Essay Writing

Basic Skills Test
Standards of Writing

- **Standard 13:** Prepare an organized composition in edited English as used in the United States in response to instructions regarding content, purpose, and audience.
Examples of Prompts

Should the legal driving age be raised to 18?

Is it appropriate for tattoos to be visible in the workplace?

Should religious displays be allowed on public property?

*Questions are going to focus on realistic issues that have social implications.
*You will need to make a clear on whether your agree or disagree with the statement. No ambivalence.
Pre-Writing and Brainstorming

- Decide a stance, or main idea
- Make a list of supporting evidence
- Make a list of possible rebuttals and weaknesses of your argument
- Develop a thesis statement
  - This will come from your stance
A Thesis statement is just that… a statement. It is not a question. It is not a creative, elliptical sentence.

Thesis statement should:

- Answer the question: What is my topic? (repeat the question in your thesis) What is my position on my topic?
- Answer the question: What am I saying about my topic?
- Be clear and concise
- Include sub-points of supporting paragraphs

For example…
The legal driving age in the United States should be raised to 18 for three important reasons: 18 year-olds are more responsible than 16 year-olds, the privilege of driving would be reserved for adults only, and it would reduce the amount of automobile accidents.

Notice it is a statement with a clear position/stance

Notice it lists the supporting arguments that will make up the body

What are the possible supporting details of each argument?
Statement vs. Topic

- Be sure to make a Statement instead of just stating a Topic

- **Topic:** Large but defined body of information with subject areas and sub-topics.
  - Football
  - Professional Football
  - Chicago Bears

- **Issue:** A statement or question that will divide the opinion of a competent audience

President Bush and his administration are responsible for the No Child Left Behind Policy

The No Child Left Behind policy has been a failure in terms of educating American’s children.
Supporting Details

- Will form the paragraph development of the essay
- Will be the body paragraphs of an essay

The standard essay would be a five paragraph essay, so having a thesis with three topics to prove your stance is a good idea.
Introduction and Conclusion

- **Introduction** should be concise and no longer than any body paragraph.
- **Introduction** should be attention-getting and creative.
- The thesis statement should be the last sentence of your introduction.
- **Conclusion** should be concise and should connect to the introduction.
- **Conclusion** should not contain any points not mentioned in the body paragraphs.
- Rephrased thesis statement is first sentence of conclusion.
Revise for Content:

1. Add details: adjectives, numbers, descriptive words
2. Delete words, sentences, and paragraphs that stray from thesis. Delete padding--unnecessary words and repetition
3. Elaborate and support each main idea by providing details, sensory images, figurative details, anecdotes, etc.
4. Check for transitions between paragraphs in topic and concluding sentences.
Revise for Style (Grammar)

1. Eliminate slang, clichés, and worn-out verbs
2. Avoid using the passive voice.
   Ex: Scholarships were going to be eliminated by the college. How could this be edited?
3. Vary sentence length
   - vary short sentences with long sentences, don’t have every sentence format be: subject predicate
3. Vary sentence beginnings
   - use adverbs and prepositions for sentence variety
   - watch our for excessive fragments and run-ons