

Writing Situation: Your state’s writing scores have fallen and lots of people are trying to determine why.

Think about what you believe is the main reason(s) for this.

Now write to persuade the public to agree with your reasons.

Dear public,

Imagine being told one day, that instead of writing from left to right on paper, you have to write from right to left. Wouldn’t that be difficult? Well, 84% of Florida 10th grade students were writing above grade level in 2011 but that number took a nosedive to 34%¹ in 2012, causing the state to call an emergency meeting and change the passing rate from a 4 to a 3.² There are several reasons people say this has happened. Some people say the state has raised the bar too high too quickly. Some think that our students are getting dumber. Other people say that teachers are to blame.³

First⁴, some people say that the state has raised the bar too high in too short of a time. They say this because when it comes to conventions of grammar and spelling, “the scoring of this element in the past has been applied with leniency.” It was also scored this year with “increased attention to the quality of details, requiring use of relevant, logical, and plausible support, rather than contrived statistical claims or unsubstantiated generalities.”⁵ When students suddenly have to worry about things like spelling and grammar, or making sense, that’s hard. You can’t expect change overnight. Students should not be held accountable for what they have always done.⁶

In addition, some think that our students are getting dumber. For example, Maggie Meyer has been teaching for 42 years and says that each year the kids get dumber.⁷ “They just get dumber,” she said. More students take remedial classes every year and the highest enrolled classes on any college campus these days are remedial Math, Writing, and Reading. The University of Central Florida had a remedial writing enrollment of 22% a decade ago, up to 94% this year.⁸ Kids just aren’t as smart as they used to be.

Finally, other people say that teachers are to blame. Take my teachers for example. Every year we write essays like these, to some dumb prompt that they give us. They said we had to because the school wanted to make sure their students would get high scores on the state test. They said all the trainings and our textbooks focused on this model. They said that thesis statements must be in the first paragraph with the three points as a blueprint for the paper, and the last paragraph should restate the thesis. They said that we have to use transition words because that is what the state would look for.

¹ This number is completely made up.

² This sentence does not have a logical connection to the first two.

³ The author realizes that her paragraph is 7 sentences long instead of the standard 4-6. In the author’s defense, one of the sentences is a fragment.

⁴ Note transition taken from a “list of transitions” chart – page 48 in a textbook*

*even though footnotes should not have footnotes, just wanted to point out that the author does not really have a reference or textbook

⁵ Author notes these are quotations from a legitimate source but since the author only uses random, made-up statistics, the actual information of where she received this is not important. Instead, readers should applaud her ability to support her point with details.

⁶ The author has more to say here but the time limits require she move on. Plus she has reached 6 sentences in this paragraph.

⁷ Maggie Meyer is a made-up name so if someone by this name reads this, the author extends an apology

⁸ Impressive statistic. No offense intended to University of Central Florida or student body.

They told us not to worry about our spelling as much—mostly our organization. They told us to support what we said with details—even make them up and sometimes they gave us ones to use—said the state wouldn't care. They showed us papers that the state had given them and that was how we were supposed to write. Then, one day, they wanted us to be what they called “real writers” and move past this “formula” model but it was just too hard. That is why teachers are to blame.⁹

I mean, I'm not a writer.¹⁰

In conclusion, people believe there are many reasons for the drop in scores. Some think the state raised the bar, some think the kids are dumber, and some think teachers are to blame.¹¹ I think all three are good reasons. What do you think?

Sincerely,
Tamara Doehring¹²

⁹ Author notes and apologizes for sentence structure not varying and for this paragraph being too many sentences.

¹⁰ Oops. Sorry to make this a six paragraph essay but this final point really felt it had to be made. Author apologizes and gladly accepts a lower score for the first sentence of a paragraph not followed by support.

¹¹ High quality restated thesis

¹² Since the author did not have enough time or space to complete her thought on this topic, [please come back](#) next week when she shares her thoughts in more detail.