

EVALUATING A PERSUASIVE ESSAY USING THE SIX WRITING TRAITS

Directions: A student responded to the persuasive prompt below. Read the student's essay and the completed evaluation on the next page. Then, answer the questions that follow.

Persuasive Prompt: *Imagine that a local builder found an ancient campsite while clearing land to build a badly needed school. Should the builder be allowed to proceed, or should building stop while archaeologists study the site? Local schools are overcrowded, and archaeologists estimate that it could take as long as a year to complete their study. Write an essay for your school newspaper in which you state your position on this issue and support it with convincing reasons and details.*

If construction of a new school for our city is suspended for a year, as archaeologists want, some classes in our old school will have fifty or more students next year. I know it is important to make discoveries at the ancient campsite, but I think a year is too long to wait to start building a new school. I think we should give the archaeologists a shorter time to dig so we don't spend another whole year crowded into an old building and trailers. I believe that technology can help both projects get done faster and that people on both sides want the best for history and for children.

Technology can help in two ways. I think the archaeologists should get one of those machines that lets them see objects underground. If they see anything out of the ordinary, they should start digging immediately. If they find nothing in a period of five months, we should start to build the foundation for our new school. During the time when the archaeologists are looking at the site, the new school can be designed, and we can use computer programs to plan and figure out the most efficient way to do the job. That way, as soon as the archaeologists finish, we can be ready to start work right away and finish the school more quickly.

If I were an archaeologist, of course I would want to dig up whatever treasure is underground. They might learn more about early humans or maybe even find something that can confirm the way dinosaurs died, and then they would want to keep digging. Still, if I were an archaeologist, I would probably want the best for the children. After all, archaeologists spent a lot of time in school. They know it's important. They might even have kids, too. The archaeologists should try to finish their project as soon as they can so that the school will be

ready by the next school year. If I were an archaeologist, I would not want my work to force kids to stay crowded in an old school.

On the other hand, if I were an administrator, obviously I would want to build the school. However, I would probably be interested in finding out what was at the site, too. If there were fossils or artifacts to be found, I would have the archaeologists start digging. Their discoveries might give us further things to study in our new school, and our school would be recognized as the place where an important discovery was made. Finding fossils at our new school will give us an advantage, but stopping construction for a whole year would mean the old school will still be crowded and put the students at a disadvantage.

The best solution to this problem is to limit the delay caused by digging at the site. The archaeologists and builders should use technology to speed up the process so that construction of the new school can begin in time for the school to be ready for the next school year. We deserve to go to a new school that is not overcrowded.

One Reader's Evaluation

A reader used the rubrics on pp. 20–21 to evaluate the persuasive essay above. Below are her scores and comments.

Persuasive Essay: Six Trait Scores	
Ideas and Content	4
Organization	5
Voice	4
Word Choice	3
Sentence Fluency	5
Conventions	5

What's the Score?
Sometimes a trait in a paper may deserve a score of a 4 or a 2. The rubrics don't show those scores, though. Use your judgment. If you think that a paper's organization is not quite a 5 but definitely better than a 3, you can always give a score of 4.

One Reader's Comments

Ideas and Content: The writer identifies a clear position and considers multiple perspectives, although the ideas sometimes lack specificity.

Organization: Organization fits the writer's purpose, and ideas progress logically.

Voice: The writer demonstrates a keen involvement with the topic, but uses a fair and calm voice as he or she discusses possible concerns from opposing viewpoints.

Word Choice: Word choice is correct and adequate to communicate the writer's ideas.

Sentence Fluency: Sentences vary in length and structure and clearly communicate the writer's message.

Conventions: The writer demonstrates control over the conventions of written language; paragraphing, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling are generally correct.

Sum It Up: Overall I thought the paper was balanced, thoughtful, and interested in the topic. I could tell the writer cared deeply about both building a new school and making historical discoveries.

Your Turn

Now answer the questions below. Use the rubrics on pp. 20-21 to figure out how you would score the preceding persuasive essay (pp. 26-27). How do your responses compare to the scores shown above?

- 1. I do/ do not agree with the evaluator's score on the writer's ideas and contents because**

- 2. I do/ do not agree with the evaluator's score on the writer's organization because**

- 3. I do/ do not agree with the evaluator's score on the writer's voice because**

- 4. I do/ do not agree with the evaluator's score on the writer's word choice because**

- 5. I do/ do not agree with the evaluator's score on the writer's sentence fluency because**

- 6. I do/ do not agree with the evaluator's score on the writer's conventions because**

- 7. If you were to give the essay different scores from the ones on p. 28, what would they be? Why do you think different scores should be given?**
