377; Sample student response, p. 377.

“Analyze an Argument”

A one-paragraph, hypothetical argument is presented to you. It is full of details, flaws, weaknesses, and hidden assumptions. Your job is usually to spot as many flaws, weaknesses, and hidden assumptions as you can, paying careful attention to the given details.

This type of essay is an exercise in focusing on the written passage presented to you. It is not necessary to refer to outside knowledge. You will earn your best score by complete analysis (picking up on all the details, flaws, weaknesses, and hidden assumptions) and following the specific instructions.

Look for the “cores” of the argument where the author attempts to convince or persuade. Organize your response around those points (e.g. 1 – 2 paragraphs per point addressed).

See Grading rubric, p. 39; Sample argument, p. 384; Sample student response, p. 384.

Alternative Explanation

The hardest kind of AAA instruction is the “Alternative Explanation.”

The following appeared as part of a letter to the editor of a scientific journal.

"A recent study of eighteen rhesus monkeys provides clues as to the effects of birth order on an individual's levels of stimulation. The study showed that in stimulating situations (such as an encounter with an unfamiliar monkey), firstborn infant monkeys produce up to twice as much of the hormone cortisol, which primes the body for increased activity levels, as do their younger siblings. Firstborn humans also produce relatively high levels of cortisol in stimulating situations (such as the return of a parent after an absence). The study also found that during pregnancy, first-time mother monkeys had higher levels of cortisol than did those who had had several offspring."

Write a response in which you discuss one or more alternative explanations that could rival the proposed explanation and explain how your explanation(s) can plausibly account for the facts presented in the argument.

Analysis and organization of response

Observation: Monkeys’ reactions to stress vary individually. In particular, some monkeys produce more cortisol (stress hormone) than others in response to stressful situations.

Proposed explanation: Cortisol production is related to birth order; firstborn monkeys produce more cortisol than their later-born siblings.

Alternative explanation: These findings could also be explained by trends in age. Perhaps cortisol levels naturally peak in young adulthood. This would explain why firstborn infant monkeys produce more cortisol than their younger siblings – not because they are “firstborn”, but because they are older! It would also explain why first-time mothers have higher levels of cortisol

than those with more offspring – not because of childbirths, but because cortisol levels may taper off in older age.

Further discussion (evaluate the author’s use of evidence or interpretation):

- Propose an experiment to distinguish between the proposed explanation and your alternative (try the described experiments again with unrelated monkeys, with varying controls on age or birth order).
- Discuss other weaknesses or uncertainties in the argument
 - It is not stated whether the firstborn humans in the study were children or adults.
 - The sample of monkeys was pretty small.
 - The term “stressful” seems to be poorly defined. (Unknown monkey as opposed to return of parent)