



ISASP IOWA STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT of
STUDENT PROGRESS

ISASP Writing
Released Writing Prompt,
Sample Student Essays, and
Scoring Notes

Grade 7

ISASP Writing

Released Writing Prompt, Sample Student Essays, and Scoring Notes

This document contains the following information:

- 1) A released ISASP Writing prompt that was previously administered to students in the relevant grade as part of the ISASP Language/Writing test.
- 2) A copy of the scoring rubric that was used to guide scoring.
- 3) Five samples of actual student responses to the prompt that illustrate a range of scores.
- 4) For each writing sample, a set of scoring notes created at the time of scoring that provide articulations around score point decisions.

Released responses can be examined to better understand how well students are demonstrating writing skills with respect to the four traits that are evaluated as part of the ISASP Writing test. Responses can also be used to gain a better understanding of how ISASP is scored and the application of the rubric to the individual response.

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Sample Writing Prompt

Your class is researching the histories of things students use every day. Read the information about the Pony Express and the United States Postal Service. Then, write an essay for students your own age in which you explain both how mail delivery has changed and how it has remained the same since the Pony Express.

You should use the information you are given when you write your explanation. Remember to use your own words. Do not copy. You may also add your own ideas. The Writing Checklist will help you remember important parts of a piece of writing.

Writing Checklist

As you write, remember to:

- Provide clear main ideas.
- Use reasons, details, and examples from the information you are given to develop your writing. You may also add your own ideas.
- Organize your writing. Provide an opening and closing. Use paragraphs and linking words.
- Use strong words, clear sentences, and language appropriate for your audience.
- Check your work for correct spelling and mistakes.

The Pony Express

The horse's hooves pound on the prairie trail. When the galloping horse and its rider reach the relay station, the rider leaps from his tired horse. He pulls the *mochila*, a special mail bag with four pockets, from his saddle and throws it onto the saddle of a waiting horse. Then he jumps onto the horse's back. Within seconds, the Pony Express rider has changed horses and is galloping west toward the next station.

The Pony Express began in April, 1860. Its purpose was to deliver mail quickly across the American West. The route stretched from the state of Missouri to the state of California. It crossed flat plains, mountain trails, and desert sands.

Almost 200 relay stations lined the trail. At each one, stock handlers cared for horses that would carry the riders and their mochilas filled with letters. Riders stopped every 10 to 15 miles to change horses. In this way, a rider could travel 100 miles a day. When a rider needed a rest, he would hand off the mochila to another rider. That rider would immediately race off along the trail. Working together, Pony Express riders could deliver mail the length of the entire route in only 10 days!

Only 180 men were hired to be Pony Express riders. Their job was difficult and dangerous. The men had to travel through all kinds of weather: summer sun, winter cold, drenching rain, and snow.

Once telegraph lines crossed the American West, the riders were no longer needed. Yet the Pony Express is remembered as an important part of American history.

United States Postal Service

I have an important and interesting job to do. I am a mail carrier for the United States Postal Service!

Each morning I arrive at the post office and prepare to deliver the mail. I sort the letters and packages that have arrived in the post office. Then I decide which will be delivered first on my route. Some of the mail is stacked in trays and placed in my Postal Service truck. Some letters and packages go in the shoulder bag I carry when I walk to the stops on my route. I drive to my delivery route. Once there, I walk to each address, leaving letters and cards in the mailboxes of homes, apartment buildings, and businesses.

Letter carriers like me deliver mail in all kinds of weather. I walk through driving rain and hot sun, cold snow, and blowing winds. Some days are long and tiring, but I know that it is important for the people on my route to receive their mail.

I have a special role: because I know the people who live on my mail route, I am part of the Carrier Alert Program. If I see that someone need help, I will help them. Every year the Postal Service gives awards to Employee Heroes. These are mail carriers who have helped the people in their neighborhoods.

More than 7 million men and women work for the United States Postal Service. Together we make sure that everyone in the country receives their mail. People are happy to receive letters, cards, and packages from their friends and family all over the world, and I am glad that my job helps make people happy.

**Grade 7 Informative/Explanatory Rubric**

	Prompt Task	Development of Explanation	Organization	Language Use
5	Provides a context for the explanation. Topic(s) and purpose of explanation are clear from the start. Successfully uses ample relevant evidence from provided texts to support the explanation.	Explains topic(s) completely. Effectively uses ample specific and relevant facts, definitions, details, examples, and/or other appropriate information in the explanation.	Has a clear, well-developed introduction. Provides a logical concluding statement or section. Organizes ideas effectively, using clear and appropriate paragraphing throughout the response. Consistently uses effective and varied transition words, phrases, and clauses within and between text sections.	Uses precise and varied word choice. Employs topic-specific vocabulary successfully. Effectively varies sentence length and complexity. Establishes and maintains a style appropriate for the designated audience and purpose throughout the explanation.
4	Topic(s) and purpose of explanation are clear. Appropriately uses some evidence from provided texts to support the explanation.	Explains topic(s) adequately. Explanation includes some specific and relevant facts, definitions, details, examples, and/or other appropriate information.	Has a clear, somewhat-developed introduction. Provides a clear concluding statement or section. Organizes ideas adequately, using appropriate paragraphing. Consistently uses simple and/or repetitive transitions within and between sections of text.	Uses mostly specific and somewhat varied word choice. Occasionally employs topic-specific vocabulary successfully. Demonstrates adequate control of sentences with some variety in length and structure. Establishes a style appropriate for the designated audience and purpose and maintains it through most of the explanation.

**Grade 7 Informative/Explanatory Rubric**

	Prompt Task	Development of Explanation	Organization	Language Use
3	Topic(s) and purpose of explanation are apparent within the response as a whole. Evidence from provided texts is used but is limited, overused, or misrepresented.	Explains topic(s) to a limited extent or the explanation is developed unevenly. Explanation includes few or only general facts, details, and examples. Some information may be repetitious or may not be clearly relevant.	Provides a basic introduction and basic concluding statement or section. Groups related ideas together but the relationship among ideas may at times be unclear or parts of the explanation may seem out of place. Sometimes uses transitions.	Uses general word choice. Attempts to employ topic-specific vocabulary may be unsuccessful. Demonstrates a little variety in sentence structure, although there may be a few long, uncontrolled sentences. Demonstrates some understanding of style appropriate for the designated audience and purpose but fails to maintain it throughout the explanation.
2	Topic(s) and purpose of explanation are unclear or otherwise confusing. Attempts to use evidence from provided texts are unsuccessful (text sections are lifted exactly, misunderstood, or not relevant to the explanation they are used in support of).	Explains topic(s) by providing some information but explanation is minimal and/or superficial, and parts may be repetitious or not relevant.	Has minimal evidence of an introduction and/or a concluding statement or section. Groups a few related ideas together within the response but overall demonstrates weak paragraphing skills. Use of transitions is not controlled and may cause confusion.	Uses simple and/or repetitive word choice. Uses repetitive sentence structure and/or long, uncontrolled sentences. Style is not appropriate for the designated audience and/or purpose and is sometimes distracting.
1	Topic(s) and purpose of explanation are never indicated. No attempt is made to use evidence from provided texts to support the explanation.	Development of topic(s) lacks explanation of ideas, only repeats ideas, or most ideas are not relevant. May demonstrate a lack of understanding of the purpose of explanatory writing.	Lacks an introduction and a concluding statement or section. Demonstrates no understanding of paragraphing (or response may be too short to assess). Transitions are not used.	Uses awkward, incorrect, and/or confusing word choice and sentence structure. Style is inappropriate for the designated audience and/or purpose and is distracting.

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Sample Essay 1

Hello, I will be telling you about the differences of the older "Pony Express" and the modern "United States Postal Service." I think there is a big difference between 1860 to now. Today's mail is more advanced compared to the 1860's. It is a little bit the same in the sense that in 1860 they had to go through harsh conditions no matter what and today that is still the same way with mail carriers. But then again, the differences are still there with cars today and airplanes flying through the sky. That is what I think about the 1860's to now.

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Sample Essay 1 – Scoring Notes

Trait	Score	Scoring Notes
Prompt Task	2	The stated purpose in this response is unclear because it claims to discuss differences but also discusses similarities (<i>I will be telling you about the differences of the older "Pony Express" and the modern "United States Postal Service."</i> It is a little bit the same in the sense that in 1860 they had to go thru harsh conditions). Text evidence is presented once (<i>in 1860 they had to go thru harsh conditions no matter what and today that is still the same way with mail carriers</i>) but is vague and used unsuccessfully.
Development	1	The ideas presented to support the explanation of how mail delivery has changed and stayed the same lack explanation. Claims are unsupported (<i>Today's mail is more advanced compared to the 1860's</i>) or unclear (<i>But then again, the differences are still there with cars today and airplanes flying thru the sky</i>).
Organization	2	The response has minimal evidence of an introduction (<i>Hello, I will be telling you about the differences of the older "Pony Express" and the modern "United States Postal Service"</i>) and a concluding statement. A few related ideas are grouped together (<i>I think there is a big difference between 1860 to now. Today's mail is more advanced compared to the 1860's</i>). Overall, the response demonstrates weak paragraphing or grouping skills.
Language Use	2	The response demonstrates the use of repetitive sentence structure (<i>I think there is a big difference between 1860 to now [and] That is what I think about the 1860's to now</i>). The style is not appropriate for the designated purpose and is sometimes distracting.

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Sample Essay 2

when the postal servise started in april 1860 they were using horses and bags to carry and deliver the mail. Today we are using trucks to deliver the mail. It used to take 10 days for a rider to finish a whole rout when today and only takes about a day to finish a whole rout. It has definetly changed over the years of the postal survice.

Back then they had to stop every ten to fifteen miles to stop take a break and get a new horse. Now we can travel double that distance maybe even triple that distance cause we use trucks and not horses. The workers dont have to take many breaks either as they did back then. Cause now the trucks hold all of it. Back then the horses had saddle bags that carreid them and the rider has a bag to carry some mail to. They also had to tarvel through the hot sun, cold weather, and rain. So it was dangerous for them only riding horses. They also had to cross sand and rocky moutains to deliver mail to.

Back then when it first started woman couldnt work at the postal service only men. There were only about 180 men that worked at the postal service delivering mail. Now over seven million men and woman work at the postal service.

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Sample Essay 2 – Scoring Notes

Trait	Score	Scoring Notes
Prompt Task	3	The response addresses a few differences in the pony express and today's postal service, but the general topic and purpose presented are unclear (<i>It has definetly changed over the years of the postal survice</i>). Many ideas from the texts are used to compare the Pony Express and the postal service—really, the text is overused because the comparisons are almost listed without any of the ideas being connected or discussed.
Development	2	The response explains the topic by providing some information, but the explanation is minimal. Parts of the explanation are repetitious (<i>Back then they had to stop every ten to fifteen miles to stop take a break and get a new horse. Now we can travel double that distance maybe even triple that distance cause we use trucks and not horses. The workers dont have to take many breaks either as they did back then. Cause now the trucks hold all of it</i>).
Organization	2	There is minimal evidence of an introductory statement (<i>It has definetly changed over the years of the postal survice</i>). There is no discernible conclusion. While there are a few transitions present (<i>Now, Back then, They also</i>), they simply introduce the next idea, rather than connecting and organizing ideas, and this may cause confusion.
Language Use	3	Word choice is general and attempts to employ topic-specific vocabulary are occasionally unsuccessful in clarifying the explanation (<i>Back then the horses had saddle bags that carreid them and the rider has a bag to carry some mail to</i>). The response demonstrates some control in language use and includes a little variety is sentence structure.

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Sample Essay 3

Do you ever wonder how it was like to deliver back then in history? A lot has changed from back then, and now, it was tough to get mail delivered to you back then.

Around 1860, was when the Polar Express started, and it was hard to get mail delivered to you back then. The men that delivered the mail had to go through tough times, such as extreme weather. They'd go through the hot summer sun, freezing cold, hard rain, or snow. They'd also used their horses to get to where they needed to be. Their horses would also be hungry, and exhausted. If however, the rider got hurt, ill, injured or needed rest the next rider would take the lead, and change horses that way he could go another 100 miles per day. Usually, an average rider would stop every 10 to 15 miles to change their horses. Their work was very tiring, and dangerous but, after the telegraph was invented the Pony Express riders were no longer needed. However, we remember them to this day, and think about their hard work for delivering mail to families.

In today's delivering, it is quite easier than it was back then. Instead of using a horse, we use trucks to carry loads of letters, posts, or items that need to be delivered. Of course, we always organize them, and put them in should bags. Once their done organizing, they use their driving route and drop off there letters or items. During the Polar Express, they used a mochila, which was a special bag with four pockets and when the rider was done putting the letters in the bag, they would throw it onto the saddle of the horse. Yes, the mailmen still go through tough weather like the riders did, but it is easier now since they have a truck, and have more protection.

We should look carefully and take a look back of how it was like back then to deliver things. We should also give thanks to our mailmen, and think about how they use their time to give something to you. This makes people happy from all places, to recieve letters or cards from there families.

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Sample Essay 3 – Scoring Notes

Trait	Score	Scoring Notes
Prompt Task	3	The purpose of explaining how mail delivery has changed and stayed the same is apparent in the response as a whole. It begins by explaining the Pony Express. There is some comparison made in the third paragraph by listing some differences and a similarity (<i>Yes, the mailmen still go through tough weather like the riders did, but it is easier now since they have a truck, and have more protection</i>). Evidence from the provided texts is overused and much of it is descriptive of the two services rather than actually comparing similarities and differences.
Development	3	The explanation of how mail delivery has changed and stayed the same is developed unevenly throughout the response because there is a larger focus on the Pony Express. The writer specifically explains similarities and differences only to a limited extent; much of the description of the two services is never linked together to indicate similarity or difference—while they are not necessarily irrelevant, the writer’s lack of explanation of the details described keeps them from being clearly relevant.
Organization	3	The response provides a basic introduction (<i>Do you ever wonder how it was like to deliver back then in history? A lot has changed from back then, and now, it was tough to get mail delivered to you back then</i>) and a basic concluding section. Related ideas are grouped together throughout the response. Some parts of the explanation seem out of place (<i>During the Polar Express, they used a mochila, which was a special bag with four pockets and when the rider was done putting the letters in the bag, they would throw it onto the saddle of the horse</i>). Sometimes transitions are used within and between paragraphs to connect related ideas.
Language Use	4	The response demonstrates the use of mostly specific and somewhat varied word choice (<i>Instead of using a horse, we use trucks to carry loads of letters, posts, or items that need to be delivered</i>). Sentence control and variation in length and complexity is demonstrated through most of the response. Some topic-specific vocabulary is employed successfully.

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Sample Essay 4

Over time, the way mail was delivered has evolved and changed. However the work effort put into working these tough jobs are filled with determination. Mail delivery made easier and easier since 1860, yet the job is so very difficult.

In April, 1860, the pony express was invented to make mail delivery easy. Traveling many miles on a horse through rain, snow, beating heat, and even through dry deserts and mountains. The pony express was a quicker way for people to receive mail in 10 days. The mailmen, or riders, used a bag called a mochilla to carry the mail on a long trip to get to the receiver. Because the horses need rest too from walking, every 10 to 15 miles the horse was traded at a station for a new horse who is ready to roll. Even when riders get tired, they have another rider finish the job, so this job is really a group effort.

Now-a-days, we have the U.S postal service, a even quicker, easier way to bring you your mail. Given the fact that the U.S postal service has more workers, each employee is given a different neighborhood and would deliver mail to said neighborhood. Their jobs are not as dangerous as the pony express, but the employees still have an important job other than mail, making sure everyone in the neighborhood is safe! U.S postal service employees check to make sure everyone they give mail to is safe and sound and if they aren't they make sure that they can help!

As you see, both jobs are important, they make sure people get the mail they need, but the jobs are a lot more than just handing you mail. The jobs have hardships and difficulties but the mailmen always find a way to get you your mail. Mail jobs seem simple but they help a lot of people. The evolution of mail delivery is great and gets you your mail when you need it. Mailmen are determined to get you your mail, even if the sky is falling.

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Sample Essay 4 – Scoring Notes

Trait	Score	Scoring Notes
Prompt Task	3	The response indicates a general topic (<i>the way mail was delivered</i>). The purpose, to discuss how mail delivery has changed and stayed the same since the Pony Express, is less clear, but apparent within the response as a whole. Rather, the response focuses on a general explanation of each passage provided, with comparison embedded into the description of the Postal Service and the final paragraph. Limited evidence from the text is used in support of the explanation provided.
Development	4	Ideas about both the Pony Express and the United States Postal Service are explained adequately. Some details and facts about differences and similarities are provided (<i>Travling many miles on a horse through rain, snow, beating heat, and even trough dry deserts and mountains [and] Now-a-days, we have the U.S postal service, a even quicker, easier way to bring you your mail. Given the fact that the U.S postal service has more workers, each employe is given a different neighrhood and would diliver mail to said neighrhood</i>).
Organization	4	The response has a somewhat developed introduction (<i>Over time, the way mail was dilivered has evolved and changed. However the work effort put into working these tough jobs are filled with determination. Mail dilivery made easier and easier sence 1860, yet the job is so very difficult</i>) and a clear concluding section. The response organizes ideas adequately through the use of appropriate paragraphing. Transitions are consistently used within and between paragraphs to link and sequence the ideas.
Language Use	4	There are a few specific words and phrases used (<i>beating heat, even if the sky is falling</i>), and topic-specific vocabulary is occasionally employed successfully. The response demonstrates adequate control of sentences throughout. Sentences are varied in length and structure.

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Sample Essay 5

Back in 1860 when the Pony Express started, it was very helpful in terms of communication. There are many ways that the Pony Express has impacted the way that The United States Postal Service functions today. There are also many differences in these different ways that mail was spread across the country.

The Pony Express was a long and difficult task for the riders to complete, especially on horseback. Every ten to fifteen miles, the riders would change horses and continue to ride. In this way, riders were able to travel up to 100 miles a day! Also, you cant forget how challenging and dangerous these trails really were. They had to ride through hot scorching sun and soaking rain, as well as cold winters and snowy blizzards. Only 180 men were chosen to work for the pony express, becuase of how dangerous the job was.

During more recent times, the Pony Express has been replaced by the United States Postal Service. The Postal Service today is a lot easier and less physically demanding than than the Pony Express was. However, Mail carriers today still walk through bad conditions like snow storms or downpours of rain because they realize how important it may be that some people recieve their mail on time. On the Pony Express, it was long and painful distances that riders traveled daily, but in todays world, mail carriers are given vehicles to drive around and deliver mail in that way. Also, today there are close to seven million men and women that work for the United States Postal Service. With this many people, it is much easier to get the job done as well as not having to travel farther distances to deliver mail.

The Pony Express has affected the way that The United States Postal Service functions in a few ways. First of all, the Pony Express was the first efficient way of transporting mail, which eventually turned into what we do today. Sadly, Once telegraph lines were put up in the west, the Pony Express riders were no longer needed. They are still remembered today as an important part of our history.

In conclusion, The Pony Express and The United States Postal Service relate in some ways, and are different in others. Although the Pony Express only lasted a few years, it is still considered an important part of our history, guiding the way for the Postal service we know today.

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Sample Essay 5 – Scoring Notes

Trait	Score	Scoring Notes
Prompt Task	5	The topic and purpose of explanation are clear from the beginning (<i>There are many ways that the Pony Express has impacted the way that The United States Postal Service functions today. There are also many differences in these different ways that mail was spread across the country</i>). Evidence from the text shows how the United States mail service has evolved over the last century and a half and highlights connections between the two passages. Evidence is ample and relevant and is used successfully to support the explanation of the similarities and differences between the Pony Express and the United States Postal Service.
Development	5	Similarities and differences are completely explained with effective use of ample specific facts, details, and examples (<i>The Postal Service today is a lot easier and less physically demanding than than the Pony Express was. However, Mail carriers today still walk through bad conditions like snow storms or downpours of rain because they realize how important it may be that some people recieve their mail on time</i>). Ideas and information are all relevant to the explanation.
Organization	4	Ideas are organized adequately with the use of appropriate paragraphing. There is a clear, somewhat-developed introduction present. There is a clear conclusion (<i>In conclusion, The Pony Express and The United States Postal Service relate in some ways, and are different in others. Although the Pony Express only lasted a few years, it is still considered an important part of our history, guiding the way for the Postal service we know today</i>). Consistent use of transition words, phrases and clauses (<i>First of all, the Pony Express was the first efficient way of transporting mail, which eventually turned into what we do today. Sadly, Once telegraph lines were put up in the west, the Pony Express riders were no longer needed</i>) is demonstrated throughout the response.
Language Use	5	Varied word choice is present throughout the response. Effective control and variation in sentence structure is demonstrated (<i>Also, you cant forget how challenging and dangerous these trails really were. They had to ride through hot scorching sun and soaking rain, as well as cold winters and snowy blizzards</i>). Appropriate style for the purpose of writing an essay explaining the differences and similarities between today’s mail service and the Pony Express of the 1800s is established and maintained throughout.