ESSAY READER GUIDELINES

“Commitment to Quality Education for All”
The Academic Decathlon is a ten-event scholastic competition for teams of high school students. The ten events include comprehensive written exams in: Art, Economics, Language and Literature, Mathematics, Music, Social Science and Science. In addition, students deliver both a prepared and impromptu speech, write an essay and communicate through a conversational interview. Students also participate in the culminating team event, open to the public, known as the Super Quiz.

The Ventura County Office of Education (VCOE) inaugurated the first Ventura County Academic Decathlon in 1982 to promote learning and academic excellence through teamwork among students of all achievement levels and has continued to coordinate this competition on an annual basis. Ventura County teams have enjoyed tremendous success in the Academic Decathlon, winning both state and national championships.

A particularly unique aspect of the Academic Decathlon format is that it is designed to include students from all academic backgrounds. A team consists of nine full-time students from the ninth through twelfth grades of the same high school. Each nine-member team is comprised of three students whose grade point average falls into the "A" category (Honor students), three students in the "B" category (Scholastic students), and three students in the "C" or below category (Varsity students). All students compete in all ten events. Students in each category compete only against students in that category.

Fostering academic excellence is a cooperative education effort. Without the help and support of our sponsors, volunteers, parents and teachers, this premier scholastic competition would not be such a great success. On behalf of my office and the Ventura County Academic Decathlon, I thank you for your participation and hard work, and look forward to a fun, successful and rewarding competition.

Sincerely,

John E. Tarkany
Ventura County Office of Education
Day 1 Competition Schedule:

7:30 a.m. Essay Proctor/Readers Arrive, check-in and receive room assignments and instruction: Breakfast Served

8:30 a.m. Essay Event begins

9:20 a.m. Essay Event concludes

10:30 a.m. Interview Event begins

10:45 a.m. Speech Event begins

12:15 to 1:15 p.m. BREAK and LUNCH for students and coaches (Some students will start lunch later due to their speech and interview schedule)

1:15 p.m. Competition resumes

4:00 p.m. Day 1 Competition concludes (Conclusion time is approximate; length of day is contingent upon # of participants)
General Information
You will proctor approximately 30 Students for 50 minutes as they pre-write, plan, organize, draft, and write a final version of an essay in response to a specific prompt.

Please be sure that the students write, their name and student ID on their Blue Book, and that they check the box for the prompt that they will be answering.

After the allotted 50 minutes has elapsed, you will collect the essays and take them to the essay scoring room. Essay readers should be aware of the time that is allotted for students to take the essay exam, so their scoring standard is set at an appropriate level, given the circumstances limiting the writing task, the standard of scoring for an essay written on demand in 50 minutes is clearly different than that for a paper written over the course of several days.

Essay Prompts
Most all of the prompts used require students to write an expository essay, i.e., an essay that exposes information by explaining, defining, or interpreting the given subject. Prompts may also solicit an argumentative, or persuasive, essay, i.e., an essay that seeks to convince the reader of the truth or falseness of an idea.

Essay Scoring Procedure
• Separate the essays by the prompt responded to.
• The reader should not place marks or write comments on the essay. The reader is to evaluate the essay as a “whole” using the round number contained on the Scantron sheet.
• Each essay will be read independently by two readers, and the average of these two scores will be the student’s final essay score.
• Readers should score each essay independently, should refrain from looking at one another’s scores, and should not discuss their scores.
• All readers must score each essay in accordance with the assigned rubric.
• If the scores given by two readers differ by 200 or more points, then the essay will be read by a third reader. The final score of the essay will be the average of the two closest scores. The essay coordinator will review the scores to determine which essays require a third read. Readers do not need to compare their score with that of the previous reader.
• Each essay will have two Scantron forms (one form per reader) assigned to it. Before entering his/her scores on the Scantron, the reader should check that the student ID number on the Scantron is the same as that on the student’s essay cover page.
• The reader will mark two scores on each Scantron sheet. One score indicates the reader’s rating for Table A of the rubric. The other score indicates the reader’s rating for Table B. Readers are not responsible for calculating the sum of these two scores.
• If the essay does not address the given prompt, then the reader must consult with a second reader. If the second reader agrees that the essay is off-prompt, then both readers must mark the “Off Prompt” box on their respective Scantron forms. No score should be indicated in Tables A or B, as all off-prompt essays should receive a zero score. If the two readers do not agree on whether the essay is off-prompt, then a third reader must read the essay. The scores of the two readers who are in agreement will be considered the final scores for that essay.
• If the essay is illegible, insufficient, or a blank paper, then the reader must consult with a second reader. If the second reader agrees that the essay is illegible or insufficient, then the readers must mark the “Nonscorable” box on their respective Scantron forms. In such cases, no score should be indicated in Tables A or B, as all illegible, insufficient, or blank essays receive a zero score. If the two readers do not agree on whether the essay is illegible or insufficient, then a third scorer must read the essay. The scores of the two readers who are in agreement will be considered the final scores for that essay.
The Scoring Rubric

The rubric is analytic insofar as it requires the reader to provide two separate scores for the essay. One score evaluates the focus, scope, organization, content, and development of the essay. The second score evaluates the language, style, and conventions of the essay. The first score accounts for 80 percent of the student’s final essay score, and the second score accounts for 20 percent of the student’s final essay score.

Following are brief explanations of each of the domains of the rubric. To ensure fair and consistent scoring it is essential that all essay readers understand these domain descriptions.

Focus/Scope: This domain assesses how thoroughly the student addresses the given prompt and how successful he/she is in establishing a clear thesis or purpose. The student should make a specific point about a specific topic and should maintain this focus throughout his/her essay. This domain also calls for judgment on the student’s range of understanding of the given topic.

Organization: This domain assesses the manner in which the student presents his/her ideas to the reader. This domain calls for judgment on the clarity, logic, and sequence of the ideas presented and the degree to which these ideas are developed and sustained within and across paragraphs using traditional devices. This domain also assesses the quality of the student’s introduction and conclusion and the effectiveness of the paragraphs in presenting and reinforcing the student’s main point(s).

Content/Development: This domain assesses the quality of the student’s ideas and the degree to which they are fully developed through facts, examples, anecdotes, details, opinions, statistics, reasons, and/or explanations. The reader will also assess the relevancy of the information presented to the overall focus of the essay.

Language/Style: This domain assesses the effectiveness and appropriateness of the student’s choice, use, and arrangement of words and sentence structures. The student’s use of language should serve to create an effective and appropriate tone and a consistent and powerful voice. The student should use language to communicate his/her ideas clearly and effectively. The reader will need to consider the student’s choice of words, range and specificity of vocabulary, as well as sentence variety.

Conventions: This domain assesses the correctness of the student’s grammar, mechanics (spelling, capitalization, and punctuation), usage and sentence formations.
U.S. Academic Decathlon
Essay Evaluation Form

Directions: Select one performance category in Table A. Within the range of points for that category, record the points scored in the space provided.

A. Focus/Scope - Organization - Content/Development

| OUTSTANDING | 85 - 100 pts |
| EXCELLENT | 70 - 84 pts |
| GOOD | 55 - 69 pts |
| FAIR | 40 - 54 pts |
| WEAK | 15 - 39 pts |
| POOR | 0 - 14 pts |

Directions: Select one performance category in Table B. Within the range of points for that category, record the points scored in the space provided.

B. Language/Style - Conventions

| OUTSTANDING | 85 - 100 pts |
| EXCELLENT | 70 - 84 pts |
| GOOD | 55 - 69 pts |
| FAIR | 40 - 54 pts |
| WEAK | 15 - 39 pts |
| POOR | 0 - 14 pts |

Off Prompt (OP) = Zero Score
Prompt is not addressed

Nonscorable (NS) = Zero Score
Essay is: illegible, insufficient, a blank paper

Total for B

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