

C I & E

CURRENT ISSUES and EVENTS

UIL

**CONTEST
MANUAL**

REVISED JULY 2015

@UILCIANDE

Overcoming a knowledge deficit

Welcome to the world of Current Issues and Events. This competition is challenging and rewarding. It requires successful participants to read and to keep up with events in the United States and across the world. And the benefits go well beyond potentially winning a medal at an invitational, district, regional or state event.

Learning about what is happening in the world will build an interest and passion for situations and events that will last throughout your life. In 2010, *Education World* published the research of Edward F. DeRoche demonstrating some of the benefits of studying current events:

- Students who use newspapers tend to score higher on standardized achievement tests — particularly in reading, math, and social studies — than those who don't use them.
- Newspapers help teach students to be effective readers.
- Newspapers can help develop and improve student vocabulary, word recognition skills, and comprehension.
- Newspapers are effective tools for teaching many math concepts, particularly fractions, decimals, currency, and averages.
- In surveys, students overwhelmingly support the use of newspapers in the classroom and have a positive attitude toward reading newspapers.
- Newspapers increase awareness of and interest in current events.
- Students who read newspapers in school tend to continue reading them when they become adults.



REFERENCE: Gary Hopkins "Education World: Why Teach Current Events?" *Education World*, www.educationworld.com/a_curr/curr084.shtml

About this publication

COVER PHOTO: Texas Capitol dome. Photo by Bradley Wilson.

This document was originally written in 1993 by former UIL Academic Director Bobby Hawthorne and has been revised several times since. The 2014 version was produced by CIE State Director Bradley Wilson, uilcurrentissues@gmail.com

All rights to the Current Issues and Events contest are reserved to the UIL. The content and design of the Web pages, newspaper pages and magazines remain copyrighted by their respective owners.

Participating in current events will help you prepare for timed tests, such as Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and the State of Texas assessment tests. All of these tests require that you answer a set amount of questions under time constraints, as well as ask you to create a coherent and thoughtful writing product.

In college, many of your tests will be timed and most will require you to answer some form of objective questions and to produce a writing product. In this age of rising college tuition and the importance of your grades, it is a huge advantage to be able to test and write under pressure. The CIE test asks participants to do both. The test contains 40 questions and an essay to complete in an hour or less.

Perhaps the most important byproduct of studying current issues and events is creating a well-informed citizenry.

Plato wrote, "Ignorance, the root and stem of all evil" and that "Knowledge is the true opinion." When you read multiple sources of the news, then you are killing ignorance at the root and building your knowledge base, and you are able to make better decisions as to the course of not only your life, but also the state and the country.

Gary Hopkins, editor of *Education World* explains, "In a recent survey, 135 inner-city school teachers who used a program designed to incorporate current events into lesson plans said the program was effective in increasing student interest in current events."

In short, all of the participants, whether or not they win a medal, are becoming more knowledgeable and informed citizens.

NATURE OF THE CONTEST

The contest will focus on a basic knowledge of current state, national and world events and issues. “Current events” are defined as those which have occurred during the present school year. The contest will consist of questions which will be posed in such a way as to allow for objective grading. Also, participants will be required to write an essay.

Test questions will mostly be taken from the news sections of national daily newspapers, with *The New York Times* primarily used as the main source. The Tuesday Science section of the *Times* is of special interest. Plus the largest Texas metropolitan newspapers and weekly news magazines, such as *The Week* and *Time* magazine, will be used. Magazines such as *Texas Monthly* and the *Atlantic* are not usually a source of questions unless the information appears elsewhere.

Students should watch the news broadcasts of CNN, NBC, ABC and CBS occasionally, as they all cover the same big stories.

Background knowledge and the vocabulary that comes with it are vital to reading comprehension. If you don’t know who Raoul Wallenberg is, then you can’t understand the meaning of the following sentence by Frank Rich of *The New York Times*, “Though the (Iraqi) war’s godfathers saw themselves as ridding the world of another Hitler, their legacy includes a humanitarian catastrophe that will need its own Raoul Wallenbergs and Oskar Schindlers if lives are to be saved.”

Best-selling author and scholar E.D. Hirsch, Jr. wrote, “Formal comprehension skills can only take students so far; knowledge is what enables their comprehension to keep increasing.”

And that’s why it’s important to know what the debt ceiling is and its impact both economically and politically.

In short, if something important happens in the world, and *The New York Times* and other highly-respected newspapers cover it prominently, THAT IS NEWS, regardless of the person’s field or contributions. Usually, all print/electronic or online media follow suit, making the importance obvious. One example of this might be prominent deaths I used for questions in 2013. One was writer Ray Bradbury (*Fahrenheit 451*, *The Martian Chronicles*, *The Illustrated Man*). The world’s media did not treat it as a Sci-Fi writer had died — but as one of the most influential writers in history was gone. The same thing happened when music legends Ravi Shankar (sitar) and Dave Brubeck (piano) died.

However, I am a journalist and journalism educator by career: ‘soft’ and most ‘cultural’ news is not part of my DNA and will not be part of the tests UNLESS it has heavy hard-news significance: news about Kim Kardashian or Lindsay Lohan will not be found on the tests

ELIGIBILITY

The contest is open only to those students eligible under Subchapter M of the Constitution. In other words, if students are eligible for any other UIL contest, they’re eligible for this one.

Each school may enter four individuals in the district meet. Students with the highest three objective scores constitute the school’s team score. All four members of the winning district team will advance to region. All four members of the winning region team will advance to the State Meet.

All students qualifying from district to the regional meet contest and from regional to the State Meet contest are eligible to compete for individual honors. Thus, it is possible for seven persons from a district—the top three place finishers as well as the four members of the winning team—to be eligible to compete for individual honors at region. Likewise, it is possible, though highly unlikely, for seven persons from a region—the top three place finishers as well as the four members of the winning team—to be eligible to compete for individual honors at the State Meet.

THE DAY OF THE CONTEST

Contestants must furnish their own No. 2 pencils and erasers, and may write on lined paper or on blank white paper. Contest directors shall provide contestants with scratch paper. Contestants are permitted to write on the exam. Textbooks, periodicals, and other reference sources may not be brought into the contest room. The League will furnish tests.

Here’s a rundown of the process.

- The contest director should announce the time for verification and the announcement of results.
- All persons except contestants, the contest director, and an assistant should leave the room. Contestants should be seated around the room.
- Each contestant should be assigned a number, which is indicated on the contest roster.
- The contest director should check roll from the contestants listed on the contest roster.
- The test should be distributed. The contest director should instruct the contestants to write the assigned number in the top right-hand corner of the answer sheet.
- The contest director should then instruct students to begin the contest. During the contest, the director and the assistant should be stationed in a place where they can make certain that contestants are silent and seated.
- Contestants may turn in papers and exit the contest room as soon as they complete the test and the essay.
- After 60 minutes have expired, the contest director shall instruct all participants to cease writing and turn in their papers.

BY THE NUMBERS

- **40 objective** questions. Each question is worth **1 point**.
- **One essay**. Worth as much as **10 points**
- **60 minutes**
- School can enter as many as **four students**.
- **Top three scores** in the objective portion of the contest count toward the team score.
- **Top eight contestants** in the objective round qualify for the essay round.
- Points essay counts toward team total? **Zero**.

DOs & DON'Ts

- During testing, do not allow team members to sit next to, in front or behind each other. This will eliminate any possibility of copying or peeking.
- Ask students to turn off all beepers, cell phones and/or audible signals on watches.
- Place all books, magazines, purses and such on the floor.



The New York Times, as one of the top national media outlets, is an authoritative source for news.

LEAVING THE ROOM

Students may not leave and return to the contest room unless they have the permission of the contest director and are accompanied by a monitor. Contest directors should grant such permission only in the event of an emergency.

GRADING: AN OVERVIEW

1. Assemble the judges in the grading room.
2. Read the questions without the key and answer any questions that might arise.
3. Verify the key. If the judges believe the key is incorrect, contact the UIL office.
4. Grade all papers.
5. Pull the top eight finishers in the objective portion of the contest.
6. Read each essay.
8. Assign a score to each essay. Add essay score to objective score to determine final score.
9. Break individual ties for first through sixth place by judging essays of tied contestants against one another. All ties must be broken.
10. Four students from the same school may place at the district meet.

WHO SHOULD JUDGE?

The contest director should select judges to grade tests. Contest coaches may serve as graders of the objective portions of the contest. In fact, the UIL recommends that every judging panel include at least one contest coach. Impartial judge(s) who have no vested interest in the rankings should be selected to grade the essay. Contest coaches whose students are not involved in the standings may judge the essays.

Every effort should be made to insure that judges have no vested interest in the results of a



The Wall Street Journal is a primary source for business and economics news.

contest. Thus, a coach may help judge the objective portion of the contest, but if the coach's student is in the essay round, then the judge should be excused.

DETERMINING THE TEAM CHAMPION

A school may enter four students in the team competition. The three students scoring the highest in the objective portion of the contest shall constitute the overall team score. The essay scores is not included in the calculation of the team champion.

For example:

TEAM 1		
Slot	# of correct answers	
1	36	
2	35	
3	34	
4	29	
Total	105	

TEAM 2		
Slot	# of correct answers	
1	23	
2	27	
3	32	
4	23	
Total	82	

TEAM 3		
Slot	# of correct answers	
1	27	
2	26	
3	24	
4	20	
Total	77	



CNN is worth checking on almost daily as a litmus test for how international news will be played in the U.S.

TIES BETWEEN TEAMS

If at the district or regional meet two or more teams vying for first or second place have the same team score, first place shall be awarded to the team with the highest score of the fourth-place team member. Should two or more contestants who are the fourth-place team member have the same score, then a team tie will be declared and all teams involved in the tie shall advance. For purposes of this tie breaker, a team without a fourth member will use a score of zero for the fourth-place member's score. At the State Meet, no tie breaking procedure will be used for teams in any place; if two first place awards are made based on a declared tie, there will be no second place, etc.

DETERMINING THE INDIVIDUAL CHAMPION

The winning entry in the individual competition is determined by a cumulative score from the objective and essay portions of the contest. After students have completed the test, the objective portion of the test may be machine or hand-graded. Each test should be graded and errors initialed by no fewer than two graders.

Award points for each correct answer.

Pull the top eight papers or, in the event of ties, enough papers to fill eight slots. For example:

Slot	Place	# of correct answers
1	1	36
2	2 (tie)	35
3	2 (tie)	35
4	4	34
5	5 (tie)	32
6	5 (tie)	32
7	5 (tie)	32
8	8	30



Don't be afraid to check other national news sources such as Fox News that offer differing viewpoints.

If a tie for the eighth slot exists, then grade all those tied for the eighth slot. For example:

Slot	Place	# of correct answers
1	1	36
2	2	35
3	3	34
4	4	33
5	5	31
6	6	30
7	7	29
8	8 (tie)	26
	8 (tie)	26

The essay is graded on a 10-point scale (see rubric on page 23). The essay score is added to the objective score to determine the cumulative score. The essay score is subjective and not subject to protest.

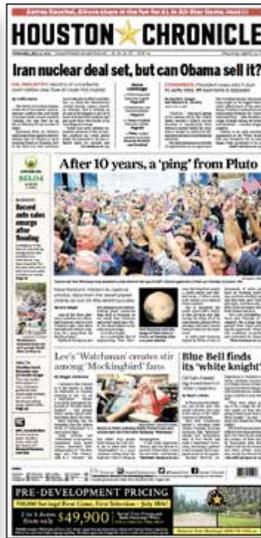
Slot	Place	Obj. only		Total	Final Rank
		Obj.	Essay		
1	1	36	6	42	2
2	2	35	5	40	4 (tie)
3	3	34	9	43	1
4	4	33	8	41	3
5	5	31	9	40	4 (tie)
6	6	30	8	38	6
7	7	29	3	32	
8	8 (tie)	26	6	32	
	8 (tie)	26	8	34	

NUTS & BOLTS

- The essay is used to break ties.
- Fourth place contestant scores are used to break team ties.
- First, second and third place individuals advance.
- All four members of the team may place.
- First place team advances.
- All four members of the team advance.

THE ESSAY MADE ALL THE DIFFERENCE

It would be wise to appreciate the importance of the essay. State and regional meet results show that students who score poorly on the essay rarely place. Generally, a weak essay will cost a student an opportunity to advance, while a strong essay might pull a student into position to advance to region or to the State Meet.



Texas has a plethora of quality newspapers in all corners of the state from the *Austin American-Statesman* that often leads with Texas politics to the *Houston Chronicle*, the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* and the *San Antonio Express-News*. Stories that all of the papers pick up or provide local coverage of are even more likely to be topics for questions on the exams.

JUDGING THE ESSAY

1. Take the papers with the top eight objective scores.
2. If a tie for the eighth place exists, take all that tie for the eighth place. For example, in the scenario below, take first, second, third, and the five papers that tied for fourth. These are your top eight papers. It is not necessary to drag in the ninth paper.

Slot	Place	# of correct answers
1	1	33
2	2	32
3	3	31
4	4 (tie)	30
5	4 (tie)	30
6	4 (tie)	30
7	4 (tie)	30
8	4 (tie)	30
9	9	27

3. Read all eight essays.
4. Assign a score to all essays. (Please read "Rating vs. ranking" below). Read through all essays once to determine which are best. This will help determine what a "10" is. Then, you can determine which essays are 8s, 5s, 3s, etc.

It is possible — even probable — that no essay will deserve a 10. So your highest rated essay may be an 8. Then, you might have two or three essays that score a 6 or 7. The essay ranking need not and probably should not correspond to the essay rating score.

In other words, the top rated essay need not necessarily deserve a 10, the second-best essay a 9, the third-best an 8, and so on. It is possible that two or three essays might earn 7s or 8s, and two or three others 4s or 5s.

Also, it is reasonable that an essay that scores a 9 at district may receive a 7 or a 6 at regional. The grading of essays is relative and subjective.

GRADING THE ESSAY

One judge may judge all eight essays. If more than one person judges essays, judges must reach agreement on essay ranking and scores.

Do not rely solely on the individual judge's assignment of points. One judge may be more stringent than another. It is possible that a weaker essay, graded by a more lenient judge, can be awarded more points than a stronger essay, graded by a more demanding judge.

RANKING OR RATING?

A question arose during a State Meet regarding the tendency of judges to rank papers and assign points accordingly. One coach argued that ranking papers violated the integrity of the rubric. Every essay should be ranked on its own merits rather than in context to the other essays, the coaches argued.

Others believed that the quality of essays improve from district to region, region to state. Thus, the essay points should be awarded in context to the quality of the essays submitted. So an essay that might have been given an eight at district because the other essays were weak may be given a four or five at State, where the other essays are quite strong.

Noted one coach, "I think papers should be ranked since there are so few to be read. That way, you get the kid who wrote the best essay with the most points."

To solve the problem, judges may read all eight papers, rank them first through eighth and then award points accordingly. UIL rules do not prohibit this. The rubric is worthless unless it can differenti-



The *Dallas Morning News* is one of the most respected papers in the state and worthy of reading on a regular basis.

ate among strong and weak essays.

At the same time, recognize that it is possible for—even probable that—two or more essays may receive the same score. Again, rules do not prohibit this either.

The purpose of the essay is to determine which students best understand the meaning and implications of current events in a number of contexts: political, social, economic, scientific and cultural, just to mention a few. Without some attempt at ranking, a weak and a strong essay may both receive the same score simply because one was read early and the other late in the judging. It would be an injustice if this failure to appropriately reward the better essay cost its author an opportunity to advance to the next round.

In addition, failure to rank could result in a lenient judge awarding more points for a weak essay than a strict judge awards to a stronger essay.

Another coach recommended that judges award points for each essay in relation to the “Points to be Considered in the Essay.”

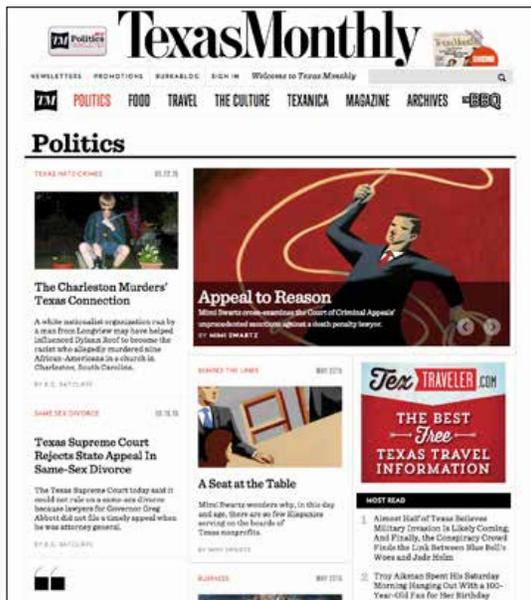
She wrote, “I have always tried to read the students’ essay in relation to that information and used the rubric as a scale for evaluating the quality of the essay as it relates to the suggested answer.”

A hard and fast rule does not exist. Districts and regions are free to establish procedures as they see fit. The bottom line must be that it is fair and it insures the best students advance.

Again, the essay score is subjective and as such, not subject to protest.

TIES IN INDIVIDUAL COMPETITION

In the event of a tie in the individual competition after the essays have been scored and added to the point totals from the objective portion of the contest,



Texas Monthly magazine provides yet another look at Texas politics and issues in Texas.

the tie will be broken by comparing the essays of the students involved in the tie against each other.

Do not change the point total. When a tie occurs, those contestants who are tied should be awarded a place before other contestant(s) are awarded a place. Change the **rank**, not the score in the spring meet online system to reflect which contestant won the tie-breaker.

The following hypothetical situation further clarifies the individual and team aspects of the Current Issues & Events contest.

ADVANCING FROM DISTRICT TO REGION TO STATE

School A enters four students.

School B enters four students also. These students may advance as individuals, as members of a team, or as both, depending on their individual and cumulative scores. The current events contest will contain 40 questions, and will be graded on a pure-sum basis.

If at the meet, Bill answers 24 of 40, and Sally answers 35 of 40, and Joe answers 33 of 40, and Jane answers 30 of 40, then their cumulative score would be 98 (35+33+30). If 98 is the highest cumulative score — and in this hypothetical situation, we’ll assume that it is — then all four members of School A (including Bill, whose score did not count toward the cumulative total) would advance to the regional meet.

Meanwhile, School B members scored as followed: Jill answers 26 of 40, Jim answered correctly 34 of 40, Bob answered 30 of 40, and Sue answered 29 of 40. Their cumulative score is 93.

Let’s assume that no other student correctly answered more than 30 questions. If this is true, then the highest cumulative score possible for any

WE CAN'T ADVANCE

If a team cannot advance, for whatever reason, the coach must notify the officials of the next higher meet as well as the alternate school of its inability to advance.

RETURNING ENTRIES

If results are final and all test questions resolved, entries may be returned no sooner than the end of the contest on the Saturday of the respective district week.

HISTORY

Then Academic Director **BOBBY HAWTHORNE** created the Current Issues and Events contest in 1993.

"We needed a contest in the Social Studies realm, and the teachers we surveyed seemed most interested in a current events competition.

"At first, we thought it might be more like Jeopardy, with buzzers and an audience, but that soon proved troublesome if not impossible.

"The advisory committee was most concerned about making the contest as objective as possible, since a good number of the contestants fancy themselves as lawyers in training and would protest every ambiguous or mushy answer.

"Finally, we added the essay component because we wanted it to be more than a short-term memory competition."

PAST DIRECTORS

Bobby Hawthorne
Randy Vonderheid
Tom Ray
Dave Garlock



Time magazine and other weekly news magazines are a good way to get a weekly synopsis of the news.



Whether online or in print, *The Week* provides not only quality reporting but analysis and commentary on the news.

other team is 90. Thus the regional meet qualifiers would be:

Team: School A

To determine the individual champions, we must find the top eight finishers in the objective portion of the contest, grade and score their essays, and then rank according to a cumulative score.

For example:

Slot	Obj. only		Essay	Total	Final Rank
	Place	Obj.			
Sally	1	35	6	41	2
Jim	2	34	5	39	3 (tie)
Joe	3	33	9	42	1
Bob	4	30	8	38	5
Jane	4	30	9	39	3 (tie)
Sue	6	29	8	37	6
Mary	6	29	3	32	
Ron	8	28	6	34	

In the above scenario, we have a tie for third place that must be broken. So we compare Jane's essay with Jim's to break the tie. Note that it is possible for students to advance as both individuals and members of the team. Sally and Joe will advance to the next round, both as a member of Team A and as individuals. Even if at the next round Team A does not advance, it is possible for Sally and Joe to advance as individuals if they place first, second or third in the individual competition.

TEAM SUBSTITUTIONS

The winning team from each district in each conference will advance to regional competition. The winning team from each region in each conference will advance to state competition.

In all team events, if a team member is unable to compete at the next higher level of competition, no more than one substitution may be made. The substitute must present the contest director with a completed substitution form or a letter, signed by the school administrator or designee, certifying eligibility.

If two members of a four-member team cannot compete at the next level, it is permissible for the team to drop one student and then make one substitution. This would mean the school would have a three-member team. If this team wins at region, you may not add a member at State. In other words, if you won with three members at region, you must compete with three members at State.

If a team cannot advance for whatever reason, the coach must notify the officials of the next higher meet as well as the alternate school of its inability to advance. Failure to do so is a potential violation of the Spring Meet Code.

ANNOUNCING RESULTS

Unofficial results. Unofficial results of individuals who appear to have placed first through sixth place and of the first place team should be announced. Post all scores so that students and coaches can make certain that scores and places are correct.

Verification Period. Prior to the announcement of official results, contestants and sponsors should be permitted to examine for no more than 15 minutes the contestant's answer sheet with a copy of the test and answer key. It is important that unofficial scores are posted during the verification period. During this period, they should verify that it is the correct paper, and look for possible errors in the grading or the recording of scores. Questions should be re-



National Public Radio also provides another way to hear the news. Pay closer attention to the state affiliates out of Austin, KUT, and Dallas, KERA.

solved at this time. Contest directors should collect all tests and answer sheets so that none remain with the contestant or sponsor. Sponsors or contestants not present for the viewing period forfeit their opportunity to raise questions.

Tabulation Error. If it is evident that an error has been made in tabulation, only the contest director is authorized to correct it.

Error in Key. In the case of an error on the answer key of an objectively-scored contest, graders should notify the UIL office of the nature of the error and/or contact the state contest director to seek clarification. Papers should be judged on correctness rather than an incorrect answer on a key.

The essay score is subjective and not subject to protest.

Final Authority. The decision of the contest director in these matters should be final.

Announcing Official Results. The contest director should announce the name and school of first through sixth place individuals and the first place and second place teams. Once the results are announced, results are final. It is the responsibility of each participating school to obtain a copy of the official results and to be informed about procedures for advancing to the next level of competition.

WILD CARDS

Each district is one of eight per region. All first place teams in your region will advance. The highest-scoring second place team in your region will also advance. This is the wild card.

The highest-scoring second place team from the four regional meets will advance to the State Meet.

For instructions regarding wild cards, visit the UIL website or consult the *UIL Constitution and Contest Rules*.



Many people today get news from The Daily Show or other alternative news shows. These shows provide yet another perspective on the news.

WRAPPING UP

Returning the Papers. The *Constitution and Contest Rules* states, "If results are final and all test questions resolved, entries may be returned no sooner than the end of the contest on the Saturday of the respective district week." Contestants wishing to receive their materials should provide the contest director with a self-addressed, stamped envelope the day of the meet. Provided there are no unresolved questions concerning any of the papers following the verification and announcement of official results, regional directors may return papers the day of the meet, so long as the meet is held on Saturday.

Points. Points are awarded through sixth place in the individual competition and to the first place and second place teams according to Section 902 (n).



TIPS FROM STUDENTS WHO HAVE BEEN THERE, DONE THAT

- **Study.** **Read** a good metropolitan newspaper every day.
- **Listen** to National Public Radio as often as possible.
- **Watch** the network evening news programs.
- **Read** the news analysis articles in *Time* and *The Week*.
- **Begin reading** the first week of school.
- **Study** practice tests.
- **Study** Texas politics. Make sure you know the names of the major players.
- Keep names and places on index cards.

Preparing for competition

So now that you're familiar with the rules and scoring, how do you prepare? My process begins with *The New York Times* and *The Week*. I read them for several reasons. First, the *Times* is one of the most prestigious and authoritative newspapers in the U.S. and read around the world. *The Week* provides a list of unmatched sources to study. Additionally, many local and regional newspapers use their reporting the next day.

I also check the *Houston Chronicle* and the *Dallas Morning News* for events of statewide interest. I use *USA Today*, *The Washington Post* and the *Wall Street Journal* as well, but not as widely.

Other sites used on a regular basis are: CNN, NPR, Reuters, BBC, PBS and Google News. I also subscribe to *Time*, *Texas Monthly*, the *New Yorker*, and the *Atlantic*. I use monthly news magazines for questions more often than the others.

When I'm reading through a news source, I'm looking for basic categories of information: international and domestic, and to a lesser degree, Texas. The test will be split "about" 50-50 between international and domestic questions.

CONFLICT/WAR/TERROR

Questions are mostly international, and could cover the Mideast wars; protests anywhere; the leaking of classified material by U.S. citizens; military excursions by a wide variety of countries; the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There are always questions in this area.

I usually provide one to two clues that will help answer the question if you have studied, such as the name of the current leader and/or the name of the site of the violence. Be aware of leaders from countries in the news.

ECONOMY

This is another topic just bursting with possibilities. I will not ask narrow questions like whether the deficit is at \$5.1, \$5.3, \$5.4 billion or whatever.

But the economy is an important subject in the entire world, and one that also leads to political unrest and violence.

ELECTIONS/RESIGNATIONS

This could be either domestic or international and fairly easy to judge its importance by the coverage in the major media. Elections in Iran, China or the U.S. often have global impact, as did the leadership change in North Korea. In the U.S., the rise of the Tea Party and the dynamics of our firm Red State/Blue State differences toward immigration, same-sex marriage and civil rights continues to dominate much of the news.

Domestically, focus on important elections and/or trends emerging in Congressional elections, such as shifts in political control of swing states that signal a fundamental change in the government.

This is a common category used on tests. You would do well to be prepared for these types of questions.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

This deals with how the United States or other countries relate to each other through legislation or policy. An example might be President Obama's change in stance toward Israeli President Reuven Rivlin and his ability to govern. It could include the situation in the Middle East and the difficulties Israel, China, Japan and Venezuela have at home and in dealing with their neighbors. Look for changes in countries' relationships with each other.

LEGISLATION

Again, think big picture and controversy. Domestically, consider the wrangling over the continuing budget/debt ceiling, immigration reform and other hot issues in Obama's final term. Internationally, much of Europe is still dealing with huge budget issues that generate protests and domestic dissension.

ENVIRONMENT

This area ranges from tornados that seem to be ravaging the U.S. to flooding and other national disasters. *The New York Times* and other major media publish articles on scientific papers covering events in the Midwest to oil spills to species/habitat loss

that will show up as questions. I try to ask about losses that affect a huge part of the ecosystem, such as the loss of a top end predator (tuna and tiger), or the decline of a major food source (tuna). Some questions might focus on the evidence on either side of the debate on global warming that create news.

POLITICS

Most of the quotation questions are political, mainly on the national level, but some on the Texas level. Look for statements and events that generate buzz and controversy. Newt Gingrich's "Kenyan, anti-colonialism" comment in the last election, for example. I try to include enough evidence in the quote so that you can determine the policy stance of the person or deduce who might or might not have made the statements.

Pay particular attention to the Texas gubernatorial election and potential candidates for national office.

SECURITY/DEFENSE

Internationally, one focus is on nuclear proliferation and the issues surrounding it. Other questions have focused on Iran and North Korea and their development of intercontinental ballistic missiles, as well as China's development of a blue water navy. Such issues clearly shift the balance of power in the region and threaten United States leadership. Domestically, questions might regard the development or cancellation of weapons systems, military readiness or the ability to respond to domestic terrorism.

HEALTH

Questions will cover breakthroughs, setbacks or issues about major diseases. For example, the first person to have a rare transplant in the United States represents an important medical breakthrough that raises the bar for medicine throughout the country and possibly the world. An international question might focus on a report on the status of HIV/AIDS in the world and how it has changed. Remember, you are looking for events or issues that affect lots of people. In the U.S., the subject of abortion rights continues to be major issue.

EDUCATION

Occasionally, there may be a newsworthy article about the state of education in the United States, such as Chicago closing so many schools in 2013. However, this category often involves schools in Texas. You are looking for news that provides a context to the quality (or the lack) of education in America, Texas or the world. For instance, Governor Perry shared his vision of fundamental changes in the cost of a college education that has rocked the world of state universities and colleges. The University of Texas had recent battles involving the role

of the Board of Regents in UT affairs, which spilled over into the state legislature.

NATURAL DISASTERS

Any event that triggers massive loss of life, property, and affects a region long term will probably make the test. For example, the Japanese earthquake and subsequent nuclear crisis a few years ago had a large impact on the world's third largest economy, as do earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, tsunamis and floods. The wildfires on the West Coast or Super Typhoon Haiyan are fair game.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Questions in this area are often found on the CI&E tests. These tend to be developments that are important, such as the drought, Google Glass, smart phones and a myriad of new high-tech apps and businesses. Read the Tuesday science section of *The New York Times*, *The Week* and *Time* magazine to look for items like this.

Dragonflies are the most dangerous predator on the planet. Yes, countries have developed a system for defending Earth against an asteroid strike. Pesticides are the cause for the demise of the honey bee. And North Texas may run out of drinkable water in 2015.

BUSINESS

In all categories, you are almost certainly looking for large multinational corporations and some sort of conflict or controversy that has caused them to be in the news cycle. For example, one oil company lost a court case in Ecuador that forced them to pay millions of dollars for an oil spill. It generated a lot of bad publicity and anger in the country. This following the negative publicity after the BP oil spill and acrimony surrounding their large profits and low tax bill. Other types of business articles to look for are ones that involve corporation and foreign governments.

SPORTS

Just as the winners of entertainment shows such as the Tony Awards, the Country Music Association Awards or the Soap Opera Digest Awards are off limits, so too are the scores of sporting events. Who won the Super Bowl just doesn't have a lasting impact on the lives of very many people, except the players and coaches who receive large bonuses.

However, sports is big business. And to the extent that sports bleeds over into the news pages, it is fair game. For example, The NFL is registered as a not-for-profit, tax-exempt organization—even with a commissioner who makes nearly \$30 million a year and that tax-exempt status is being called into question. For example, the Penn State football scandal involving coach Joe Paterno and Jerry Sandusky made front page news worldwide. Like all other

WHAT IS NEWS ANYWAY?

When it comes to examining two items and determining whether one will be on the test and one will not, start with basic news criteria.

Timeliness

Invitational A — Jan. 8 - Feb. 6
Invitational B — Feb. 12 - March 12
District 1 — March 21-26
District 2 — April 1-6
Region — April 21-23
State — May 23-25

"Current events" are defined as those that have occurred during the current school year so any material after Aug. 24, 2015 is fair game for any exam. However, the following cut-off dates will assist in studying for multiple-choice questions.

Invitational — Aug. 24 - Jan. 1
District — Sept. 1 - March 1
Region — Oct. 1 - April 1
State — Nov. 1 - May 1

Consequence

Something that impacts more people is more likely to be on the test than something that impacts only a few or only for a short period. This is why most entertainment news stories and sports game stories don't make the cut.

Proximity

Out of 160 questions on district, region and state exams in 2015, 17 percent were local to Texas people and events, 52 percent were national and 31 percent were international.

Conflict

Back to consequence. A conflict within the court system, political rivals or between two mega-industries is likely to be news.

Prominence

Famous people get more coverage just because they are famous. If you break your arm it probably will not make the front page, but if the Queen of England breaks her arm it will be big news.

material in the contest, however, the effects must be far-reaching and widely reported.

SCANDAL

Searching for topics that affect leaders or important cultural icons. I will rarely ask questions about Hollywood figures or music industry figures. So in Texas, you are looking for investigations of elected officials or scandals that gain statewide attention. Domestically, scandals such as the Anthony Weiner resignation made headlines everywhere and are easy to identify. Internationally, the scandals surrounding Silvio Berlusconi, leading to his 2013 arrest on tawdry sex-related charges made international news. Prominent leaders seem to generate scandalous news on a regular basis. (Don't expect questions about the Kardashians, Kanye West or Lindsay Lohan, however, unless they involve hard news of some sort.)

SUPREME COURT

Every year the Court rules on about 100 cases, but contestants really only need to look for decisions that affect people in a major way. In the summer of 2014, for example, the increasingly partisan court ruled 5-4 that requiring family-owned corporations to pay for insurance coverage for contraception under the Affordable Care Act violated a federal law protecting religious freedom. In that same term, the court ruled that some government workers are not required to pay union dues in a 5-4 blow to organized labor. In the summer of 2013, the court ruled on the legality of same-sex marriages, affirmative action and the 1965 Voting Rights Act within days of each other — a stunning series of decisions that seemed to affect most of the country, in one way or another. In 2012, the court ruled in favor of the Affordable Care Act (often called Obama care), which still elates or upsets people.

STATES OTHER THAN TEXAS

This is similar to the health category in that you are searching the news for events that are “firsts” or uniquely occurring in a state, such as Mississippi officially completing the paperwork to ratify the 13th Amendment (abolishing slavery) some 48 years late, after someone checked into it after seeing the movie “Lincoln.” Montana sued Travelocity to collect state sales tax, which threatened to open up Internet corporations to sales tax collection across the country, dramatically affecting their business model and consumer prices. Actions that could

have an impact or set a precedent for other states would be covered under this area.

NOBEL PEACE PRIZE

This category is pretty straightforward. The Nobel Peace Prize generates a lot of news coverage and all winners are considered possible test questions. However, earth-shattering prizes for things like the March 2013 discovery of the Higgs boson “God particle” should be looked at closely.

Don't underestimate coverage of other Nobel Prizes either. The contributions the recipients make makes them newsworthy, not necessarily that they won a Nobel Prize.

SOCIAL MEDIA/NETWORKING

Don't expect many questions about Snapchat, Twitter or Facebook, but social media is a great place to look for news coverage. One question out of 240 appeared in 2013, which was the Obamas kissing after the election. That was considered to be the most viewed social media photo of all time, which made it hard news to me — as was Facebook buying Instagram for \$1 billion in 2012.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

What is the most expensive malady in the U.S., in terms of costs to families and society in direct health care costs, according to an April 4, 2013 Rand Corp. study?

- A. Cancer
- B. Dementia
- C. Heart Disease
- D. Trauma

Which location is considered that nation's most polluted nuclear site and recently confirmed six tanks of radioactive waste (out of 177) were leaking as much as 1,000 gallons a year in the spring of 2013?

- A. Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant in Japan
- B. Chooz Nuclear Power Plant in France
- C. Hanford Nuclear Reservation in the United States
- D. Philippsburg Nuclear Power Plant in Germany

The death of legendary film critic Roger Ebert — he of the ‘thumbs up’ or ‘thumbs down’ method of reviewing movies for decades — was heavily covered in early April of 2013. Which statement about Roger Ebert IS NOT TRUE?

- A. He worked for the *Chicago Tribune*.
- B. He was the first film critic to win the Pulitzer Prize for criticism.
- C. He wrote the screenplay for the campy B-movie, “Beyond the Valley of the Dolls.”
- D. He wrote more than 15 books.

Scientists from the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, announced some groundbreaking discoveries about the universe. These findings confirm work by Einstein nearly 100 years ago. Which of the following best describes what their findings DID NOT CONFIRM?

- A. An inflationary universe.
- B. Gravitational waves.
- C. Ripples in space time.
- D. Non-expanding universe.

Which country announced in the spring of 2014 plans to end a long-running contract and relinquish control of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, an international consortium of business groups that assigns and maintains web address and domains (such as .com or .org.)?

- A. United States
- B. Russia
- C. China
- D. Germany

ANSWERS: B, C, A, D, A



Writing the essay

THE ESSAY

should be expository in nature. It should be judged on content first and clarity and precision of composition second. Writing style should be a secondary consideration.

Since essay writing is at the heart of primary and secondary composition curriculum, this manual will not detail in depth this particular form of discourse. Hundreds of textbooks are available that can outline and describe it far better than we can here.

However, it is important to remind students that the purpose of the essay is to communicate information. Shallow or pretentious vocabulary should be avoided. The essay should be clear and to the point, generally constructed as a topic sentence, followed by supporting detail, followed by a concluding sentence that expands the original reference. Padding an answer with needless repetition or irrelevant detail will hurt more than help.

The essay may analyze and interpret, but should not attempt to editorialize. The very nature of expository writing requires the writer to enhance the reader's understanding of a subject by analyzing its parts and interpreting its meaning. Still, it is important to remember that the purpose of the essay is to put to use students' grasp of current events.

Former U.S. Secretary of Education Lauro Cavazos noted, "Our students are mastering basic facts and skills in history and civics, but they must also know how to apply what they're learning if we expect to achieve the nation's education goals. Less than half can draw conclusions and demonstrate understanding — and that is unacceptable."

Because students will not be allowed to bring research material into the room, their essays will not be as detailed as they might otherwise be. However, we expect students to be able to recite basic blocks of information.

Again, the contest director writes six contests: two invitational, two district, one region and one state. Two will probably deal with national politics. Two will likely deal with international issues and events. And the other two are up for grabs. Here's a fairly representative essay prompt.

STATE MEET 2002

Joel Brinkley and Todd Perdum of *The New York Times* wrote, "The Bush administration, having spent its first months in office vowing to stay out of active Middle East diplomacy, finds itself embroiled in a situation apparently more explosive than

any confronted here by the Clinton administration."

David Broder of the *Washington Post* wrote, "President Bush, who loves to deal in moral absolutes, has encountered in the Middle East a challenge that defies both dogma and deadlines."

Susan Page of *USA Today* wrote, "Bush has struggled to explain how his black-and-white denunciation of terrorists when he launched the war in Afghanistan squares with the shades-of-gray ambiguities of the Middle East."

Explain the Bush administration's evolving diplomacy in the Middle East, the intractable issues between the Israelis and the Palestinians that make even the smallest step toward peace maddeningly elusive, and the political implications of a larger role by the President in the peace process.

Basic essay outline

1. Initial Bush policy
2. Policy after September 11
3. Evolving Bush policy
4. Positions held by Israel & the Palestinians
5. Sharon v. Arafat history
6. Prospects and impact of revised Bush policy

Background — As a candidate for president, Bush was critical of President Clinton's day-to-day involvement in the Middle East peace process. In the first months of his administration, he vowed to avoid becoming enmeshed in the region's problems, insisting that they reach peace on their own timetable, even though he established a close relationship with Ariel Sharon and shunned Yasser Arafat, whom he blamed for the terrorist attacks on Israel.

After the Sept. 11 attack on the U.S., Bush said the U.S. would not tolerate terrorists or those who harbor them. However, in dealing with Arafat, he has been forced to take a more delicate position. Bush at first expressed sympathy for Israeli victims of Palestinian suicide bombers and criticized Arafat for his failure to curb terrorists. The administration said it understands Israel's right to defend itself, but the message was often muddled. After Bush defended Israel's offensive actions, the U.S. voted for a United Nations resolution calling for an Israeli withdrawal.

As the violence escalated, Bush dispatched special envoy Gen. Anthony Zinni to attempt to broker a peace deal. Vice President Dick Cheney also went to Middle

TIPS FROM STUDENTS WHO HAVE BEEN THERE, DONE THAT

- **Watch** CNN.
- Work on writing proficiency.
Read newspaper and magazines.
- Don't even try to guess the essay.
- **Start early.**
- **Have fun.**
- Study consistently.
- **Read,** read, read. Magazines and newspapers. Stay informed, current.
- **Read** a variety of newspapers.

East, in part to drum up support for an American strike against Iraq, but Arab leaders only wanted to talk about Palestinians. They said ending West Bank violence was, in effect, a precondition to moderate Arab support for a strike against Iraq and a general war on terror.

With Israeli tanks surrounding Arafat's compound in Ramallah, Bush declared, "Enough is enough." He called on Sharon to "heed my call" to withdraw from the West Bank and called on Arafat to denounce terrorism. He also warned moderate Arab leaders that they bore responsibility for the climate of hatred that prevails in the region. Undeterred by Washington, Sharon continued military strikes in the West Bank. Bush dispatched Secretary of State Colin Powell to the Middle East. After several rounds of meetings with Sharon, Arafat and others, Powell returned with no peace agreement.

In the meantime:

- Support for Arafat and the Palestinian terrorist campaign grew throughout the Arab world. Anti-Israeli sentiment grew in Europe, too.
- The Israeli military campaign, determined to wipe out the terror infrastructure, smashed into Jenin, Nablus, Hebron and other West Bank cities.

Through so-called "quiet diplomacy," the Bush administration in late April developed a plan to end the siege on Arafat's compound and possibly to pave the way for international "monitors." But the situation remains highly volatile.

Positions — Though both sides claim to want peace, neither trusts the other. Sharon believes he can crush Palestinian resistance by full military reoccupation. Put simply, Israel feels that enough is enough and that Sharon's military action must go on. Israel worries that any peace concessions they may make would only be met with further suicide bombings.

Meanwhile Arafat thinks he can drive Israel out of the West Bank and Gaza by force with international assistance. He wants Israel to withdraw to positions held 18 months ago and set up a timetable for creation of Palestinian homeland as prescribed in a report by American diplomat George Mitchell. They distrust peace talks. They fear they'll get little more than endless years of discussion with a dramatic increase in Jewish settlements in the West Bank that makes the ultimate Palestinian state impossible. In the meanwhile, they say violence is their only leverage.

Prospects — Without direct U.S. intervention, both sides seem geared up for a war of attrition that promises endless casualties in the region. The prospect only thrills Mideast terrorists. Even though Bush managed to broker an agreement to end the siege of Arafat's compound, the Bush administration faces a path fraught with peril. Now that it has a stake in the outcome, it cannot return to a posture of noninvolvement in the region.

He also faces the political damaging prospect

of higher oil prices, due in part of Mideast turmoil. And he's seen his international prestige challenged as Sharon and Arafat ignored for days his demands that they take action. He runs the risk of alienating far-right elements of the Republican Party if he appears anti-Israeli. ■

Do not rewrite the prompt.

Joel Brinkley and Todd Perdum of *The New York Times* wrote, "The Bush administration, having spent its first months in office vowing to stay out of active Middle East diplomacy, finds itself embroiled in a situation apparently more explosive than any confronted here by the Clinton administration."

David Broder of the *Washington Post* wrote, "President Bush, who loves to deal in moral absolutes, has encountered in the Middle East a challenge that defies both dogma and deadlines." Basically, that means good and bad, right and wrong, black and white.

Susan Page of *USA Today* agrees. She wrote, "Bush has struggled to explain how his black-and-white denunciation of terrorists when he launched the war in Afghanistan squares with the shades-of-gray ambiguities of the Middle East."

Thus, it is obvious that the Bush administration has an evolving diplomacy in the Middle East made more difficult by the intractable issues between the Israelis and the Palestinians, which make even the smallest step toward peace maddeningly elusive. Of course, the political implications of a larger role by the President in the peace process are huge. ■

REGION 2007

In late February, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon said, "The majority of the United Nations work still focuses on preventing and ending conflict. But the danger posed by war to all of humanity and to our planet is at least matched by the climate crisis and global warming."

Explain his reasons for making such a claim.

This is a straightforward prompt that asks contestants to draw information from a number of sources. It doesn't require much analysis or interpretation, merely that students know something about global warming science, even if they believe in their heart-of-hearts that global warming is all a big scare campaign concocted by a scientific gasbags, nutcase environmentalists and cause-de-jour celebrities for the United Nations as a way of controlling American politics, economics and indoor swimming pool temperatures.

Thus, to answer the question successfully, contestants must understand:

1. Most credible scientists agree that global warming is taking place, and human behavior has something to do with it.
2. Globally, temperatures are rising, glaciers and ice caps are melting, and storms are more numerous and severe. As a result, plant and animal life are

beginning to be impacted by changing climate patterns.

3. The United Nations blamed human activities for global warming and predicted more droughts, heat waves and a slow rise in sea levels that could continue for more than 1,000 years even if greenhouse gas emissions were capped.

That's plenty to get started. Here's a sample essay that contained a wealth of data:

The vast majority of credible climate scientists agree that the average temperatures of the oceans, the land surface of the planet and the lower atmosphere have been climbing at an accelerating pace. The same specialists say that nearly as many scientists agree that man-made greenhouse gas emissions are a significant factor — and a good many say the only significant factor — in global warming.

On Feb. 2, a UN-organized panel of 2,500 top climate scientists from more than 130 nations blamed human activities for global warming and predicted more droughts, heat waves and a slow rise in sea levels that could continue for more than 1,000 years even if greenhouse gas emissions were capped. The panel predicted a "best estimate" that temperatures would rise by as much as 7.8 degrees Fahrenheit in the 21st Century. Such climate changes will likely become a major driver of war and conflict. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reported that global warming is so severe that it will "continue for centuries," leading to a far different planet in 100 years.

In addition, the world's largest general scientific society, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, stated that global climate change caused by human activities is occurring now and is a growing threat to society.

During the past year, various reports concluded the following:

- Non-polar glaciers around the world are disappearing much faster than scientists thought possible. Also, Arctic summer ice is melting and may disappear in the next several decades. A Norwegian study found that a melt of glaciers at the North Pole was quickening, and that warming of the Arctic and the resulting melting ice threatens indigenous hunting cultures and animals.
- Half of all plant and animal species are showing impacts of the warming. For example, polar bears are in jeopardy and need stronger government protection because of melting Arctic sea ice related to global warming, according to the U.S. Interior Department.
- A report by the National Center for Atmospheric Research stated that the world — especially the Western United States, the Mediterranean region and Brazil — will probably suffer more extended droughts, heavy rainfalls and longer heat waves over the next century because of global warming.

According to the report, some places such as the U.S. Pacific Northwest will receive a strange double-whammy: longer dry spells punctuated by heavier rainfalls.

- According to the journal *Nature*, global warming gases trapped in the soil are bubbling out of the thawing permafrost in amounts far higher than previously thought and might trigger a climate time bomb. Methane, a greenhouse gas more powerful in trapping heat than carbon dioxide, is being released from the permafrost at a rate five times as fast as previously thought, *Nature* reported.

So, what is the upshot of all this? Economic disaster, according to a report commissioned by the British government, which said that failing to curb the effects of climate change could damage the global economy on the scale of the Great Depression or either world war. It said climate change could cost between 5 and 20 percent of the world's gross national product. According to the British report, global warming could cause widespread deaths and turn hundreds of millions of people into refugees.

The effects of global warming may include melting glaciers, rising sea levels, declining crop yields, drinking-water shortages, higher death tolls from malnutrition and heat stress, and widespread outbreaks of malaria and dengue fever. Developing countries will be the hardest hit, according to multiple studies.

But Europe and North America may also be profoundly affected. Scientists have reported that the Atlantic currents' "conveyor belt" system has already slowed down — one of the predicted effects of global warming, possibly spurred by fresh water pouring in from the melting Greenland ice cap. These slowing currents include the Gulf Stream, which carries tropical heat up past New England and over to Britain and northwest Europe. If these currents stop completely, these regions would be far colder.

The U.S. is the world's top greenhouse gas emitter and accounts for about a quarter of the global total, ahead of China, Russia and India. In January, Bush acknowledged climate change as a "serious challenge." ■

Here's another fairly straightforward prompt. It asks contestants to answer the question, "Is Iraq in a civil war?" For months, the Bush administration had denied that it was, that the violence was merely the actions of foreign insurgents and those with al Qaeda connections. Here's the prompt:

DISTRICT 1 MEET 2007

Edward Wong of *The New York Times* wrote, "Is Iraq in a civil war? Though the Bush administration continues to insist that it is not, a growing number of American and Iraqi scholars, leaders and policy analysts say the fighting in Iraq meets the standard definition of civil war."

Explain briefly both sides of the question, "Is Iraq in a civil war?"

WRITING TIPS

1. **Think first.** Make sure you know what the question asks. Then figure out what your answer is and what your argument or thesis will be.
2. **Develop a plan** for your essay. Outline. Distill the essay to its essential points.
3. **Recognize arguments.** Anticipate and refute counter-arguments.
4. Begin writing. **Open with a paragraph or sentence that declares a statement.** State your thesis early.
5. **Develop the thesis.** Provide supporting statements, facts. Make certain your facts are correct.
6. **Work on transitional or directional words.** The essay should have a clear, organized, logical order, and information should flow from one idea to the next.
7. **Don't editorialize.** Be sure your writing is clear and free of grammatical errors.
8. **Don't repeat yourself.** Make a point once and move on.
9. **Paraphrase.** If you use direct quotes, they should be "hot fragments."
10. **End with a strong conclusion or kicker.** It is a good idea to restate your thesis and indicate its significance.

TIPS FROM STUDENTS WHO HAVE BEEN THERE, DONE THAT

- Study but have fun; don't stress out.
- **Read** personal opinion columns in newsmagazines and newspapers. They will help you learn to write essays.
- Use a wide variety of media and tests to study in preparation.
- **Take all practice tests** available.
- Start studying in September.

Again, don't re-write the prompt

Some say Iraq is in the midst of a civil war, that the violence there meets all the criteria of "civil war," just like the American Civil War met that criteria. But others disagree. They say the violence in Iraq is not a civil war. Sure, it's violence. But it's not civil war violence because there aren't two armies lined up against one another.

Both sides have their reasons for believing what they believe, but I think I'll stick with President Bush, who says Iraq is not having a civil war, and he ought to know. ■

And do not write an editorial.

Iraq isn't in a civil war. That's stupid. To even suggest it is plain dumb. Only a fool would think such a thing. The Iraq war does not meet the criteria for civil war because it's impossible to identify the combatants. The situation in Iraq is too complicated to be merely called a "civil war." It is an occupation, a Baathist insurgency, a sectarian conflict, a front in a war against terrorism, a scene of criminal gangsterism and a cycle of vengeance. But it's not a civil war.

Look, if it were a civil war, you'd have a Sunni Robert E. Lee going up against a Shiite U.S. Grant, right? Well, do you see a Lee or a Grant? Neither do I. The guys fighting over there are insurgents, suiciders — not soldiers. They don't wear uniforms. They don't fight battles. They just blow things up. And that isn't a civil war. That's just plain tacky. ■

But do be concise.

Former Secretary of State Colin Powell said Iraq's violence meets the standard of civil war and that if he were heading the State Department now, he might recommend that the administration use that term. But George W. Bush has avoided using the term "civil war" to describe the situation in Iraq. He has called the sectarian violence there "part of a pattern" of attacks by al Qaeda intended to divide Sunnis and Shiites.

What constitutes a civil war? Warring groups must be from the same country and fighting for control of the main government, a separatist state or to force a major change in policy. Well, that's pretty much what's happening in Iraq now. Insurgents are attempting to gain control of the government after the U.S. transferred sovereignty to an appointed Iraqi government in June, 2004. Rather than quelling violence, the new Iraqi government seems to have further alienated even moderate Sunnis.

The war is being fought by several groups: Shiites, Sunnis, Kurds. Each one is attempting to topple what it believes to be an illegitimate government. The fighting is taking place in mixed Sunni-Shiite areas such as Baghdad, Mosul and Baquba. Large areas of Iraq are relatively quiet, but those areas are relatively homogeneous and have few people.

Certainly, the carnage of the past year qualifies Iraq as being in the throes of civil war. Militias

continue to proliferate. At least 50,000 people have reportedly been killed in Iraq since March, 2003. More than 100,000 Iraqis a month are fleeing to Jordan or Syria to escape the bloodshed, according to the United Nations.

Meanwhile the Sunni insurgency has effectively encircled Baghdad, cutting it off from the north, south and west where there are entrenched Sunni communities. East of Baghdad is mostly unpopulated desert bordering Iran. Meanwhile, the Kurds have established their own government, virtually independent of rule from the central government in Baghdad. Shiite leaders have also called for autonomy for Iraq's Shiite regions — a likely precursor for demands of outright independence.

Finally, a critical element of civil war is the tendency of neighboring states to get involved, turning the conflict into regional wars. Covert foreign intervention is proceeding in Iraq, with Iran leading the way. Iran has funneled money, guns and other support to friendly Shiite groups and has set up a network of weapons, fighters and communications channels in the event of a full-blown civil war. Sunni powers in Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Turkey are scrambling to catch up. ■

Many essay prompts won't be this cut and dried. More often than not, the prompts ask contestants to analyze a situation from a number of perspectives, to draw upon a wide range of information and then explain cause and effect, action and reaction, how and why. For example, the following question allows students to examine the issue in political, cultural, social and economic terms.

STATE MEET 2006

Lynn Varner of the *Seattle Times* wrote, "The sleeping giant is awake, and boy, is he angry. Multiply tenfold the thousands of immigrants and their advocates who marched Monday down Seattle streets and you have an idea of the size of the political dilemma presented by immigration reform."

Mark Krikorian, executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies, said, "Today's immigration policy is founded on lies. It presupposes lying by almost everyone involved."

Explain the social, economic and political implications of the current immigration reform debate.

First, establish the context: An estimated 11 million illegal immigrants live in the United States. They fill millions of low-wage, unskilled jobs. Most are hard-working, law-abiding individuals who came here to provide a better life for their families. Slamming the door to illegal immigrants would add to employers' costs as they scramble to attract new workers with higher wages. Be that as it may, many argue that the current immigration system is dysfunctional and breeds disrespect for the law. A nation without borders is not a nation.

Next, list key points of immigration reform.

- House versus Senate reform proposals. In particular, House proposal that would make illegal immigration a felony offense and would build a wall along the U.S.-Mexican border.
- President Bush's reform plan establishing a guest worker program that offers eventual citizenship to at least some illegal immigrants.
- The split in Republican Party between pro-business and anti-immigration groups. Polls show some Republican voters oppose amnesty for those in the country illegally, but business groups want to assure a supply of low-wage workers for agriculture, construction, restaurant and other services.
- Democratic Party attempts to politicize the issue in preparation for the mid-term elections.

Next, consider the following:

Led by Colorado congressman Tom Tancredo, the House passed legislation that makes illegal presence in the U.S. a felony. It also calls for a crackdown on businesses that hire illegal aliens and the construction of a 700-mile fence along the Mexican border. The House bill also does not include a guest-worker program.

Tancredo has tapped into a reservoir of anti-immigrant sentiment in the U.S. Voters complain that illegal immigrants are taking jobs that would otherwise go to untrained U.S. citizens, overwhelming public schools, clogging the health care system and bankrupting welfare budgets. They claim that illegal aliens will return to their native countries if they can't find a job in the U.S., thus negating the necessity for deportations. These voters also say that poor border security makes it easy for would-be terrorists to sneak into the nation.

Meanwhile, President Bush has offered a guest-worker proposal that he said serves the American economy by allowing illegal immigrants to obtain legal status as temporary workers. But while temporary workers will have the opportunity to try to stay in the United States permanently, they will be encouraged to return to their home countries with financial incentives and, if they do decide to stay, will have to compete with migrants outside the country for the limited number of immigration slots, the president said.

He and his political advisers believe immigrant-friendly policies will help the GOP reach out to the fast-growing Latino vote.

Finally:

- The Senate Judiciary Committee has tried to come up with a compromise that would include greater border security, a guest-worker program and a way for illegal immigrants to "earn" citizenship. They say deporting 11 million people is unrealistic socially, culturally and economically.
- Democrats have implied that tough anti-immigrant legislation is not only hardhearted but also unChristian. Organized labor has

opposed a guest-worker provision. Senate Democrats killed compromise legislation that would have offered legal status to some illegal immigrants and offer eventual citizenship to many illegal immigrants already in the country.

- A compromise Senate bill failed. As Senator Edward Kennedy said, "The politics got ahead of policy on this in spite of everyone's efforts to separate this out." Now, politicians have the grueling task of finding common ground between the House and the Senate proposals at a time when it's advantageous to both Democrats and Republicans to keep the issue alive through the fall to energize voters. ■

DISTRICT MEET 2007

Dan Balz of the *Washington Post* wrote, "President Bush used his State of the Union address last night to try to revive his presidency against what may be the greatest odds any chief executive has faced in a generation. Other presidents have encountered difficult moments and have been dealt electoral setbacks, but few have faced the combination of obstacles that now confront this White House."

Carl Leubsdorf of the *Dallas Morning News* wrote, "You've got to say this for President Bush: He's willing to risk further decline in popularity to pursue the course he thinks is right in Iraq."

Explain the current course being pursued by the president in executing the war in Iraq, particularly in context to the options presented to him by the Iraq Study Group, the Democratic congressional leadership, military commanders and his closest advisers.

To get started, first make a list of the questions to be answered.

- First, what is the Bush policy in Iraq?
- Second, what were the recommendations of the Iraq Study Group?
- What do the generals think?
- What's the assessment of the intelligence agencies?
- What have been Bush's response to the Iraq Study Group?
- What's the political situation in the U.S. regarding the war in Iraq and Bush's conducting of the war?

Here goes:

- Bush's policy in Iraq? Stay the course. Victory is the only acceptable outcome. Defeat them there or fight them here. A troop surge will stabilize the country and give the Iraqi government time to find its footing.
- Recommendations of the Iraq Study Group: stabilize the country, then gradually withdraw U.S. troops. Engage Iraq's neighbors, especially Iran and Syria. Set milestones and timetables. Encourage Israel and Palestine to make progress toward peace.
- The generals' response to ISG and surge? Most favor the recommendations of the Iraq Study

DRAW UP AND APPLY A MATRIX

Though it may not be the case every time, often contestants should use a matrix consisting of state, national and international implications in sculpting their essay. In devising questions, we attempt to balance the following categories:

- Texas
- Texas with national ties
- National
- National with international ties
- International
- International with Texas ties

Of course, not every question will demand that students draw information from each of these categories.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN EDITORIALIZING & ANALYZING

EDITORIALIZING

Dick Cheney has been the victim of a shameless left-wing conspiracy that unmercifully hounds him because they hate freedom.

ANALYZING

Dick Cheney, whom Democrats have hounded and vilified, has provided his enemies plenty of ammunition to use against him.

Group.

- Intelligence reports? The situation in Iraq is deteriorating and the President's strategy is not working.
- Bush's response? A polite "no thanks" to virtually all proposals.
- Political situation at home: Bush's poll numbers continue to fall. Cheney's poll numbers barely scrape above 20 percent approval rating. The Democrats control the House and the Senate. Even Republicans are calling for a change in strategy and are distancing themselves from the President.

Don't rant. For example:

President Bush understands that America has a choice: defeat the terrorists in Iraq, or fight them in the streets here. It's that simple. Iraq is the central front of the war on terror.

Al Qaeda and the other terrorists hate freedom. They represent the greatest threat to democracy and the American way of life since Hitler rolled across Western Europe. But a lot of people refuse to recognize the threat to western civilization that radical Islam poses. They'd like to believe we can just pack up and come home and they'll leave us alone.

Well, they're nuts. Look what happened on 9/11. Don't think they're not itching to slam another half-dozen jetliners into our skyscrapers just as fast as possible. Failure in Iraq will send a message to the world: the U.S. is all saddle, no horse. It will embolden the enemy and discourage our allies. We must win, whatever the costs. We cannot afford to lose!

President Bush refuses to allow that to happen, even if it costs him his popularity. He's doing what he thinks is right. Progress is being made, even if it's slow going. One day, the country will be safe, secure and stable.

But not if we high-tail it out of there without finishing the job. Victory will take time, but if we remain steadfast, it will be ours!

Viva, Bush! ■

Don't do this either.

Iraq is lost. The war was built on lies. It was poorly executed and the post-war occupation has been a disaster for which more than 3,500 U.S. troops have given their lives.

It's time to pack up, leave and allow the Sunnis and the Shiites and the Kurds work this out for themselves. If Halliburton wants to hang around, no problem. But they shouldn't be milking the taxpayers.

Look, it really doesn't matter what the Iraq Study Group or the CIA or the Joint Chiefs of Staff say about Iraq, the fact is it's a disaster, and not one more American life should be sacrificed in what has become a civil war.

Why Bush is too stubborn to understand this is beyond me. ■

The problem with both of these pieces? Both are editorials that contain little or no real information. They're emotional rants, not interpretive essays.

Present salient facts, then explain what those facts mean. For example:

President George W. Bush arrived at the Capitol at his lowest point in public-opinion polls, facing new Democratic majorities in the House and the Senate and lame-duck status as attention turns toward a 2008 presidential campaign. Bush's problems all stem from the same issue: Iraq.

The bi-partisan Iraq Study Group challenged almost every significant aspect of the administration's Iraq policy. It called for a temporary increase in troops devoted to training and equipping the Iraqi forces, but then for a gradual troop withdrawal. The report urged Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's Iraqi government to achieve a series of milestones but added that the U.S. should not make an open-ended commitment to keep a large number of troops in Iraq. It also called for the U.S. to engage in diplomacy with Iraq's neighbors, most notably Iran and Syria, and to encourage a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian problem.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff supported the ISG's conclusions that rather than sending in a new influx of U.S. troops, American advisory teams embedded with Iraqi forces should be quadrupled so Iraqis can take control more quickly. But rather than paving the way for bipartisan compromise, the ISG drew sharp condemnation from the right, with hawks saying it advocated a U.S. retreat. Aware of the impact that Iraq had on the mid-term elections and likely will have in the 2008 presidential primaries, moderates said they hoped the President would adopt the group's principle recommendations and begin the process of disengagement.

Bush thanked the ISG's authors and said he welcomed the report but for the better part has brushed aside its suggestions as impractical or unrealistic. Rather than disengaging, Bush called for committing as many as 21,000 new troops to Iraq to try to bring order to Baghdad and crush the insurgency. He also proposed increasing the size of the U.S. military by more than 90,000 over the next five years, the largest military buildup since the Cold War as a way to provide long-term relief for forces stretched thin by exhaustive deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan. Though he warned the Iraqi government that American patience was not inexhaustible and that if it does not move against Shiite death squads, the U.S. may move out, he also insisted that U.S. units will stay until "victory" is achieved. Failure in Iraq and a quick withdrawal would be a disaster for regional stability, for the war on terror and for U.S. credibility in the world, Bush said.

Rather than engaging Iraq or Syria diplomatically, Bush took a confrontational tone with both. He dispatched additional warships to the Persian Gulf and approved the arrests of five Iranian diplomats and staff

members who, he said, were aiding terrorists in Iraq. Asked if he was willing to persist in Iraq even if it meant going against the will of the American people, he has repeatedly said he will follow the path that leads to victory.

Polls taken shortly after Bush's speech to the nation outlining "a new way forward" for Iraq showed that Americans oppose the troop surge and overwhelmingly believe the war is going badly. As one newspaper columnist wrote, "With his new Iraq plan, President Bush has united the country. Pretty much everyone in America is now against him." Democrats are uniting around a theme of global diplomacy and congressional review, and the administration is facing massive defections within the GOP.

Meanwhile, the U.S. intelligence community released a starkly pessimistic assessment of the situation in Iraq, and the Pentagon's review of how to improve the situation in Iraq has outlined three basic options: send in more troops, shrink the force but stay longer, or pull out.

Two days before he resigned as secretary of defense, Donald Rumsfeld submitted a classified memo to the White House that acknowledged that the Bush administration's strategy in Iraq was not working and called for a major course correction. In particular, he suggested the administration consider a campaign to lower public expectations.

Finally, a growing number of Republican senators, led by Virginia's John Warner and Nebraska's Chuck Hegel, think Bush's surge strategy is flawed and doubt that the war can be won militarily, as do a number of top military men inside and outside government. ■

DISTRICT 1, 2007

Warren Richey of the *Christian Science Monitor* wrote, "The potential replacement of Justice Sandra Day O'Connor with appeals court Judge Samuel Alito sets the stage for a series of significant shifts in the legal landscape at the U.S. Supreme Court."

What are the issues? Explain how they are likely to change with Judge Alito on the nation's highest court.

The replacement of Sandra Day O'Connor with Justice Alito will in all likelihood bring into play some of the nation's most divisive issues, including abortion, affirmative action, campaign finance reform and the death penalty.

As a Justice Department lawyer in the Reagan administration, he wrote that he was proud of his contributions in cases in which the government argued in the Supreme Court that racial and ethnic quotas should not be allowed and that the Constitution does not protect a legal right to an abortion.

And it will possibly alter the internal dynamics of the sharply divided nine-member court in which Justice O'Connor has single-handedly shaped much of American law by deftly wielding a decisive fifth vote in major cases.

Major issues likely to change with Alito on the court:

- Abortion and privacy issues. Where O'Connor rejected restrictions on abortion, Alito is likely to uphold them, even though he said during his confirmation hearings that he would approach any abortion case "with an open mind." Still, in an 1985 memo, he wrote that the landmark abortion case, *Roe v. Wade*, was wrongly decided by the Supreme Court and should at some point be overturned.
- Affirmative action. Again, O'Connor voted to uphold an affirmative action plan at the University of Michigan, Alito is more likely to vote with conservatives who viewed the plan as an impermissible quota system.
- Individual rights. Alito tends to defer to established institutions — government, police boards, prison authorities, and especially corporations — in their legal battles with individuals. Critics claim he has been consistently hostile to victims of discrimination and in employment cases.
- Church and State. Alito is likely to side with conservatives on issues such as the public display of religious symbols such as the Ten Commandments. During his confirmation hearings, he told Senators that the high court may have gone too far in recent years in keeping the church out of public life.
- Death penalty. Alito is expected to side with conservatives who reject the "evolving standard of decency" test, which made it more difficult for states to carry out executions. He is also more likely to let stand death sentences despite claims that defense lawyers weren't effective enough or that new evidence might disprove an earlier conviction.
- Presidential power. It is unclear how Justice Alito will approach future cases involving checks on presidential power. In his confirmation hearing, he said, "Nobody in this country is above the law, and that includes the president." He added that the president must follow the Constitution and laws enacted consistent with the Constitution.

Thus, some feel he is likely to side with Justice Scalia, who in 2004 completely rejected the White House position involving an American held indefinitely in military custody as an enemy combatant.

But others disagree and think he will be more willing than O'Connor to grant the executive branch broad power to respond unilaterally to what it views as national emergencies. This would have a significant impact on matters such as the harsh treatment of terror suspects and the flap over President Bush's authorization of surveillance without court-authorized warrants within the U.S. ■

LEGIBILITY

While legibility is not a criteria for the essay, it is human nature to respond positively to papers that are clean and neat, and to respond negatively to those papers that are messy and difficult to read.

Write clearly.

Correct mistakes by crossing out, with one, simple line, the error.

Rewrite as necessary and as time permits.

THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT

- Affordable Healthcare Act, Obamacare
- Afghanistan conflict
- Al Qaeda in Pakistan and Ayman al-Zawahiri
- American auto industry
- Barack Obama
- Chris Christie
- Climate change
- Conflict in Nigeria
- Debt ceiling
- Drug war in Mexico
- Ebola
- Entitlement programs
- European debt crisis
- European Union & the Euro
- Fracking
- Gene therapy, manipulation
- Grover Norquist
- Harry Reid
- Hassan Rouhani
- Health care reform
- Hillary Clinton
- Immigration crisis in U.S.
- Iran's nuclear program
- Israel, Gaza, West Bank, Hamas
- Jasmine Revolution
- John Kerry
- Kim Jong-un
- Malaysian Airlines
- Military overstretch
- Nancy Pelosi and John Boehner
- North Korea international relations
- Priorities for Democrats and Republicans
- Rick Perry, Greg Abbott and Wendy Davis
- Same-sex marriage debate
- Severe weather
- State of the U.S. economy
- Sustainability
- Tea Party
- Texas drought
- U.S. housing industry
- Vladimir Putin
- World population issues
- Xi Jinping

STATE MEET, 2007

For the first time, the prompt was an editorial cartoon that showed Alberto Gonzales at a microphone, saying “No really. I feel fine. Why do you keep asking?”

Behind him are two guys digging a grave.

Below the cartoon was a one-word directive: explain.

Well, contestants would have needed to know who Alberto Gonzales is, where he came from, what positions and offices he's held in Texas and nationally. They'd need to understand his relationship with President Bush. They must know the details of the controversy swirling around him personally and around the Justice Department. They must know something about the firings of eight U.S. attorneys and about Monica Goodling.

No doubt, it was one of the most challenging prompts ever, but contestants very much enjoyed it. Here's the sample essay we provided contestants after the contest. It is far more exhaustive than what judges expected from participants. Still, it illustrates the wide range of information which students could draw upon.

The calls for Alberto Gonzales to resign have come from liberals such as Nancy Pelosi and conservatives such as Newt Gingrich. Though President Bush has steadfastly supported the former White House counsel, politicians on both sides of the aisle say his botched handling of the firings of U.S. attorneys has destroyed his credibility as the nation's top law enforcer. Sen. Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania said Department of Justice is in a state of disrepair, “perhaps even dysfunctional.”

Gonzales came to the Justice Department after serving as counsel to Bush as governor and secretary of state. Bush appointed him to the Texas Supreme Court and then as White House counsel. He came to the Justice Department, promising not to confuse the roles as White House counsel and Attorney General.

But as White House counsel, Gonzales became a vocal defender of some of the administration's most contentious anti-terrorism initiatives, including the National Security Agency's eavesdropping program. He also authored the notorious “torture memo” that greenlighted new interrogation techniques for war-on-terrorism detainees.

But it is the firing of eight U.S. attorneys that has most severely damaged the Justice Department. Some of the dismissed prosecutors complained at Congressional hearings that lawmakers tried to influence political investigations. Several also said there had been Justice Department attempts to intimidate them.

Kyle Sampson, Gonzales' former chief of staff, testified that he had consulted regularly with the attorney general about dismissing U.S. attorneys,

disputing Gonzales' public account of his role as very limited. E-mails between the Justice Department and the White House contradicted the administration's earlier contention that Bush's aides had only limited involvement in the firings.

Gonzales initially called the firings “an overblown personnel matter,” and said the dismissals were performance-related, not based on political considerations. He claimed he was not directly involved in the decisions. But testimony from his former chief of staff as well as e-mails between the department and the White House contradicted those claims, leading to a public apology from Gonzales.

It was also learned that long before they fired a group of U.S. attorneys, senior White House and Justice Department officials were already discussing some politically connected insiders for their replacements, according to documents that contradict repeated statements by department officials that no successors had been selected before the dismissals.

Questions have also been raised about the replacements for the dismissed U.S. attorneys. One is a former assistant to Karl Rove who has no prosecutorial experience. Monica Goodling, who resigned rather than testify before Congress, has come to represent the politicizing of the Justice Department: young, inexperienced, politically ambitious. The Justice Department is now investigating whether Goodling improperly tried to fill vacancies at the agency with Republicans loyal to the Bush administration by determining the political affiliations of job applicants before they were hired as entry-level prosecutors — potentially a violation of civil service laws and a break with a tradition of nonpartisanship in the career ranks at the Justice Department.

The Senate Judiciary Committee has issued a subpoena to Gonzales for all Justice Department e-mail messages about the firings involving Karl Rove. The White House has said it is trying to recover e-mails that were lost but has not promised to give any to congressional investigators.

In his testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Gonzales apologized for shoddily treating the U.S. attorneys and he took responsibility for the decision to dismiss the prosecutors. In several hours before the committee, he said he had done nothing improper in firing the eight prosecutors but conceded the case had been badly handled. At the same time, he said 71 times that he either could not recall or did not remember conversations or events surrounding the dismissals.

Gonzales' supporters say the firings of the U.S. attorneys are much ado about nothing, that all U.S. attorney hirings are political, and that no laws or ethics have been violated. That's not necessarily true. If any of the U.S. attorneys were replaced to interfere with a valid prosecution or as punishment for refusing to misuse their offices, that could constitute obstruction of justice. If Justice Department officials

knowingly misled Congress' investigation by providing knowingly incomplete information, that would be a crime.

Even if it were true, Gonzales has allowed a scandal to be created where there was none, and his clumsy handling of the firings continue to drain time, effort and credibility from the Bush administration that could be far better spent elsewhere. Friends and foes alike say he has failed to fulfill his promise of distancing himself from the White House and its political agenda. The issue in this case is whether Bush administration officials went too far and engaged in unacceptable actions — such as pressuring the attorneys to use their powers for a specific electoral benefit of the GOP.

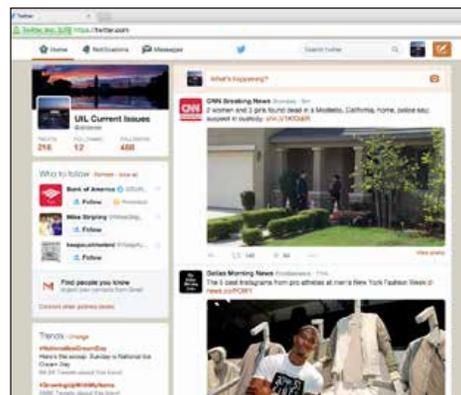
Two final points: The former leader of the Justice Department team that prosecuted a landmark lawsuit against tobacco companies said that Bush administration political appointees ordered her to take steps that weakened the government's racketeering case. She added that Bush loyalists in Gonzales' office began micromanaging the team's strategy in the final weeks of the 2005 trial, to the detriment of the government's claim that the industry had conspired to lie to U.S. smokers.

Finally, FBI Director Robert Mueller admitted the bureau had abused its expanded authority under the USA PATRIOT Act to seize the personal records of thousands of Americans and legal residents. ■

Not for the weak of heart.

No doubt, the essay is difficult — daunting for the prepared, incomprehensible for the unprepared. The essay prompt compares to those that might be asked of a college junior who is enrolled in a rigorous political science or government course.

We make no apologies for this. Based on conversations we've had with students and coaches alike, they wouldn't have it any other way, either.



TWITTER

Follow the UIL Current Issues & Events contest on Twitter.



EMAIL

Contact the state contest director at any time at uilcurrentissues@gmail.com.



ONLINE

Learn more about the contest online at www.uiltexas.org/academics/current-issues-and-events

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For additional practice tests & invitational meet materials for the Current Issues & Events contests, visit the UIL website for "Additional Resources."

ESSAY PROMPTS

from past CI&E contests

CAN YOU GUESS WHAT THE ESSAY PROMPT WILL BE?

Possibly so. Each year, the contest writer looks at some of the biggest — that is, the most significant, most profound news events of the year.

Also, the contest writer will ask questions that require contestants to synthesize, analyze and interpret — not simply regurgitate names and places. What does it all mean and how do issues or events connect to another and any social and economic consequences of specific immigration reform proposals, for example.

INVITATIONAL A

Explain the root causes of why so many high school graduates not in college are not working fulltime; why so few plan on attending college; and the implications on this on both students and the country as a whole.

INVITATIONAL B

Discuss how the burgeoning population of the nation's youngest ethnic group (by far) will likely affect the future of both the Republican and Democratic parties and how the changing demographics will affect the role of Latinos and Hispanics in future elections.

DISTRICT 1

Explain the complexity of the student loan debt problem as you see it and how it will be solved (or not) in the next few years.

DISTRICT 2

School shootings have been in the news during the last few months and both Democrats and Republicans are racing forward with new ideas on: protecting schools from such future violence, gun control, the Second Amendment, background checks and mental health screening. Explain the complexity of the problem as you see it and how it will be solved (or not) in the next few years.

REGION MEET 2013

How seriously should the United States view cyber security and the threat of a possible cyber attack? Discuss the potential economic, social, and political implications if the United States were to fall victim to one. In doing so, suggest measures the United States might take to better prevent and protect itself from a cyber threat. Give details and use examples as much as possible.

REGION MEET 2015

In the 1700s, the U.S. colonies fought a war at least in part for religious freedom. In the mid-1800s, the United States fought a civil war over slavery. By the 1960s, allowing blacks to vote took center stage, leading to the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr. pushed for an end to segregation and racism in America. Yet in 2014 and 2015, numerous incidents — apparently motivated by racism or religious conflict — made the news all over the world. Describe some of these events and discuss their implications.

STATE MEET 2013

Objective military observers do not feel North Korea has the capability to hit the United States with a missile, as they have claimed, but they could threaten U.S. troops and allies in the region such as South Korea, Japan, Guam or elsewhere in the northern Pacific. Discuss the options the U.S. can take to diffuse this situation — now and in the future, noting any political, international or military implications that may need to be dealt with. Give details and use examples as much as possible.

STATE MEET 2014

In April, the U.S. Supreme Court eliminated a major provision of the nation's campaign finance law. By a 5-to-4 vote, the justices removed the cap on the total amount of money that donors can contribute to candidates and parties in each election. Before the ruling, the aggregate limit was \$123,000. Now there is no limit.

Discuss the implications of campaign finance in general, and why the subject of unlimited money being spent in elections has inflamed people on all sides of the issue. Feel free to add any historical precedents you find worthwhile or pertinent.



**University
Interscholastic
League**



**CURRENT
ISSUES
and EVENTS**

 @UILCIANDE

RUBRIC

for the CI&E Essay

Judges may award all or no points. This is a working document for as many as three judges. Final points are a compromise among judges, NOT A RUNNING POINT TOTAL or pure point averaging. Return this form to the student with the objective portion of the contest.

■ **POINTS AWARDED:**

An 8-10 ESSAY opens with a declarative statement that extends the prompt without re-stating it. The thesis is supported by substantial, relevant information that analyzes the prompt from a range of perspectives — for example, political, social, cultural and economic. It does not provide a mere shopping list of facts. It interprets the facts without editorializing. The essay is well written and organized with few spelling, grammar or punctuation errors. The essay is clear, precise and succinct.

A 5-7 ESSAY offers a clear thesis with limited development. It either deals with one aspect in depth or with all aspects more superficially while providing limited analysis. Generally good writing and organization skills displayed. May contain errors of fact that do not seriously detract from the quality of the essay.

A 2-4 ESSAY lacks a thesis or presents a confused or undeveloped thesis. It deals with the prompt in a superficial way and offers no analysis. Instead, it tends to editorialize. May contain major fact errors, display poor writing skills and rely on bloated, pretentious language.

A 0-1 ESSAY displays little or no understanding of the prompt. The response is poorly written and organized and may contain significant fact, grammar, punctuation and/or spelling errors that detract from the clarity of the response.

Judge 1	Judge 2	Judge 3	Consensus
---------	---------	---------	-----------

Comments:

OVERALL ESSAY SCORE _____
(maximum of 10 points)

OBJECTIVE SCORE _____
(score from the objective portion of the test)

OVERALL SCORE _____
(add essay score to objective score)



University
Interscholastic
League



GRADING

the CI&E Essay

1. Distribute contests to students, who will then have 60 minutes to finish.
2. Grade the objective portions of the test.
3. Enter results of the objective portion of the contest into the UIL online entry system. Do not add essay scores to determine the overall team winner!
4. To determine the overall individual winner, pull the top eight papers. In the event of ties, select enough papers to fill eight slots. For example:

Slot	Place	# of correct answers
1	1	36
2	2 (tie)	35
3	2 (tie)	35
4	4	34
5	5 (tie)	32
6	5 (tie)	32
7	5 (tie)	32
8	8	30

Tie for last slot: If a tie for the eighth slot exists, then grade all those tied for the eighth slot, as in the example below. Then, add the scores from the essay portion of the contest to the objective scores.

Slot	Obj. only place	Objective score	Essay score	Total score	Final place
1 (Joe)	1st	36	5	41	2 (tie to be broken)
2 (Bo)	2nd (tie)	35	7	42	1
3 (Moe)	2nd (tie)	35	3	38	5
4 (Sue)	4th	34	7	41	2 (tie to be broken)
5 (Flo)	5th (tie)	32	8	40	4
6 (Bill)	5th (tie)	32	5	37	6
7 (Mary)	5th (tie)	32	4	36	did not place
8 (Lina)	8th (tie)	26	7	33	did not place
(Jim)	8th (tie)	26	6	32	did not place

Tie for second place: To break tie for second place, judge Joe's essay against Sue's essay. Award places accordingly. Break all ties for first through sixth place.

5. In a three-person judging panel, must every judge grade each essay? Yes. If more than one person judges essays, make certain that judges reach agreement on which essay is the best. Do not rely solely on point totals. One judge may be more stringent than another. It is possible that a weaker essay, graded by a more lenient judge, can be awarded more points than a stronger essay, graded by a more strict judge.
6. Judges should not be excused until verification is completed and results announced as official.

CI&E

CURRENT
ISSUES
and EVENTS

 @UILCIANDE