

## 3—Pros and Cons



In the previous chapter, we took a look at the Rules of Engagement — building blocks and style conventions essential to structuring an ACT essay quickly and cohesively. In this chapter, I’m going to show you how to parse the prompt using a “T chart” to separate pro and con arguments.

Parsing the prompt constitutes important “pre-work” that you need to do prior to jumping directly into your essay. You have 30 minutes to compose an ACT essay and *at least three minutes* of that should be allocated to set-up time, where you break the prompt down into sub-arguments you can organize your essay around.

Trust me, this is both an easy and essential process that will lend logic and narrative cohesion to your composition.

Students who jump right into the prompt often find their arguments swaying back and forth like drunken sailors, uncertain of their footing on the shore.

### T-Chart

Engineers and draftsmen use T-squares to draw parallel lines and establish right angles. In much the same manner, you can draw a “T-chart” in the ACT test booklet directly below the prompt to separate *pro* and *con* arguments

Pro	Con

A T-chart provides a handy way to organize and contrast the different viewpoints presented in the prompt; moreover, it allows you to easily augment those viewpoints with others of your own.

In this chapter we’ll take a look at some common ACT prompts and demonstrate how a T-chart can be used to parse — and cherry pick! — the prompt. We’ll start by returning to the prompt we saw in the first chapter.



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### ACT Prompt 1

In some high schools, many teachers and parents have encouraged the school to require school uniforms that students must wear to school. Some teachers and parents support school uniforms because they think their use will improve the school's learning environment. Other teachers and parents do not support requiring uniforms because they think it restricts individual freedom of expression. In your opinion, should high schools require uniforms for students?

In your essay, *take a position on this question*. You may write about either one of the two points of view given, or you may present a different point of view on this question. Use specific reasons and examples to support your position.

### Strategy

Split the prompt into the pro and con arguments that you want to elaborate on in your essay. Right away, you can cherry pick two arguments directly from the prompt. For example:

Pro	Con
School uniforms improve the learning environment. <b>Why</b> —	School uniforms discourage individual freedom. <b>Why</b> —



Next, elaborate sub-arguments on each side. Since the ACT essay is simply a matter of *opinion*, this shouldn't be too hard. Just stretch your imagination and picture everyday events that might relate to the topic. One strategy, demonstrated below, is to ask yourself "Why" the pro and con arguments are worthy of support.

<b>Pro</b>	<b>Con</b>
School uniforms improve the learning environment. <b>Why</b> —	School uniforms discourage individual freedom. <b>Why</b> —
<b>Sub-arguments</b>	
They take the emphasis off fashion and onto learning	They reduce individual creativity and lead to a uniform mind set
Distractions due to provocative clothing are eliminated	Uniforms fail to prepare students for the real world where people learn to "dress for success"
Uniforms reduce income-based schoolyard bullying and "elitism"	Telling students what to wear creates a "nanny" state in high school
Uniforms put the emphasis on democratic principles and cultural equality	
They reduce the costs and effort incurred in "keeping up with the Kardashians"	

Once you've parsed the prompt into sub-arguments, determine which side of the issue makes the most sense to support. A useful strategy for doing this is to view the prompt through a series of perspectives.

## Perspectives

Perspectives are a quick and surefire way to list the various points of view you want to consider when evaluating the prompt. Moreover, they are a great way to organize and introduce your body paragraphs.

There are a wide variety of perspectives to play around with. I'll present a general list below and highlight several that have a direct bearing on the prompt under consideration. For example:

- From a **financial** perspective . . .



- From a fashion perspective . . .
- From a personal perspective . . .
- From an **academic** perspective . . .
- From a psychological perspective . . .
- From a practical perspective . . .
- From a peer-group perspective . . .
- From a sports perspective . . .
- From an **egalitarian** perspective . . .
- From a pop culture perspective . . .
- From a constitutional perspective . . .
- From a health or public health perspective . . .
- From a community perspective . . .
- From a technology perspective . . .
- From a free speech perspective . . .
- From a civil liberties perspective . . .
- From a **big government** perspective . . .

Of course, there are many more that you can come up with on your own but this list should be enough to get you started. Consider how some of the sub-arguments (opinions) in the previous T-chart readily align to various perspectives:

Sub-argument	Perspective
They take the emphasis off fashion and onto learning	From an <b>academic</b> perspective . . .
Uniforms put the emphasis on democratic principles and cultural equality	From an <b>egalitarian</b> perspective . . .
They reduce the costs and effort incurred in “keeping up with the Kardashians”	From a <b>financial</b> perspective . . .
Telling students what to wear creates a “nanny” state in high school	From a <b>big-government</b> perspective . . .



Perspectives are the secret to success on the ACT essay. They help you quickly enumerate points of view around which your essay can be organized. Equally important, as can be seen in the previous table, perspectives can be used as transitions between paragraphs to smooth the flow of your presentation and clarify the logic.

Once you've constructed your T-chart, enumerated your sub-arguments, selected your perspectives, and determined which side of the prompt you want to support, you're ready to compose your introductory paragraph.

### **Sample Introduction**

Ideally, your intro paragraph should start by establishing context with a broad, sweeping statement that defines the territory your essay will explore. You can then use your T-chart sub-arguments to weave between the multiple points of view presented in the prompt. Usually, but not necessarily, you'll want to reveal which position you plan to support in your intro. Here's how it's done:

With the world undergoing change at an alarming rate, it is important for our schools to provide a safe and efficient learning environment for students. To ensure this, many teachers and parents have encouraged schools to require school uniforms because they think their use will improve the school's learning environment. *However*, other teachers and parents disagree, arguing that uniforms restrict individual freedom of expression. Citing fears of an encroaching "nanny state", these educators feel school districts should not unnecessarily burden students with non-academic restrictions. *On the other hand*, a school system with no rules in place for appropriate dress may result in a fashion free-for-all, where students with the most money flaunt their wealth and look down on less affluent students. *Clearly*, this approach flies in the face of the democratic principles that schools are supposed to uphold and encourage. *Consequently*, school uniforms, both less costly and more egalitarian, promote the best learning environment for high school students.

Most people — in fact, most writers — have a hard time getting started. Students in particular are antsy; their tendency is to just jump into the essay and start writing, often haphazardly. However, taking a few minutes to draw up a T-chart to formulate your arguments lets you hit the ground running when you begin your essay.

Instead of starting completely from scratch, you wisely make use of the material the ACT has so helpfully provided you in the prompt, augmented by your own opinions and perspectives. Doing so provides you — and the ACT Reader — with a logical roadmap that ensures a well-organized and top-scoring essay.



While expressing multiple points of view in your intro, keep in mind the position you eventually want to support. You can either conclude your intro by taking a firm position on the prompt — as demonstrated in the sample above — or you can wait for your body paragraphs to do so.

Finally, notice how this introduction employs liberal use of transitions to navigate the various points of view in the intro:

- *however*
- *on the other hand*
- *clearly*
- *consequently*

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, transitions are the mark of a good writer. While perspectives provide a quick and useful way to organize your arguments, transitions clarify the logic of your composition and smooth the narrative flow. It's not an exaggeration to say they are the literary super-glue that holds a top-scoring composition together. Make them your friend.

### *Summary*

Here are the key things to keep in mind when composing an introduction:

- Use a broad, sweeping statement to open the intro and establish context for the prompt
- State the pro and con positions from your T-chart, mixing in a generous helping of sub-arguments
- Use transition words to move back and forth between various points of view
- Add in any details that help to flesh out the presentation
- Optionally, take a strong stand on one side of the argument

### **Sample Body Paragraphs**

Unlike the introduction, where multiple points of view are presented, body paragraphs encapsulate individual points. In each body paragraph, writers should:

- Take a strong position on some part of the prompt
- Qualify that position with perspectives
- Add interesting details (details, details) to flesh out the presentation
- Wrap things up and move on to your next point

To demonstrate this process, here are two body paragraphs from a sample essay on the “high school uniform” prompt written by one of my students that highlight the use of perspectives in an ACT essay.



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### Body paragraph 1

*From a financial perspective*, having school uniforms would relieve me of the need to “shop till I drop” at the nearest mall. The money I save on clothes could be more productively spent at my local bookstore, catching up on trash novels like “The Hunger Games” or re-reading classics from my freshman year like “To Kill a Mockingbird” or “Wuthering Heights”, my personal favorite.

### Body paragraph 2

*From a peer-group perspective*, I would welcome the reduction in stress and tension that invariably occurs when girls comment negatively on each other’s outfits. It’s not nice to say so but girls can sometimes be “catty”. School uniforms would level the playing field between the “in group” and those less blessed with innate fashion sense. This latter group, I have to admit, sometimes includes me!

A word of caution here. I’m not advocating that you start *every* body paragraph with a “From the perspective of . . .” phrase — that would be too formulaic and repetitive. But using perspectives as an organizing principle and interspersing them in strategic points throughout the essay is a surefire recipe for success.

In some sense, parsing the prompt for sub-arguments and enumerating perspectives entails a chicken and the egg scenario. Which comes first —brainstorming sub-argument opinions or considering perspectives? The answer is simple; they work hand in hand and are both pragmatic shortcuts to help you quickly come up with content examples for your essay.

Every essay should have an introduction, four to five body paragraphs (depending on length) and a conclusion.

The conclusion is actually the easiest part of your essay; you just sum up the points you’ve made previously and add a concluding flourish, which we’ll see in the sample essay in the next chapter. Stay tuned.

For now, having seen the strategies required to analyze one ACT prompt, let’s take a look at a second, constructing another T-chart to parse the prompt.

## ACT Prompt 2

Educators debate extending high school to five years because of increasing demands on students from employers and colleges to participate in extracurricular activities and community service in addition to having high grades. Some educators support extending high school to five years because they think students need more time to achieve all that is expected of them. Other educators do not support extending high school to five years because



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they think students would lose interest in school and attendance would drop in the fifth year. In your opinion, should high school be extended to five years?

In your essay, take a position on this question. You may write about either one of the two points of view given, or you may present a different point of view on this question. Use specific reasons and examples to support your position.

### Strategy

As before, split the prompt into the pro and con arguments that you want to elaborate on in your essay. Again, right away, you can cherry pick two arguments directly from the prompt. For example:

Pro	Con
High school should be extended to five years. <b>Why</b> —	High school should not be extended to five years. <b>Why</b> —



Next elaborate sub-arguments on each side. Remember: the ACT essay is simply a matter of *opinion*. Your opinion! Given the nature of this prompt, you'll want to dwell on the reasons "why" high school should or should not be extended.

<b>Pro</b>	<b>Con</b>
High school should be extended to five years. <b>Why</b> —	High school should not be extended to five years. <b>Why</b> —
<b>Sub-arguments</b>	
Due to increased demand for extracurricular activities like sports	Because students would lose interest in school and drop out
To provide more time for volunteer work	Because schools would lose federal funds if the student population declines
To provide more time to devote to difficult coursework such as AP and science classes	Because many students go on to graduate school and adding one more year to high school is counterproductive
Helps make students more likely to succeed in college	Because this represents an unnecessary intrusion of big government into local school districts

Once you've established your pro and con arguments, you can align them with perspectives.



## Perspectives

Sub-argument	Perspective
Due to increasing demands for extracurricular activities like sports	From an <b>athletic</b> perspective...
To provide more time to devote to difficult coursework such as AP and science classes	From an <b>academic</b> perspective...
To provide more time for volunteer work	From a <b>community</b> perspective...
Because schools would lose federal funds if the student population declines	From a <b>financial</b> perspective...
Because students would lose interest in school and drop out	From a <b>personal</b> perspective...

These perspectives can then be used to organize your essay and/or to populate your paragraphs.

### Sample Body Paragraphs

Here are two sample paragraphs from different students on “extending high school to five years”. The first embeds the perspective at the end of the paragraph; the other uses perspective as a transition.

#### *Body paragraph 1*

Sports have always been an intrinsic part of my academic life. Sitting in a classroom, while productive in terms of knowledge gained, is not conducive to overall health. In a world dominated by digital devices and online gaming, teenagers today need to keep active in order to stay healthy. The obesity epidemic is already threatening many adolescents with early-onset diabetes and metabolic syndrome. On top of that, physical education has declined in our nation’s primary schools. *From a health and athletic perspective*, being able to devote more time to sports during a fifth year of high school might be just what the doctor ordered.



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### *Body paragraph 2*

*From a financial perspective, extending high school to five years would pose significant funding problems for high school administrators, especially those responsible for inner city schools where the dropout rate is already high. Federal funding is tied directly to student population. The more students a school has the more federal dollars it has at its disposal. If, as many experts argue, extending high school to five years results in an increase in high school dropouts, our already underfunded inner city schools would suffer disproportionately. This could be considered a form of financial discrimination. The Supreme Court decision in “Brown vs Board of Education” in the early fifties made it clear that laws establishing separate schools for black and white students were unconstitutional. Do we really want to go back to the days of “separate but equal”? Extending high school to five years might result in just that.*

Both of these body paragraphs augment the writer’s opinions by bringing in cultural and historical references, an excellent way to ensure a top-scoring essay. The first paragraph mentions the obesity epidemic and brings in a technical reference to “metabolic syndrome”. The second puts the argument in historical context by referencing one the most significant Supreme Court decisions of the 20th century.

Bringing in outside material like this to buttress your arguments is key to top-scoring essays. Opinions can be expressed much more forcefully when objective material (historic, literary, scientific, sociological, etc.) is brought in for support.

### **ACT Prompt 3**

Finally, one last prompt to consider. At this point, you might feel comfortable enough with the strategies I’ve presented to parse the prompt yourself.

Try it on your own by first reading the next prompt and then constructing a quick T-chart in the margins with pro and con arguments. Then come up with your own sub-arguments for each side before moving on to the Strategy section, where several approaches are broached.

I’ll leave it to you as an exercise to come up with your own sample paragraphs based on your T-chart. But don’t worry. If you’re not quite up to that task yet, just proceed on to the next chapter where a complete sample essay awaits you.

In some states, legislators have debated whether teenagers should be required to maintain a “C” grade average in school before receiving a driver’s license. Some people think this would be a good policy because having passing grades shows that students are responsible enough to be good drivers. Other people think such a policy would not be appropriate because they see no



relationship between grades in school and driving skills. In your opinion, should teenagers be required to maintain a “C” average in school before receiving a driver’s license?

In your essay, take a position on this question. You may write about either one of the two points of view given, or you may present a different point of view on this question. Use specific reasons and examples to support your position.

### Strategy

Once again, split the prompt into the pro and con opinions and elaborate your sub-arguments.

Pro	Con
Teenagers should be required to maintain a “C” average before receiving a driver’s licence. <b>Why —</b>	Teenagers should <i>not</i> be required to maintain a “C” average before receiving a driver’s licence. <b>Why —</b>
<b>Sub-arguments</b>	
Students with good grades are responsible drivers	No relationship between grades and driving
Driving is a privilege not a right	Driving is necessary for many students to get to and from school and work
Teenage roadside fatalities have increased due to poor drivers	Withholding driver’s licences would unfairly discriminate among poor students
	Such mandates represent an unnecessary intrusion of big government into local school district affairs

Next tag each sub-argument with perspectives.



## Perspectives

Sub-argument	Perspective
Driving is necessary for many students to get to and from school and work	From a <b>practical</b> perspective . . .
Withholding driver's licences would unfairly discriminate among poor students	From a <b>constitutional</b> perspective . . .
Teenage roadside fatalities have increased due to poor drivers	From a <b>public health</b> perspective . . .

### Overview

For students who want a quick overview of the methodology described in this and previous chapters, the key points so far are these:

- Use a T-chart to parse the prompt into pro and con positions and generate sub-arguments for these positions.
- Write an introduction that establishes context for your essay and summarizes the multiple points of view contained in your T-chart.
- Compose body paragraphs based on the sub-arguments in your T-chart, using perspectives to organize your presentation and, at times, provide transitions between/within paragraphs. When constructing arguments, add as much detail as possible.
- For top-scoring essays, the devil is always in the details. Use objective material — supreme court cases, constitutional issues, environmental restrictions — to support your opinions and arguments.
- Make liberal use of transitions within and between paragraphs to help the reader understand the logic of your presentation and appreciate the narrative flow.
- Keep your sentence structure varied. Avoid choppy subject-verb-object sentences. Use subordination (independent phrases and clauses) to create a more sophisticated writing style.
- Remember to keep your pencil moving. Word count matters. Top-scoring ACT essays usually run at least 450 words.

Throughout all of this, because your opinions are your own, you are free to come up with whatever arguments or counter-arguments seem feasible. As Marcus Aurelius said in the opening passage of the previous chapter:



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“Everything we hear is a matter of opinion . . . everything we see is a perspective.”

### **What’s Next**

In the following chapter, we’ll pull all these threads together and review a complete sample essay.

## 4—Sample Essay

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Before you begin writing, spend three or four minutes to analyze the prompt box. As we've seen in previous chapters, the ACT actually helps you get started on your essay by suggesting various points of views.

Remember: the ACT is all about opinions and perspectives. In sports, good teams take advantage of what the defense has to offer. The ACT offers you several different points of view. Use these viewpoints to construct a T-chart.

Here's the prompt from the June 2013 ACT test. In this chapter, we'll parse the prompt, marshal sub-arguments, add perspectives and construct a sample essay based on our analysis.

### **ACT Prompt — June 2013**

Educators debate whether high school students should have an active role in classroom instruction, such as selecting some course materials and leading some class discussions. Some educators support giving students an active role in classroom instruction because they think doing so would increase students' interest in their classes. Other educators do not support giving students an active role in classroom instruction because they think students would not learn as much from their peers as they would from a teacher. In your opinion, should high school students have an active role in classroom instruction?

In your essay, take a position on this question. You may write about either one of the two points of view given, or you may present a different point of view on this question. Use specific reasons and examples to support your position.

### **Cherry Pick the Prompt**

The first order of business is to split the prompt into the pro and con arguments presented to you by the ACT. You'll want to elaborate on those in your essay, but right away you can cherry pick two arguments directly from the prompt and bank off of them to elaborate sub-arguments. For example:



<b>Pro</b>	<b>Con</b>
Student teachers should have an active role in the classroom. <b>Why</b> —	Student teachers should not have an active role in the classroom. <b>Why</b> —
<b>Sub-arguments</b>	
They provide an alternate perspective on the subject	They take away time from professional teachers who are more qualified
They make learning more relevant and fun	Classroom decorum is disrupted
They foster an easy-going classroom atmosphere which helps reduce stress	
They benefit from better presentation abilities	

This parsing of the prompt should take you 3, no more than 4, minutes. Having accomplished that, you're now armed and dangerous and ready to write. You've got opinions. You've mapped out your arguments. All you need are a few perspectives.

### **Perspectives**

From the previous chapter, recall that perspective can act as both transitions between paragraphs and organizing principles around which you can construct your essay. Perspectives, therefore, are both a literary tool and a way to reinforce your T-chart arguments. Here's a quick recap of the main perspectives:

- From a financial perspective . . .
- From an academic perspective . . .
- From a personal perspective . . .
- From a **psychological** perspective . . .
- From an egalitarian perspective . . .
- From a practical perspective . . .
- From a **peer-group** perspective . . .



- From a sports perspective . . .
- From a pop culture perspective . . .
- From a constitutional perspective . . .
- From a free speech perspective . . .
- From a civil liberty perspective . . .
- From a big government perspective . . .
- From a health perspective . . .

In the following sample essay, two of these have been employed to enhance the argument:

- From a **psychological** perspective . . .
- From a **peer-group** perspective . . .

As a general rule, you can employ these as transitions between paragraphs or, more subtly, weave them within paragraphs to make your point.

But remember: you don't want to over-use these perspectives and imbalance your essay. Think of them as seasonings you might add to a dish to enhance — but not overwhelm — the flavor.

To construct your introduction, start with a broad, sweeping statement that establishes the context for your essay. Then, using transition words and phrases, weave between the arguments, describing both pro and con positions. Finally, either take a stand, siding with one position over another, or leave your view open-ended, to be elaborated on in a later paragraph.

### Sample Essay

With education more crucial than ever for the future success of our nation, it is important to have as streamlined an educational system as possible. The idea that students should play a role in helping to instruct their peers in the classroom is currently a debated topic. On one hand, the new perspective on a subject a student could provide may help others grasp certain information better. On the other hand, most people would agree that a teacher is more qualified to assess educational issues. Those in opposition to letting students have a hand in instruction argue that teachers should be the only ones allowed to teach. Still, having students teach their peers could not only help academically but could also foster an easygoing classroom setting to help reduce stress.

**From a peer-group perspective**, one of the main benefits of students taking an active role in the learning process is the fresh, alternative perspective they would bring to the subject matter. Often, students may not see eye to eye with



their instructors. Having their peers make presentations on various subjects could fill in some gaps for students in their overall understanding of academic material.

Additionally, having students occasionally teach lessons would provide a much-needed change of pace for the whole class. The unending repetition of having one teacher give lectures or presentations every day can get very monotonous. If a student were to prepare his or her own lectures, the refreshing style of a new peer-group instructor would revive interest and further engage the class. Sometimes a lighter and more relevant presentation is exactly what students need to make classes more enjoyable and learning more fun.

While the idea of having students teach their own peers is clearly quite appealing, it does not come without complications. Those who oppose this idea argue that since teachers are well qualified and have all the required credentials, they are the ones who can best teach the class since they possess a Bachelor or Master degree. Moreover, having unqualified students teaching the class could prove disruptive and counter-productive.

On the other hand, older teachers, especially those who are set in their ways and teach the same subject the same way for many years, sometimes lose interest themselves in the subject matter. It would be a breath of fresh air for students and perhaps professionally motivating for teachers to see how different students present the same material. Teachers could even grade student presentations and reward students with extra credit points for the best presentations.

Of course, opponents to this course of action might argue that not all students would be comfortable with the responsibility of having to instruct the class. I disagree. **From a psychological perspective**, such an experience could well help alleviate their anxiety and improve their public speaking ability. After all, if you don't face your fears, you will never overcome them.

In sum, the idea of a system where pupils help in teaching their classmates is highly appealing. Not only would it ease the current strain of repetition in school, it would also assist in making information more accessible and relevant to students. After working out a few kinks, we could utilize this system to improve the status quo in education.

So there you have it. A complete ACT essay from start to finish. Now, to pull back the curtain and see what's really going on inside, the next section breaks this essay down into the component parts that went into its construction.

**Note:** This is a sample essay. A real essay from a real student on the same subject matter is provided in Chapter 4.



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## Building Blocks

Every ACT essay is really just a series of building blocks stacked one on top of the other. One of the tricks to writing an essay in thirty minutes or less is knowing how to assemble these blocks quickly into a cohesive whole.

In this section, we walk through the sample essay from start to finish, highlighting the function of each of the major building blocks and showing, with snippets from the essay, how that function is put into play.

In other words, notice how:

- The introduction of the essay sets the scene by simply repeating the topic and stating the pros and cons virtually verbatim from the prompt box. In other words, you don't have to come up with a provocative and original opening for the ACT. You just cherry pick the prompt.

Of course, if you have a snappy quote or appropriate anecdote to throw at the prompt, please, be my guest. But any student can get off to a great start on the ACT essay simply by summarizing the main points discussed in the prompt box.

Just be sure to devote sufficient attention to both sides. The easiest way to do this is to employ literary transitions that allow you to go "back and forth". In the sample essay, the following transitions (in bold) are put to good use in the intro:

**On one hand**, the new perspective on a subject a student could provide may help others grasp certain information better. **On the other hand**, most people would agree that a teacher is more qualified to assess educational issues.

At the end of the intro, you may want to state the position you want to support. Although this isn't mandatory, it's a good way to establish the direction your essay is headed and prepare the Reader for the body paragraphs that follow.

**Still**, having students teach their peers could not only help academically but could also foster an easygoing classroom setting to help reduce stress.

**Note:** It's also possible to put off taking sides in your introduction, using the first body paragraph, rather than the intro, to state your opinion on the prompt.

- The first body paragraph of the sample essay uses the "From the perspective of . . ." strategy to excellent effect.

**From a peer-group perspective**, one of the main benefits of students taking part in the learning process is the fresh, alternative perspective they would bring to the subject matter.



This point is then embellished with *opinions* of the author regarding ways in which student teachers could augment and enhance the academic material used in the classroom.

- The second body paragraph continues this line of thought and adds additional *opinions* regarding the positive effects of “change of pace” and ways to make “learning more fun”. It’s important to note that these are just opinions of the author. They may or may not be true. What’s important is that they address and support the author’s position.

One of the most important things to understand when constructing an ACT essay is that EVERYTHING is a matter of opinion. Your opinion, whatever it may be, is just as valid and important as something derived directly from a textbook or encyclopedia.

To return to the quote from Marcus Aurelius: “Everything we hear is an opinion, not a fact. Everything we see is a perspective, not the truth.”

Your job is to come up with cogent opinions and whatever facts you can muster to support your position on the prompt.

- The third body paragraph presents a counter-argument to prompt, which the author initiates like this:

While the idea of having students teach their own peers is clearly quite appealing, it does not come without complications.

This introduces the **CONCESSION PARAGRAPH**, which is essential to top-scoring essays since it shows the ACT readers that you are conversant with both sides of an issue and can present arguments from multiple points of view. After stating various *opinions* regarding the drawbacks of student teachers in the classroom, the author sums up the concession paragraph with this remark.

**Moreover**, having unqualified students teaching the class could prove disruptive and counter-productive.

- In the fourth paragraph, the narrative segues from the concession paragraph back to the benefits of student teachers, concluding with the suggestion that:

Teachers could even grade student presentations and reward students with extra credit points for the best presentations.

- With the concession paragraph out of the way, the author steps directly into the passage to tell the ACT readers “I disagree.” Since the ACT essay is really just a matter of opinion, this “personal touch” represents an interesting stylistic device.



Even more interesting, however, is the embedded transition the author uses to address the issue of stress in the classroom, saying:

**From a psychological perspective**, such an experience could well help alleviate their anxiety and improve their public speaking ability.

The paragraph concludes with a homespun homily to reinforce the “personal touch”.

After all, if you don’t face your fears, you will never overcome them.

You don’t have to *be* a psychologist in order to argue like one!

- The conclusion closes the sale with a general statement supporting the main position taken on the prompt.

In sum, the idea of a system where pupils help in teaching their classmates is highly appealing. Not only would it ease the current strain of repetition in school, it would also assist in making information more accessible and relevant to students. After working out a few kinks, we could utilize this system to improve the status quo in education.

This paragraph is perhaps the easiest of the essay since it simply summarizes your position and reiterates supporting points.

## Chapter Overview

Here’s a recap on the main points of this chapter:

- Construct a T-chart to parse the prompt into generic *pro* and *con* arguments
- Use *perspectives* and *opinions* to generate sub-arguments
- Provide an introduction that summarizes the major issues and optionally takes a definitive position pro or con
- Compose body paragraphs that flesh out your opinions and arguments with details, details, details
- Make sure to include a concession paragraph or statement
- Employ transitions both between and within paragraphs to help organize the essay and produce a smooth and logical narrative flow
- Generate a conclusion which summarizes the points presented and makes a compelling case for your main argument



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### **What's Next**

In the following chapters, we'll expand on this theme by presenting several real essays from real students who have dominated the ACT.

One of the key features of this book — and of my overall teaching methodology — is to use real-world essays to get you up and running as a successful ACT essay writer in the shortest possible amount of time.