



# Praxis CORE Guide and Writing Tips

## A-State Online Writing Center

### What is the Praxis CORE Academic Skills for Educators Exam?

“These tests measure academic skills in reading, writing and mathematics. They were designed to provide comprehensive assessments that measure the skills and content knowledge of candidates entering teacher preparation programs.” (ets.org)

### How Can the A-State Online Writing Center Help?

The OWC can help Praxis students by familiarizing them with the two types of essay prompts given on the Praxis CORE exam. The names and explanations of each type are listed below:

- **Argumentative Essay:** Praxis CORE test-takers will have 30 minutes to plan and write an argumentative essay; they will be asked to give his or her personal opinion regarding an important social, educational, or political issue. Overall, the tester must explain why he or she agrees or disagrees with the claim in the argumentative essay prompt in a clear, well-thought-out, and concise piece of writing. (magoosh.com)
- **Source-Based Essay:** Praxis CORE test-takers will have 30 minutes to plan and write a source-based essay; rather than express their personal opinions on an issue (as they did in the argumentative essay), he or she will instead be asked to write about the various opinions of *others* regarding an issue. Testers will read two passages that focus on the same topic, each written by a different author. However, the authors will have conflicting opinions about the single issue presented in their writings. The Praxis tester must summarize and present both sides of the issue through the voices and words of the passages’ authors, both by citing and organizing the information presented in the two works in a clear, concise piece of writing. (magoosh.com)

### What issues do student testers have with The Praxis CORE?

- Completing the essays within the test’s time limits
- Breaking down the essay prompts in order to fully answer them

- “Sticking to the prompt”/staying “on-topic” throughout the essays
- Having various grammar mistakes in their responses

**Things for Online Writing Center Tutors to Remember about the Praxis CORE Exam:**

- The writing portion of the Praxis CORE is included in the exam in order to give testers the opportunity to show how *well* they can write, NOT *how much* they can write. (ets.org)
- The length of the responses does not matter, but the Praxis CORE site recommends that testers provide “more than one paragraph.” (ets.org)
- Above all, make sure to **encourage** all Praxis tutees!

# Writing Tips: **Argumentative Essays**

While working with a Praxis tester in the Online Writing Center, it is important for tutors to help him or her focus on the test's writing prompts as much as possible, and, most importantly, help them become better writers!

## An Example Prompt from ets.org:

Read the opinion stated below:

“Minimum wage jobs are a ticket to nowhere. They are boring and repetitive and teach employees little or nothing of value. Minimum-wage employers take advantage of people because they need a job.”

Discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with this opinion. Support your views with specific reasons and opinions from your own experiences, observations, or reading.

Directions: You will have 30 minutes to plan and write an argumentative essay on the topic presented above. The essay will be based on your own reading, experience, or observations.

## Practice Prewriting with the Praxis Tutee

Give the above prompt to the OWC Praxis tutee. Make sure to ask the tutee (either asynchronously or synchronously) which “side” he or she will take on the issue (For example, the tutor could ask, “Do you agree or disagree with the opinion statement? Why?”). After this is established, both tutee and OWC tutor can brainstorm for the essay together in various ways, such as by:

- Having a discussion with the tutee about the topic (via Zoom or email)
- Asking the tutee to writing as a form of brainstorming, possibly by assigning them some time off-screen; this could include making T-charts or Venn Diagrams or jotting down ideas related to the topic on paper or the marker board and then discussing them via Zoom or email
- Asking the tutee to look up articles online about the topic

After brainstorming, continue practicing the prewriting process by making a tentative outline of the essay together. **One of the most common misconceptions about the writing portion of the Praxis CORE is that the tester must write a 5-paragraph essay for both responses. THIS IS**

**NOT TRUE.** The instructions merely say to fully answer the prompt. Testers can better manage their hour of writing time by writing a 4-paragraph essay for each response. An example is outlined below:

Paragraph 1, the introduction: explain your disagreement or agreement with the opinion stated in the prompt.

Paragraph 2, the first body paragraph: explain your first reason for agreeing/disagreeing with specific example(s).

Paragraph 3, the second body paragraph: explain your second reason for agreeing/disagreeing with specific example(s).

Paragraph 4, the conclusion: restate your main idea, summarize your main argument, and/or “warn” the reader about the consequences of “going against” your opinion.

(Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONOUulafpJs>)

While brainstorming and outlining, make sure to refer back to the prompt and have the Praxis tutee point out the “verbs” that are expected of them as they write this essay. For example, in this prompt specifically, the tester is asked to “discuss” their opinion and “support” it with details. Make sure that the Praxis tutee always focuses on these kinds of demanding verbs throughout the entire essay so that they can stay on topic as they write!

Once the Praxis tutee has practiced brainstorming and outlining, he or she will feel more comfortable with the testing process. The tutee does not have to write to this essay prompt as a full response; it is completely acceptable (and even encouraged) for them to only practice brainstorming and outlining several prompts before actually attempting to write one!

### **Practicing Writing an Argumentative Response**

Once the Praxis tutee is comfortable breaking down argumentative prompts, it is best to allow them to practice writing a full essay. **However, do not worry about timing them the first time that they attempt this.** It would be wise to look at the prompts he or she has broken down already and have him or her pick the one they feel the “strongest” about or that they relate to the most. This will make them more comfortable and give them a personal drive to complete the response. The tutor can also help the tutee write out their first full response if they wish, or they can have the tutee write it independently, based on what the tutee may desire.

### **Going Over the Argumentative Essay Response**

Once the Praxis tutee has completed a full argumentative essay response, it is important to go over it with the tutee. Even though you will be communicating with him or her online (synchronously or asynchronously), encourage them, tell them what they did right, and then ease into the components they could improve on. For example:

“You used great transition words and had awesome organization! But you could have used a few more specific examples to prove your point in the second body paragraph.”

“Great job with providing examples! However, you tended to ramble in both body paragraphs. Make sure to be more specific on your points, and you got it!”

Continue to encourage your tutee, and allow them to practice writing argumentative responses. Whenever the tutor feels as though the Praxis tutee is ready, they can give him or her a timed-writing session to mimic the Praxis. Continue to discuss all of their responses after their completion in order for them to improve their argumentative writing skills!

### **Argumentative Prompts to Use in Tutoring Sessions**

**Directions for All:** Discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with this opinion. Support your views with specific reasons and examples from your own experience, observations, or reading.

High school students should not be exposed to controversial topics in the classroom. (Agree or disagree)

Teachers can apply to become nationally board certified, based on a rigorous application and screening process. This program is beneficial to the teaching profession. (Agree or disagree)

Students benefit most from hands-on activities. (Agree or disagree)

The draft should be reinstated to insure that our country can defend itself in these troubling times. (Agree or disagree)

If the draft is reinstated, women should be drafted as well as men. (Agree or disagree)

Teacher education programs should emphasize methods instruction, including classroom management. (Agree or disagree)

Many states have begun implementing standardized testing programs to document student success. These programs help improve education in the U.S. (Agree or disagree)

Students should have the chance to go on several field trips each year. (Agree or disagree)

The drinking age should be lowered to 18. (Agree or disagree)

Terminally ill patients should have the right to 'die with dignity' through assisted suicide. (Agree or disagree)

Communities need to become more involved in supporting local schools. (Agree or disagree)

Teachers should be required to learn a foreign language as a part of their training. (Agree or disagree).

Sports should be emphasized throughout secondary education (Agree or Disagree).

There is no excuse not to vote. All U.S. citizens should vote in every election, even when they are not thrilled with their choices of candidates. (Agree or Disagree)

It is important to read a newspaper daily. (Agree or disagree)

Money management is important, especially avoiding credit card debt. (Agree or disagree)

The key to friendship is loyalty. (Agree or disagree)

The amount of sex and violence on television these days has a negative effect on children and teens. (Agree or disagree)

Smaller class size leads to more success in elementary and high school classes. (Agree or disagree)

More vocational training should be available to high school students who may not be interested in getting a college degree. (Agree or disagree)

Everyone should be encouraged to get a college degree, regardless of what they want to do for a living. (Agree or disagree)

Children benefit from having choices but also having limits set. Too much freedom can actually lead to negative results for children at home or in the classroom. (Agree or disagree)

The internet is one of the best sources of information these days. (Agree or disagree)

We rely too much on computers these days. (Agree or disagree)

Cell phones have improved the lives of people. (Agree or disagree)

Students are more likely to succeed if they believe their teachers care about them. (Agree or disagree)

Occasionally, the prompts are quotes that you are asked to agree or disagree with. You may want to find other quotes to write on as well for practice.

Only the educated are free. Epictetus (Agree or Disagree).

The foundation of every state is the education of its youth. Diogenes Laertius (Agree or Disagree).

Knowledge is of two kinds. We know a subject ourselves, or we know where we can find information on it. Samuel Johnson (Agree or Disagree).

Knowledge is power. Francis Bacon (Agree or Disagree).

Mistakes are the portals of discovery. James Joyce (Agree or Disagree).

An educated person is one who has learned that information almost always turns out to be at best incomplete and very often false, misleading, fictitious, mendacious - just dead wrong. Russell Baker (Agree or disagree)

The object of education is to prepare the young to educate themselves throughout their lives. Robert M. Hutchins (Agree or disagree)

An unjust peace is better than a just war. Marcus Tullius Cicero (Agree or disagree)

The release of atomic energy has not created a new problem. It has merely made more urgent the necessity of solving an existing one. Albert Einstein (Agree or disagree)

Nothing in the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity. Martin Luther King, Jr. (Agree or disagree)

Find a job you like and you add five days to every week. H. Jackson Brown, Jr. (Agree or disagree)

Peace and justice are two sides of the same coin. Dwight D. Eisenhower (Agree or disagree)

Should children be allowed to bring cellphones to school? If so, at what age? If not, why not? Use as much evidence as you can to support your assertion.

Many people think that teacher education programs should do more teaching of classroom management. Others think that teacher education programs should focus on content knowledge. Explain which you think is more important and why.

Which community members do you think should start taking more responsibility for improving public schools? How and why should they do this?

Explain whether you believe it is important for teachers to remain informed of current events. Use specific evidence to justify the argument you're making.

Do you believe that people of all ages should be allowed to buy cigarettes? Explain why or why not, using evidence.

Agree or disagree with the following statement: It is important for students who are learning to read to have access to books in their homes as well as at schools.

Do you think that high school students should be allowed to discuss controversial social and political topics in schools? Argue "yes" or "no" and explain why or why not.

Agree or disagree with the following statement: The current movie rating system is too strict and it should be loosened up.

Because students have so many extracurricular activities and so little time outside the school day, the majority of school hours should be limited to academic courses only.



The technology included in the latest model automobiles—weather reports, email access, GPS, and so forth—distracts the driver and should be eliminated.

Although learning to eat nutritious food is important, some leaders in our society have taken the matter of eating healthy too far.

Television reporting of news in the United States has begun to rely too heavily on ratings, leading networks to strive for entertainment and sensationalism rather than unbiased reporting.

All high school and college students should be required to take regular drug tests. Students with poor academic performance should be prohibited from participating in all extracurricular activities.

