



Collegiate Learning Assessment

**Student Guide &
Practice Tasks**

[cla] Student Guide

WHAT IS THE CLA?

The Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) is an open-ended assessment that provides a measure of an institution's contribution to the development of critical thinking and writing skills of its students.

Unlike many of the exams you may be familiar with, the CLA reports the results at the school level, rather than at the student level. And while the CLA allows schools to benchmark how much progress their students have made relative to the progress of similar students at other colleges, it is not designed to rank institutions, nor it is designed to rank students. The principal goal of the CLA is to assist faculty and administrators in improving teaching and learning.

WHY DO SCHOOLS USE THE CLA?

Schools participate in the CLA to estimate how, and by how much, they contribute to your development of higher-order skills. Collecting this information is one step in the process of improving teaching and learning.

There are many variables that schools may use when attempting to measure their "quality of education." Some of these variables include student-to-teacher ratios, endowment size, the number of faculty with doctoral degrees, etc.

While this information is certainly helpful, it doesn't provide a direct measure of student learning. The CLA, conversely, focuses directly on the quality of education that is being provided to you and your peers by estimating student learning outcomes.

ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

There are two task types in the CLA: the Performance Task and the Analytic Writing Task. Most students will take one task or the other, not both. The Analytic Writing Task includes a pair of prompts called Make-an-Argument and Critique-an-Argument.

All CLA tasks are administered online and contain open-ended prompts that require written responses. There are no multiple-choice questions.

The two task types are randomly distributed to students upon entering the testing environment through the online Student Interface.

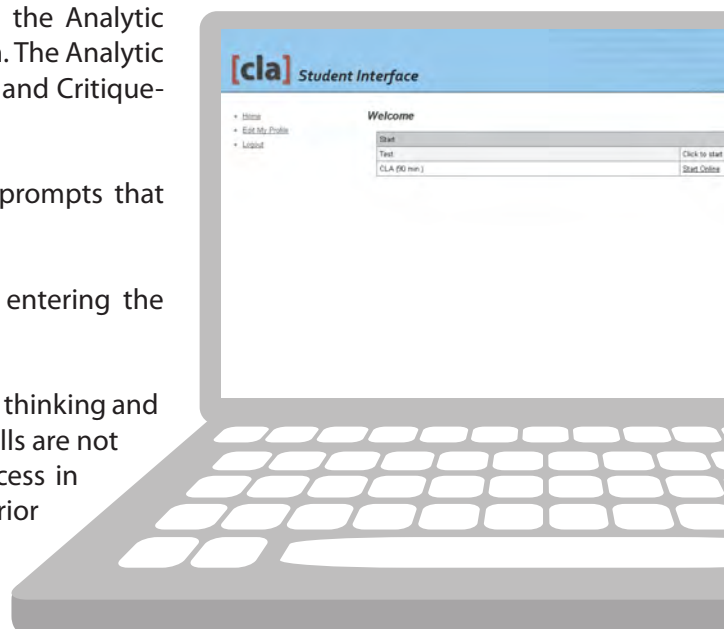
The CLA tasks are designed to assess students' general higher-order thinking and writing skills regardless of their academic concentrations. These skills are not only necessary for success in college; they are important for success in the workplace and other aspects of life outside the classroom. No prior knowledge of any particular field is necessary in order to perform well on the CLA.

WHY IS YOUR PARTICIPATION IMPORTANT TO YOUR SCHOOL?

An assessment program like the CLA requires the cooperation of many members of your institution, including administrators, faculty, and students.

The students who participate in the CLA contribute to the results and data that inform your institution about its students' learning. The more students that participate in the assessment, the more confidence an institution can have in its results.

Not only does your participation in the CLA help to demonstrate your school's contribution to your learning, but by attempting to do your best on the CLA, you are also helping your school grow and improve the education it provides to you and your peers.



PERFORMANCE TASKS

Each Performance Task assesses analytic reasoning and evaluation, problem solving, writing effectiveness and writing mechanics by asking students to answer several open-ended questions about a hypothetical but realistic situation. Students have 90 minutes to complete a Performance Task.

A Performance Task also has its own Document Library that includes a range of information sources, such as letters, memos, photographs, charts, or newspaper articles.

To complete Performance Tasks, you may have to weigh different types of evidence, evaluate the credibility of various documents, spot possible bias, and identify questionable or critical assumptions. It is important to note that there is no single correct answer to a Performance Task.

Characteristics of a high quality Performance Task response:

- Evaluates whether evidence is credible or unreliable
- Provides analysis and synthesis of the evidence
- Draws conclusions that follow from the provided evidence
- Is well-organized and logically developed, with each idea building upon the last
- Shows strong command of writing mechanics and vocabulary

EXAMPLE PERFORMANCE TASK:

SCENARIO

Pat Stone is running for reelection as mayor of Jefferson, a city in the state of Columbia. Mayor Stone's opponent in this contest is Dr. Jamie Eager. Dr. Eager is a member of the Jefferson City Council. You are a consultant to Mayor Stone. Dr. Eager made the following three arguments during a recent TV interview:

First, Mayor Stone's proposal for reducing crime by increasing the number of police officers is a bad idea. Dr. Eager said "it will only lead to more crime." Dr. Eager supported this argument with a chart that shows that counties with a relatively large number of police officers per resident tend to have more crime than those with fewer officers per resident.

Second, Dr. Eager said "we should take the money that would have gone to hiring more police officers and spend it on the STRIVE drug treatment program." Dr. Eager supported this argument by referring to a news release by the Washington Institute for Social Research that describes the effectiveness of the STRIVE drug treatment program. Dr. Eager also said there were other scientific studies that showed the STRIVE program was effective.

Third, Dr. Eager said that because of the strong correlation between drug use and crime in Jefferson, reducing the number of addicts would lower the city's crime rate. To support this argument, Dr. Eager showed a chart that compared the percentage of drug addicts in a Jefferson zip code area to the number of crimes committed in that area. Dr. Eager based this chart on crime and community data tables that were provided by the Jefferson Police Department.

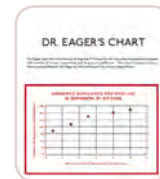
ROLE

You are a consultant to Mayor Stone

TASK

Mayor Stone has asked you to prepare a memo that analyzes the strengths and limitations of each of Dr. Eager's three main points, including any holes in those arguments. Your memo also should contain your conclusions about each of Dr. Eager's three points, explain the reasons for your conclusions, and justify those conclusions by referring to the specific documents, data, and statements on which your conclusions are based.

DOCUMENT LIBRARY



ANALYTIC WRITING TASKS

Each Analytic Writing Task assesses analytic reasoning and evaluation, writing effectiveness and writing mechanics by asking students to respond to two types of essay prompts: Make-an-Argument and Critique-an-Argument.

MAKE-AN-ARGUMENT

A Make-an-Argument prompt presents an opinion on an issue and asks you to write, in 45 minutes, a persuasive analytic essay to support a position on the issue.

Characteristics of a high quality Analytic Writing Task response – Make-an-Argument:

- Has a clearly developed and explained thesis
- Includes in-depth treatment of the issues
 - Provides multiple reasons to support your thesis
 - Supports points with helpful examples
 - Considers the consequences of your suggestions
 - Acknowledges and discusses multiple perspectives on the issues
 - Presents counterarguments to opposing perspectives
- Is well-organized and logically developed, with each idea building upon the last
- Shows strong command of writing mechanics and vocabulary

CRITIQUE-AN-ARGUMENT

A Critique-an-Argument prompt asks you, in 30 minutes, to critique an argument written by someone else; by discussing how well-reasoned you find it to be (rather than simply agreeing or disagreeing with the position presented).

Characteristics of a high quality Analytic Writing Task response – Critique-an-Argument:

- Identifies numerous flaws (obvious, subtle, and complex)
- Explains critiques clearly, completely, and convincingly for the reader using examples, logical argumentation, and common knowledge
- Is well-organized and logically developed, with each idea building upon the last
- Shows strong command of writing mechanics and vocabulary

EXAMPLE ANALYTIC WRITING TASKS:

MAKE-AN-ARGUMENT

The Make-an-Argument prompt presents an opinion on an issue and asks the students to address the issue from any perspective they wish, so long as they provide relevant reasons and examples to explain and support their views on topics such as:

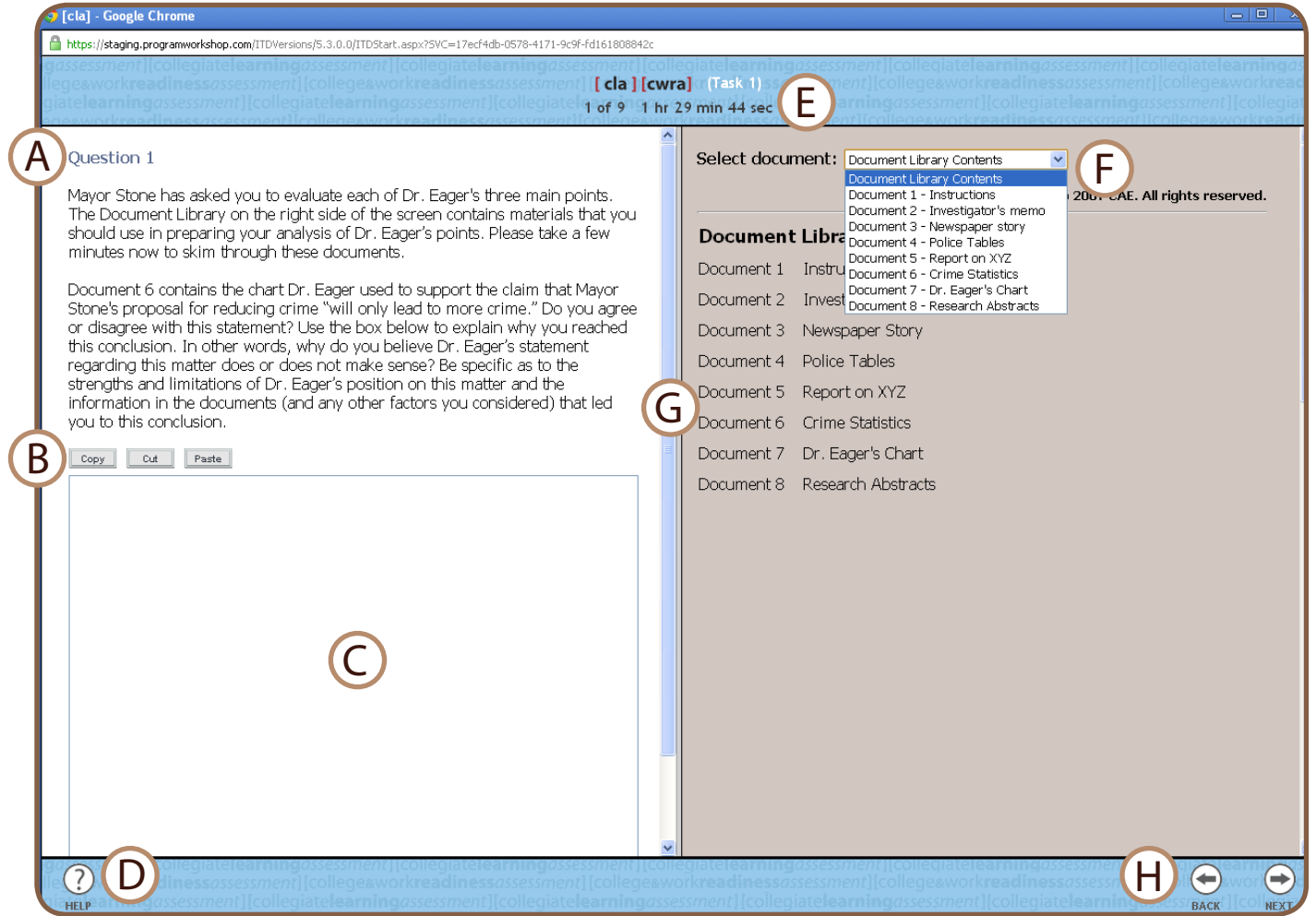
Government funding would be better spent on preventing crime than in dealing with criminals after the fact.

CRITIQUE-AN-ARGUMENT

The Critique-an-Argument prompt requires students to critique an argument by discussing how well reasoned they find it; they must do so by considering the soundness of the argument’s logic (rather than agree or disagree with the position presented). An example prompt is:

The number of marriages that end in separation or divorce is growing steadily. A disproportional number of them are from June weddings. Because June weddings are so culturally desirable, they are often preceded by long engagements as the couples wait until the summer months. The number of divorces increases with each passing year, and the latest statistics indicate that more than 1 out of 3 marriages will end in divorce. With the deck stacked against “forever more” it is best to take every step possible from joining the pool of divorcees. Therefore, it is sage advice to young couples to shorten their engagements and choose a month other than June for a wedding.

STUDENT INTERFACE



A QUESTION - Depending on the task type the number of questions will vary.

E COUNTDOWN CLOCK - The amount of time remaining in the exam. You may click to hide the clock.

B COPY, CUT, PASTE - This feature may be used in the current response or from one response box to another.

F DOCUMENT LIBRARY - Use this dropdown to view the various documents within the task.

C RESPONSE BOX - Your response to the question found above should be input into this area.

G SCREEN MEDIAN - Change the size of the left and right of the screen by dragging the gray bar that divides the screen.

D HELP BUTTON - Will allow you to refer to the information contained in the tutorial at any point during your exam.

H NAVIGATION BUTTONS - The "Next" and "Back" buttons will move you forward and backwards through exam screens.

SCHOLASTIC LEVEL EXAM

The Scholastic Level Exam (SLE) is multiple-choice cognitive ability test created by a separate testing organization (Wonderlic).

Some colleges and universities use the SLE as a proxy for estimating the Entering Academic Ability (EAA) of students who do not have SAT or ACT scores. Each student who takes the CLA must have an SAT, ACT or SLE score to be included in a school's institutional analysis. All community college students will take the SLE as part of the CLA.

WHEN CAN I SEE MY RESULTS?

If you enter a valid email address when completing your online CLA profile, you will receive an email alerting you when your scores are available. If you tested in the fall, you should receive an email in late February; if you tested in the spring, your email will be sent out in August. This email will provide you with instructions on how to retrieve your individual CLA results.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about the structure of CLA tasks please see Architecture of the CLA:

<http://www.usersportal.org/clastudentguide>

You may also email the CLA Team at questions@cae.org.

CLA Task	Subscores (1-6)				Percentile rank at your institution	Percentile rank in the CLA	Performance level
	Analytic Reasoning and Evaluation	Writing Effectiveness	Writing Mechanics	Problem Solving			
Performance Task	5	5	5	4	97	95	WELL ABOVE

A CLA TASK TYPE - There are two task types in the CLA: the Performance Task and the Analytic Writing Task. The Analytic Writing Task includes a pair of prompts called Make-an-Argument and Critique-an-Argument.

B SUBSCORES - Subscores describe how well you demonstrated each of the skills measured by the CLA tasks and are presented on a scale of 1-6. The subscores provide a perspective on your performance on the CLA that is not relative to the performance of others.

C PERCENTILE RANK AT YOUR INSTITUTION - Shows how your performance compares to that of other students at your institution and at your class level who participated in the your testing cycle.

D PERCENTILE RANK IN THE CLA - Shows how well you did relative to the other students at your class level in the entire CLA database of participating institutions for the administration.

E PERFORMANCE LEVEL - Shows whether your scores on the CLA tasks were higher or lower than would have been expected given scores on these same tasks that were earned by students at your class level whose SAT, ACT, or SLE scores were comparable to your SAT, ACT, or SLE score.

[cla] Practice Tasks

OVERVIEW

The Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) is an open-ended assessment that measures your critical thinking, analytic reasoning, problem solving, and written communication skills.

The CLA consists of two main tasks:

- Performance Task
- Analytic Writing Task

PERFORMANCE TASK (PAGES 2-5)

A **Performance Task** presents a real-world situation in which an issue, problem, or conflict is identified. You are asked to assume a relevant role to address the issue, suggest a solution or recommend a course of action based on the information provided in a document library.

Typically a full CLA performance task contains six to twelve documents in the library, and students have 90 minutes to complete the task. The document library contains a variety of reference sources that can vary from a technical report, a data table, a newspaper article, an office memorandum, an e-mail, and other every-day materials.

What is presented in the practice is a much abbreviated version of a performance task. It illustrates some of the key components you will find in completing the CLA. The example only includes two documents, with only one question posed.

ANALYTIC WRITING (PAGES 6-14)

The Analytic Writing Task includes a pair of prompts called Make-an-Argument and Critique-an-Argument.

A **Make-an-Argument** prompt typically presents an opinion on some issue and asks students to write, in 45 minutes, a persuasive analytic essay to support a position on the issue.

A **Critique-an-Argument** prompt asks students, in 30 minutes, to critique an argument by discussing how well-reasoned they find it to be (rather than simply agreeing or disagreeing with the position presented).

On the following pages are an example examples of all CLA Tasks.. In addition there are responses that demonstrate and explain the student's critical thinking, analytic reasoning, and written communication skills.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- The CLA is an Online Assessment
- It is delivered through a secure browser
- Scores will be sent to the email address you enter when logging in
- For more information about the CLA please visit usersportal.org/clastudentguide
- You may also email the CLA Team at questions@cae.org.



PERFORMANCE TASK: INSTRUCTIONS

This is an example of a brief performance task. In the course of this practice performance task, you will prepare a written response to a hypothetical but realistic situation. The performance task is made up of an introductory scenario, a question, and some documents that include several information sources. You will use information from the documents in carrying out the task.

While your personal values and experiences are important, you should base your response on the evidence provided in these documents.

TASK INFORMATION

ROLE

You are a staff member for an organization that analyzes the accuracy of policy claims made by political candidates. The organization is non-partisan, meaning that it is not influenced by, affiliated with or supportive of any one political party or candidate.

SCENARIO

Leila Jainson is running for reelection as the mayor of Stoneville. Mayor Jainson’s opponent in this contest is Dr. Carl Greer. Dr. Greer is a member of the Stoneville City Council. During a recent TV interview about cell phone use, Dr. Greer claimed that these phones interfered with people’s ability to operate a motorized vehicle and caused vehicle-related accidents in Stoneville. Dr. Greer said that reducing cell phone usage while driving motorized vehicles would lower the city’s vehicle-related accident rate. To support this argument, Dr. Greer presented a chart that compared the percentage of drivers who use cell phones while driving to the number of vehicle-related accidents. Dr. Greer based this chart on cell phone use and community data tables that were provided by the Stoneville Police Department and government population counts.

TASK

Your job is to evaluate Dr. Greer’s claims. To do so, please answer the question that follows, using the supporting documents provided (labeled A and B). Your answers should include the appropriate or relevant evidence (drawn from documents A and B) necessary to support your position.

QUESTION

Dr. Greer claims that “reducing cell phone usage while driving motorized vehicles would lower the city’s vehicle-related accident rate” (Document B exhibits the chart Dr. Greer used to support this statement).

1. What are the strengths and/or limitations of Dr. Greer’s position on this matter? What specific information in Documents A and B led you to this conclusion? What additional information, if any, would you like to have had?



SERVING STONEVILLE FOR OVER 50 YEARS

The two tables below present data about the city’s five regions. The percentage of registered drivers who use cell phones while operating a motorized vehicle (Table 1) was obtained from a population survey. The middle column of Table 1 shows the number of registered drivers involved in a motorized vehicle-related accident. The number of registered drivers (Table 1) and the percentage who are college graduates (Table 2) are based on 2005 government population counts. The percentage of moving violation offenders in Stoneville (Table 2) is based on 2005 Stoneville Police Department data.

TABLE 1: VEHICULAR ACCIDENTS STATISTICS

Region	Percentage of drivers who use cell phones while operating a motorized vehicle	Number of registered drivers involved in a vehicle-related accident	Number of registered drivers	Number of vehicle-related accidents per 1,000 drivers
East	1	72	8,396	8.58
South	3	110	13,099	8.40
North	5	171	18,886	9.05
West	8	204	23,993	8.50
City Center	10	222	25,875	8.58

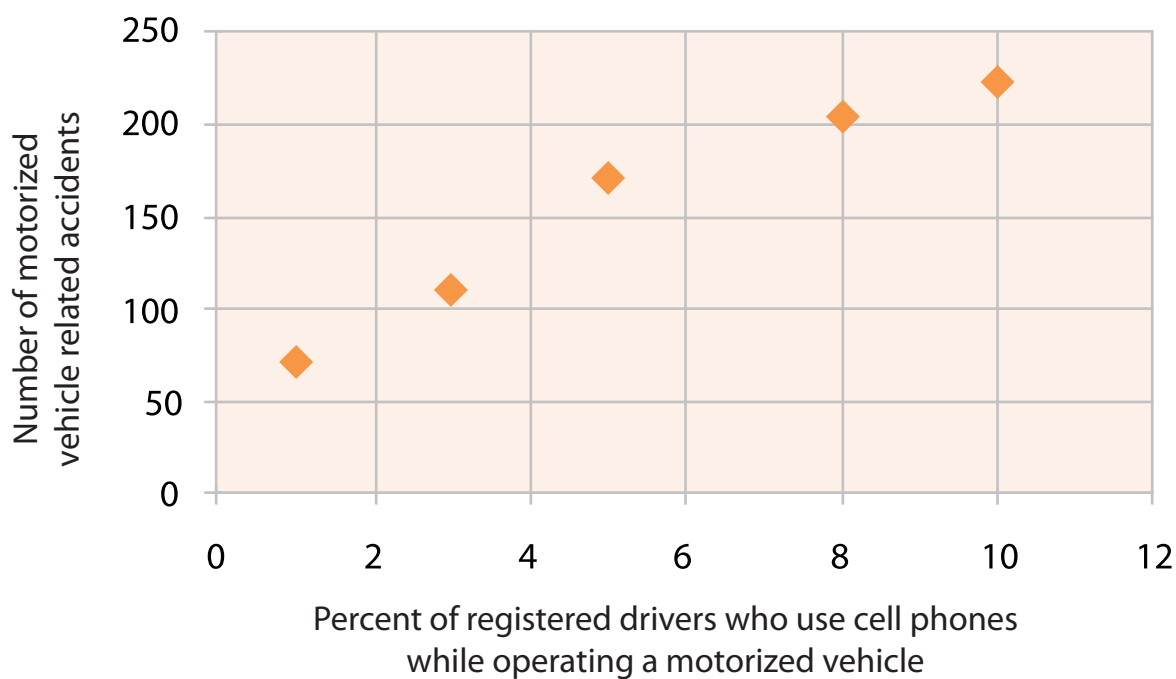
TABLE 2: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Region	Percentage of moving violation offenders in Stoneville	Percentage of drivers who are college graduates
East	60	22
South	50	16
North	40	11
West	35	9
City Center	45	3

DR. GREER'S CHART

Dr. Greer used the chart below during a TV interview to show the relationship between the number people who use cell phones while driving a motorized vehicle and vehicular accidents in Stoneville. This chart is based on data that were provided to Dr. Greer by the Stoneville Police Department (Document A).

Motorized Vehicle Accident and Cell Phone Use in Stoneville



PERFORMANCE TASK: ANSWER SHEET

Please use the pages provided to answer question from the performance task scenario section. If necessary additional paper can be used.

Dr. Greer claims that “reducing cell phone usage while driving motorized vehicles would lower the city’s vehicle-related accident rate” (Document B exhibits the chart Dr. Greer used to support this statement).

1. What are the strengths and/or limitations of Dr. Greer’s position on this matter? What specific information in Documents A and B led you to this conclusion? What additional information, if any, would you like to have had?

PERFORMANCE TASK: SAMPLE RESPONSE

Below is a sample of a high quality response to this performance task and some rationale as to why it is considered such. This was developed to help you understand what is expected of a good response. However, please keep in mind that it by no means covers every possible response.

It is highly recommended that you take time to formulate your own response before reviewing this one.

I cannot agree with Dr. Greer that “reducing cell phone usage while driving motorized vehicles would lower the city’s vehicle-related accident rate.” Dr. Greer’s strategy of looking for root causes of vehicle-related accidents is a good one, but cell phone use while driving may not be the primary cause of vehicular accidents in Stoneville.

The chart he showed in his TV interview (Document B) seems to show that vehicle-related accidents increase along with the percent of registered drivers using cell phones while driving. However, Dr. Greer is either misunderstanding the information he gathered from Document A to create his chart, or he is misleading the public. What his chart (Document B) does not show is the population of each region. Therefore, the chart ends up comparing a number with a percent, which is not meaningful. Dr. Greer is correct in saying that the number of vehicle-related accidents increases with the total number of registered driver living in each region, but he fails to consider number of accidents per 1,000 drivers. When I look at the tables provided by the police department (Document A), I can see that the number of vehicle-related accidents per 1,000 drivers stays relatively constant regardless of the percentage of drivers using cell phones while operating a motorized vehicle. You would expect the region with 1% cell phone users while driving and the one with 10% to have very different vehicular accident rates, but in fact, they are the same at 8.59. This suggests that reducing cell phone use while driving a motorized vehicle may not affect the vehicular accident rate at all.

There are many things that cause vehicle-related accidents. The North region has 5% of cell phone users while operating a motorized vehicle, but a noticeably higher vehicular accident rate of 9.04%, so it leads one to wonder what is going on in this region. It would be wise to examine this region to get an idea of all the other possibilities that may exist for vehicular accidents.

WHY THIS IS A HIGH QUALITY RESPONSE

- Clearly states position and provides rationale
- Weighs other options, but presents a position based on available evidence
- Raises issues about cause and provides specific supporting evidence that raises doubts about cause
- Discards irrelevant information (e.g. percent of registered drivers who are college graduates)
- Provides a well-organized response
- Provides a well-constructed response with complex sentences that vary in structure and length
- Recognizes a need for additional information and made a specific recommendation on the type of information

MAKE-AN-ARGUMENT: INSTRUCTIONS

You will have 45 minutes to plan and write an argument on the prompt that is presented. You should take a position to support or oppose the statement. Use examples taken from your reading, coursework, or personal experience to support your position. Your essay will be evaluated on how well you do the following:

- State your position
- Organize, develop, and express your ideas
- Support your ideas with relevant reasons and/or examples
- Address counter arguments to your position
- Control the elements of standard written English

Before you begin writing, you may want to take a few minutes to decide on a position and to plan a response. Be sure to develop your ideas fully and organize them coherently.

PROMPT

Government funding would be better spent on preventing crime than in dealing with criminals after the fact.

MAKE-AN-ARGUMENT: ANSWER SHEET

Please use the page provided to answer question from the Analytic Writing: Make-an-Argument section. If necessary additional paper can be used.

PROMPT

Government funding would be better spent on preventing crime than in dealing with criminals after the fact.

need to accommodate all individual differences so that none will become criminals? Investing in a comprehensive crime prevention program that addresses all causes and all individuals would appear to be a costly proposition. It is difficult to imagine a program that could effectively do so, at any cost. Furthermore, addressing a root cause of crime would likely trigger a series of other causes that would need to be addressed. If, for example, robbery is related to high incidence of poverty and drug abuse, then crime prevention requires effective programs to address problems of poverty and substance abuse. But these, too, are complex problems related to issues of education, discrimination, mental health, and so forth. Where would the crime prevention program (and government investment) stop? By contrast, according to the "nature" argument, criminals are social deviants from birth. Addressing crime becomes a simple matter of identifying these individuals and removing them from society according to the crimes they commit, without any need to address social or environmental concerns. So long as the number of criminals is few, the cost of separating these individuals from society (e.g., by sending them to prison) will also be relatively small, and government funding might be "better spent" on this approach. But my understanding is that the "nature vs. nurture" argument rages on, leading me to believe that neither determines an individual's behavior by itself. Sending individuals to prison, because they were born criminals, assumes that these people cannot become productive members of society. It denies these individuals their own "inalienable right," a reason many have come to the America in the first place. Whether or not this is the case, keeping these individuals imprisoned assumes further that laws, and therefore the definition of crime, never changes. Unjust imprisonment in the name of dealing with criminals can never be government funding "better spent" in the United States.

Neither investment in crime prevention nor investment in dealing with criminals by themselves can easily address the problem of crime in our society. Instead, some combination, along with investments in other societal improvements will be required to address problems of crime. More generally, how government funding should be spent to address the complex challenge of protecting citizen's rights to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" is best determined by the continued interaction of lawmakers, law enforcement officials, the courts, and the citizenry, just as it has for more than 200 years.

WHY THIS IS A HIGH QUALITY RESPONSE

- Clearly elucidated thesis
- Well-organized
- Sophisticated use of vocabulary and mechanics
- Sophisticated, in-depth treatment of the issues
 - Acknowledges and discusses issues on both sides of the prompt
 - Raises uncommon points (e.g., the changing conception of crime)
 - Clarifies the different meanings and purposes of key terms (e.g., government, crime, prevention)
 - Supports points with helpful examples
 - Applies concepts from their education (e.g., nature vs. nurture, laws are reflections of societal moral beliefs)
 - Considers the consequences of their suggestions
 - Logically developed; each idea builds upon the last

CRITIQUE-AN-ARGUMENT: INSTRUCTIONS

There is something wrong with the argument presented below. It is your job to explain what is wrong with the argument. Discuss:

- Any flaws in the argument
- Any questionable assumptions
- Any missing information
- Any inconsistencies

What we are interested in is your critical thinking skills and how well you write a response. You will have 30 minutes to respond to the argument. You will be judged on how well you do the following:

- Explain any flaws in the points the author makes
- Organize, develop, and express your ideas
- Support your ideas with relevant reasons and/or examples
- Control the elements of standard written English

Do not discuss the structure of the argument. Please avoid sentences like the following.:

- “The argument needs a better introductory sentence.”
- “This argument has some facts that help support its ideas, but the ideas are somewhat unorganized.”
- “The argument needs more details, more evidence to get its points across.”
- “The argument does a great job of recommending a solution and a way to fix the problem.”
- Your essay should be about what the argument says, not how it’s organized.

PROMPT

The number of marriages that end in divorce keeps growing. A large percentage of them are from June weddings. Because June weddings are so popular, couples end up being engaged for a long time just so that they can get married in the summer months. The number of divorces gets bigger with each passing year, and the latest news is that more than 1 out of 3 marriages will end in divorce. So, if you want a marriage that lasts forever, it is best to do everything you can to prevent getting divorced. Therefore, it is good advice for young couples to have short engagements and choose a month other than June for a wedding.

CRITIQUE-AN-ARGUMENT: ANSWER SHEET

Please use the pages provided to answer question from the Analytic Writing: Critique-an-Argument section. If necessary additional paper can be used.

PROMPT

The number of marriages that end in divorce keeps growing. A large percentage of them are from June weddings. Because June weddings are so popular, couples end up being engaged for a long time just so that they can get married in the summer months. The number of divorces gets bigger with each passing year, and the latest news is that more than 1 out of 3 marriages will end in divorce. So, if you want a marriage that lasts forever, it is best to do everything you can to prevent getting divorced. Therefore, it is good advice for young couples to have short engagements and choose a month other than June for a wedding.

compatibility, and above all hard work at maintaining the relationship. If a couple wants to try to prevent getting divorced, they should work on these things, not simply avoiding a June wedding as the author suggests. My brother is divorced. Yes, he was married in June. But in my opinion the date of their wedding was the least of their problems.

WHY THIS IS A HIGH QUALITY RESPONSE

- Information is well-organized. The reader knows exactly which part of the prompt is being critiqued at every point in the response
- Uses complex sentence structure and varied vocabulary
- Uses examples (e.g., reasoned hypothetical examples and common knowledge) to support and illustrate valid points
- Identifies numerous flaws (complex and subtle)
- Explanation/justification: The response not only mentions numerous flaws throughout the argument, but also explains the flaws clearly, completely, and convincingly for the reader
- Demonstrates solid understanding of several important critical thinking concepts. For example:
 - The difference between interpreting proportions versus just raw numbers in statistics and how doing so can lead to different conclusions
 - Correlation is not causation