



STAAR Prep Writing - Expository	Time Allocations	
	10 class periods (90-minutes each) or	
	20 class periods (45-minutes each)	
Unit Overview		
<b>Expository Writing-</b> Students review the elements of an effective 26-line expository essay and craft an example in preparation for the STAAR exam.		
<b>Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills/Student Expectations (TEKS/SEs)</b> <i>(district clarifications/elaborations in italics)</i>		
<u>Writing</u> <b>ELA.9.13A</b> Plan a first draft by selecting the correct genre for conveying the intended meaning to multiple audiences, determining appropriate topics through a range of strategies (e.g., discussion, background reading, personal interests, interviews), and developing a thesis or controlling idea. <b>® ELA.9.13B</b> Structure ideas in a sustained and persuasive (logical) way (e.g., using outlines, note taking, graphic organizers, lists) and develop drafts in timed and open-ended situations that include transitions and the rhetorical devices used to convey meaning. <b>® ELA.9.13C</b> Revise drafts to improve style, word choice, figurative language, sentence variety, and subtlety of meaning after rethinking how well questions of purpose, audience, and genre have been addressed. <b>® ELA.9.13D</b> Edit drafts for grammar, mechanics, and spelling. <b>® ELA.9.15A.i</b> Write an analytical essay of sufficient length that includes effective introductory and concluding paragraphs and a variety of sentence structures. <b>® ELA.9.15A.ii</b> Write an analytical essay of sufficient length that includes rhetorical devices, and transitions between paragraphs. <b>® ELA.9.15A.iii</b> Write an analytical essay of sufficient length that includes a controlling idea or thesis. <b>® ELA.9.15A.iv</b> Write an analytical essay of sufficient length that includes an organizing structure (e.g. <i>inductive/deductive, compare/contrast</i> ) appropriate to purpose, audience, and context. <b>® ELA.9.15A.v</b> Write an analytical essay of sufficient length that includes relevant information. <b>® ELA.9.17C</b> Use a variety of correctly structured sentences (e.g., compound, complex, compound-complex).		
Key Concepts		
• sentence structures	• writing process	• writing traits
Academic Vocabulary		
• expository writing • organization	• prompt • thesis statement	• transitions
Assessment Connections		
• <b>Performance Expectation-</b> Students plan, draft, revise, edit and publish an analytical essay of sufficient length that includes organized and accurately conveyed information, effective introductory and concluding paragraphs and a variety of sentence structures, a controlling idea or thesis, an organizing structure (e.g. <i>inductive/deductive, compare/contrast</i> ) appropriate to purpose, audience, and context, relevant information and valid inferences, rhetorical devices, and transitions between paragraphs. <a href="#">Formative Assessment- Expository Essay Rubric</a>		
• Students use released STAAR items to gain familiarity with the stems <a href="#">Released STAAR Items</a> : Reading (Selection 1, Items 1, 3-6, 8 and Writing Selection 1, Items 2, 3 and Selection 2, Items 2, 5)		



## Instructional Considerations

Students review the elements of an effective 26-line expository essay and craft an example in preparation for the STAAR exam. A sample calendar to utilize to plan 10 days of instruction is available in Resources. See [Expository Essay Calendar](#) in Resources.

To ensure effective planning and instruction, refer to the components outlined by the [Houston ISD Instructional Practice Rubric](#).

## Writing

### Prerequisites

Students should understand how to use the writing process.

### Background Knowledge for Teacher

Students should have a firm understanding of the writing process and expository writing. Deepen the connection to STAAR expository essays through a thorough examination of the expository writing task required on STAAR.

During this unit, students focus on developing writing skills for use in timed-testing situations. Use the entire writing process described here to offer multiple opportunities for students to practice responding to prompts. Support instruction through the use of the Gradual Release Model, “I do, We do, You do.” Initially, model a writing task, provide collaborative opportunities to practice, and then have students work independently to fulfill assignment expectations.

**STAAR Guidelines-** The STAAR Composition Box (26 lines) is all the space in which students have to create an expository essay. Please ensure that students understand the following:

1. Stay inside the box: Anything outside of these lines will not be graded.
2. No extra lines: Some students may have been taught to draw their own lines in between existing lines to create more writing space on TAKS. This is not allowed on STAAR.
3. Legible handwriting counts: Ensure students understand the need to take the time to write clearly. Scorers must be able to read the students’ writing to score it effectively.
4. Size matters: Students who use large or artistic handwriting will quickly fill the requisite 26 lines, leaving them with little room to fully develop their essay.

Ensure students understand an effective STAAR expository essay includes a clearly stated thesis statement that is supported by specific evidence and commentary, follows a logical progression of ideas, and is written using proper grammatical conventions. Create an Anchor Chart of the STAAR rubric expectations and post as a reference. Have students copy the information into their Writers’ Notebooks.

**STAAR Prompts-** There are STAAR-released prompts available for the STAAR Expository Essay test component. Providing students with similar prompts helps them prepare for the STAAR exam. See [Released STAAR Sample Items and Released Test Items](#) (Released Test Prompt for Expository Essay, Sample Prompt for Expository Essay) in Assessment Connections. See the [TEA](#) website for more information.

**Reviewing the Rubric-** Provide students with the [Official STAAR Expository Rubric](#) and the [Student-Friendly Rubric](#) in Resources. Model the process of highlighting and underlining key terms in the rubric. Compare and contrast the expectations at each score level, emphasizing the expectation for students is to achieve a score of “4.” Have students work collaboratively to complete this process. See Working with Rubrics in Instructional Strategies.

**Unpacking the Prompt-** Introduce students to the writing assignment by distributing and displaying the sample [Expository Essay Prompt 3](#) in Resources. Ensure students understand the “Read-Think-Write” format of the prompt. Have students underline and highlight key terms within the “Write” section of the prompt and reinforce understanding by having students rewrite the prompt as a question. Emphasize the need to “write to the task.” Ensure students understand that essays written off topic, such as responses to the “Read” or “Think” statements, receive unsatisfactory scores or are considered unscorable.



## Instructional Considerations

One simple acronym to help students break down the expository prompts is BAT:

**Background**

**Access**

**Task**

Have students label each component and explain what each means. For an example of an Expository essay prompt that utilizes the BAT process, see [Expository Essay Unpacking the Prompt Example](#) in Resources.

**Mentor Texts-** Just as a driver uses a road map to arrive at his/her destination, writers use guides and/or resources to help them achieve their task. Texts that serve as guides or models for a given mode of writing are known as mentor texts. One of the most important aspects of teaching writing is providing models and mentor texts. If students are to understand how a piece of writing is supposed to look, they must review and dissect mentor texts, analyze the structure, language, and content, and evaluate their effectiveness. Students follow a sequence of activities that improve their writing: reading, analyzing, and emulating. Mentor texts may be utilized in multiple readings, providing examples of organizational patterns, diction, thesis sentence construction, supporting evidence, etc. This process provides the scaffolds necessary to support and encourage student engagement and success. See Anderson's *10 Things Every Writer Needs to Know* in Resources.

Provide students with examples of scored essays for all points on the scoring scale. Hold whole-class discussions evaluating why each essay was or was not successful. Have students refer back to these model texts as they begin the writing process. See the [Official Scoring Guide for STAAR Writing Grade 9](#) in Resources.

**Teacher Models-** Teachers' active modeling of writing is also an integral part of successful instruction. The use of a Teacher's Writer's Notebook is an effective tool to present teacher-generated models of writing as well as examples of the writing process. See Anderson's *10 Things Every Writer Needs to Know* in Resources.

### Steps for responding to the prompt:

1. Understand the prompt: The prompt is asking you to explain, define, or analyze a given topic, which includes providing examples to support the controlling idea. Annotate the prompt to ensure you understand the task.
2. Brainstorming: List ideas and examples that are related to the topic.
3. Identify/Create your controlling idea: Based on the ideas and examples from step two, state the focus of your essay.
4. Organization: Arrange your ideas and supporting examples.
5. Write your essay and make revisions as necessary. Be aware of the amount of space you have to develop each of your ideas and examples.
6. Reread your work and make revisions and corrections. Use a dictionary!
7. If you have time, read your work again and make final corrections.

**Prewriting-** Prewriting is an essential component of the writing process. Explain that understanding the task is the most important part of the prewriting process, especially in timed situations. Advise students to take the time to develop ideas prior to organizing and drafting. Have students utilize a graphic organizer, such as the [Concept Web](#) in Resources, to brainstorm details, points, and examples necessary to effectively respond to the prompt. Model the process using a teacher-generated chart and a Think-Aloud. Have students continue brainstorming until they have more information than is necessary to complete the prompt. **(ELA.9.13A)**

**Thesis Statement-** Thesis statements are an essential aspect of organization and focus. Review the function of a thesis statement and provide examples in mentor texts. Model the creation of a clearly-stated thesis statement using the teacher-generated Concept Web. See the [LEO-Thesis Statements](#) website in Resources.  
**(ELA.9.15A.iii)**

Provide cooperative learning opportunities to increase students' engagement and support understanding. Have students write thesis statements in pairs until they become proficient. As an alternative activity, provide students with text evidence and have them compose a thesis statement, or provide students with a thesis statement and have them find supporting textual evidence.



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**Organization-** Impress upon students the need to organize their essays purposefully. Have students return to the rubric and analyze the section that relates to organization. Provide the [Outline Template](#) in Resources to assist students in logically ordering the ideas from their prewriting. Model the process using the teacher-generated Concept Web information. Have students work in collaborative groups to organize information before assigning independent application. The basic structure is:

- **Introduction:** Identifies the topic and clearly states the thesis statement
- **Body:** Provides main ideas and details that support the topic sentences and connect back to the thesis statement
- **Conclusion:** Restates the thesis statement and summarizes the most important main ideas or details (**ELA.9.13B, ELA.9.15A.iv**)

**Drafting-** Emphasize that the thesis statement drives the organization of expository essays. All paragraphs are written to provide support for the thesis statement and are connected with effective transitions. As students work in writing groups, conduct Writing Conferences to evaluate the quality of each student's thesis statement and supporting evidence. Offer immediate and frequent feedback to ensure students are completing the drafting process effectively. Have students keep a [Student Writing Log](#), found in Resources, in which they record feedback during these conferences. Students can use this log for future writing projects. See [ELA Best Practices HS](#) for more information on Writing Conferences. Remind students to refer to the Anchor Chart to ensure all expectations of the assignment are being met. (**ELA.9.15A.ii**)

Model the process of creating a rough draft, incorporating details from the teacher-generated outline. Illustrate the need to write a draft that exceeds 26 lines, providing more evidence and commentary than is needed. Explain that it is more effective to generate more details than needed, and then eliminate less effective support during revising, than it is to try to draft a 26-line essay. These tend to be underdeveloped and demonstrate a lack of depth.

**Introduction and Conclusion-** Remind students an essay must have an introduction, body, conclusion, and proper transitions between ideas. Provide examples of introductions and conclusions in mentor texts and scored essays. Have the class work together to draft the introduction and/or conclusion of the teacher-generated essay. Then, have students work in writing groups or independently to complete the draft. This provides students with multiple opportunities to understand the drafting process before working independently. (**ELA.9.15A.i**)

Effective introductions engage the reader and provide the focus point of the essay. Use mentor texts to provide examples of effective introductions. Instruct students to use the following questions to critique sample introductions:

- Does this introduction catch the reader's attention?
- Does this introduction tell the reader what the essay will be about?
- Does this introduction focus the reader on what is to come?

Use models and mentor texts to provide examples of effective conclusions. Have students work in cooperative groups to critique various conclusions. Provide samples of both effective and ineffective conclusions to provide comparison opportunities. Support participation by providing students with questions to guide discussions. For example:

- Does this conclusion sum up the essay?
- Does this conclusion tie up loose ends and answer all questions posed?
- Does this conclusion restate the thesis in a different way?
- Does this conclusion give the reader something more to think about?

**Topic Sentences-** Remind students that thesis statements are supported by topic sentences in the body. Ensure students understand that topic sentences are typically connected with a transition. This ensures the essay has a smooth, effective flow of information from start to finish.

Provide cooperative learning opportunities to increase students' engagement and support understanding. Distribute paragraphs of information and have students craft topic sentences for them. Once students become more proficient, provide them with topic sentences and have them complete the development of the paragraph with supporting evidence and commentary.





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**Supporting Evidence-** Emphasize that informational texts convey information that guides and informs the reader's understanding of key ideas and evidence. In addition to effective thesis statements, the body must include specific facts, details, and examples as evidence to support students' ideas without adding unnecessary information. **(ELA.9.15A.v)**

**Transitions-** Remind students that transitions move readers from sentence to sentence, idea to idea, and paragraph to paragraph. It is important that students avoid using transitions such as: first, next, last, etc. Reinforce learning by highlighting clear examples in successful scored essays students previously viewed. **(ELA.9.15A.ii)**

**Automatic and Manual Transitions-** We typically think of transitions as "automatic" transitions. These standard words and phrases are the first learned and, thus, the most easily used. They include words such as *however*, *in fact*, *first*, *for example*, etc. These words and phrases are student-created; however, there are "replicable patterns for creating manual transitions" for a specific piece of writing, and they are used to bring the reader from a given time or location to a new place in time or location. See [Automatic Transitions](#), [Manual Transitions](#), and Anderson's *10 Things Every Writer Needs to Know* in Resources.

**Sentence Structures-** Reiterate that the revision process is the best place to improve sentence fluency. Emphasize that strong sentence fluency involves effective use of varied sentence structures. Provide examples of different sentence structures in mentor texts and scored essays, and model the process of forming complete sentences. If needed, review compound, complex, and compound-complex sentence structures. **(ELA.9.17C)**

**Revising-** Explain that even in a timed-writing situation, such as the STAAR, PSAT, or SAT, students must reread their rough drafts in order to identify revision needs. Have students look for the following errors:

- lack of depth in details
- irrelevant details
- unclear controlling idea
- missing or ineffective transitions
- lack of introduction and/or conclusion
- writing for the incorrect purpose

Model the process of identifying and correcting each of these errors using teacher-generated essay or samples of ineffective scored essays. **(ELA.9.13C)**

Often students do not realize their ideas have not been clearly transferred to paper. Have students read their essays aloud to their writing groups so others can hear their essays and offer feedback on the development of ideas, organization, voice, word choice, and sentence fluency. Essays that are difficult to read or understand receive low scores regardless of the overall idea development and content. See Instructional Strategies for a Reading Aloud strategy.

Once students have completed the revision of their essays, explain the need to revise to 26 lines. Model the process of eliminating less effective evidence using the teacher-generated draft. Provide students with a copy of the [Official STAAR Composition Box](#) to use as a template. Clarify that titles are not necessary and should be used judiciously (i.e., only if there is enough space for both the title and the completed essay).

**Editing-** Teachers' active modeling of the editing process is a great way to create a safe environment and help students begin to feel comfortable editing their own as well as their peers' papers.

In whole-class discussions, use a document camera or projector to correct teacher-generated papers with intentional common CUPS errors, providing students the opportunity to see the editing process in action. When these papers are projected, students are able to actively participate in the editing process by "catching mistakes," adding suggestions, and asking specific questions about grammar rules or specifications. Teacher modeling invites dialogue about the editing process.

Remind students to check capitalization, punctuation, usage, and spelling (CUPS) during the editing process. Review the aspects of conventions with students. Have students form groups or pairs and exchange papers in a clocking activity. As papers rotate from one group member to another, each student is responsible for identifying one aspect from the [CUPS Checklist](#) in Resources. Have students highlight errors using different colored pens or markers. Papers are returned to the original writer with errors clearly marked in multiple colors. It may be helpful to rotate the papers



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several times, allowing students multiple opportunities to mark errors. Model this process prior to having students work independently. Once peer editors have identified as many errors as possible, allow students time to complete the corrections. This activity can be modified or extended as needed to support students' needs. For example, challenge students by having them mark only the line or paragraph in which an error occurs rather than each specific error.

(ELA.9.13D)

**Publishing-** Explain that even in a timed situation, students must pay attention to the presentation aspect of their essays. Remind students to write legibly and stay within the composition box. Have students copy their final essays onto an [Official STAAR Composition Box](#).

## Instructional Strategies / Activities

### Writing

#### Setting Objectives and Providing Feedback

Working with Rubrics

Scoring essays is also a crucial part of professional development for teachers in order for them to be able to teach students this skill. To enable students to understand and evaluate their own work, train students in scoring EOC essays based on rubrics. Doing so can help students understand the grading process and to evaluate the quality of their own work. Student-friendly rubrics are an excellent tool for this process. If laminated, one class set can be reused multiple times with dry erase markers.

**I do:** Project and discuss the rubric for the type of essay to be scored. Model scoring an essay using the rubric (circling which categories/scores are applicable, etc.).

**We do:** Show previously graded essays “blind” without visible scoring. Project each essay for the entire class to see, using an Elmo or overhead projector. Assign students to small groups, and instruct them to come to a consensus regarding their scoring of the essay. Explain that they must be able to back up their reasoning based upon the rubric.

**You do:** This can easily become a “game” with students raising their scores (in teams or individually) after a quick countdown. The instructor can keep a running tally on the dry erase board or chalkboard. Differences in ratings often lead to lively and important discussions about the quality of writing. Be sure to select a range of essays—released state tests are an excellent baseline and can be supplemented with student samples that the instructor has previously graded.

#### Setting Objectives and Providing Feedback

Reading Aloud

In order to teach students that revision is not just correcting a paper, a system of revision must be put into place. In this instructional strategy, students partner with another student. If necessary, students can split into groups of three or four, but no larger than four. Students read their essays out loud. This allows students a chance to self-identify issues with focus/coherence, development of ideas, voice, sentence fluency and organization. Have students use the following as a guide to help each other revise.

1. If the reader stumbles or pauses, the listeners should make note of where.
2. If there is a phrase or word repeated over and over, the listeners should make note of the word or phrase.
3. Once the listeners have heard the essay read through once, ask the listeners to summarize the essay.
4. Then, ask the listeners if the thesis was easily understood.
5. Next, ask the listeners if the details presented were vivid and engaging.
6. Finally, ask the listeners if they have any suggestions that would make the essay.

See Gilmore's *“Is It Done Yet?” Teaching Adolescents the Art of Revision* in Resources.



## Resources

### Supporting Resources

- [Automatic Transitions](#)
- [Concept Web](#)
- [CUPS Checklist](#)
- [ELA Best Practices HS](#)
- [Expository Essay Calendar](#)
- [Expository Essay Prompt 3](#)
- [Expository Essay Unpacking the Prompt Example](#)
- [Manual Transitions](#)
- [Official STAAR Composition Box](#)
- [Official STAAR Expository Rubric](#)
- [Official Scoring Guide for STAAR Writing Grade 9](#)
- [Outline Template](#)
- [Student-Friendly Rubric](#)
- [Student Writing Log](#)

### Professional Texts

- Anderson, Jeff. *10 Things Every Writer Needs to Know*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 2011. Print.
- Anderson, Jeff. *Everyday Editing: Inviting Students to Develop Skill and Craft in Writer's Workshop*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 2007. Print.
- Gilmore, Barry: *"Is It Done Yet?" Teaching Adolescents the Art of Revision*. New Hampshire: Heinemann, 2007.

### Online Resources

- [Houston ISD Instructional Practice Rubric](#)  
(Direct link to the HISD Instructional Practice Rubric)
- [LEO-Thesis Statements](#)  
(Website containing information on writing effective writing techniques)
- [TEA](#)  
(The Texas Education Agency's main website which provides STAAR Resources.)

