



TNCore

*Tennessee Department of Education's
Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program
for English Language Arts*

**Grade 8 Writing
Practice Task I
2014–2015**

TCAP Grade 8 Writing

Practice Task I

Directions

Student Directions

Today you will be taking the Grade 8 Writing Task. The task is made up of two texts and two prompts. For each prompt, you are to plan and write an essay about the text(s) according to the instructions provided. Your essays will be scored as rough drafts, but you should watch for careless errors.

There are some important things to remember as you complete the task:

- The time you have for reading both texts and answering the prompts will be 120 minutes.
- Read each prompt carefully and think about the best way to answer it.
- Write only about the texts and prompts you are given.
- You may complete pre-writing activities and notes before beginning your response, but do not write your response on the same pages as your pre-writing activities or notes.
- If you do not know the answer to a prompt, skip it and go on to the next prompt. You may return to it later if there is time.

Topic

The Electoral College is the system that officially elects the president and vice president of the United States every four years. This task describes the Electoral College and discusses different views of the system.

Texts

- **“What is the Electoral College?”** by Elizabeth Deatrick
- **“Counterpoint: Why We Need the Electoral College”** by Jeffrey Bowman and Tracey M. DiLascio

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Practice Task I

Text 1

Text 1 Introduction

In “**What is the Electoral College?**” by **Elizabeth Deatrick**, the author describes the system of the Electoral College.

Please read “What is the Electoral College?” and then answer Prompt 1.

What Is the Electoral College?

Elizabeth Deatrick

1 **Voting For a President Is Simple, Right?**

2 You go to the polling station, get into a booth, and indicate which candidate you prefer. Then
3 you get an “I voted!” sticker and wait to find out who won. Well, sort of.

4 In fact, what really happens to your vote isn’t quite that simple. A whole complicated process,
5 known as the Electoral College system, stands between your vote and who actually becomes the
6 president. When you cast your vote, you’re not actually voting directly for a candidate. Instead,
7 you’re voting for an elector, a person who has been chosen by his or her political party to
8 represent its presidential candidate. Each state is allocated a number of electors.

9 This number is equal to the number of its U.S. senators (two for all states), plus the number of its
10 U.S. representatives (determined by a state’s population . . .). Once all the votes have been
11 counted, the candidate who wins the state’s popular vote receives all of that state’s electoral
12 votes. This is the case for 48 out of 50 states. In Nebraska and Maine, the state is divided up
13 along Congressional district lines. The candidates in those states receive electoral votes
14 proportional to the number of congressional districts in which they win the popular vote. The two
15 statewide electoral votes go to the candidate receiving the largest statewide tally.

16 **Looking Back**

17 So how can this complicated system possibly be better than the simple “one person, one vote”
18 approach? After all, most of the time the outcomes of the popular vote and electoral vote are the
19 same—although there have been a few memorable exceptions. . . .

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Practice Task I

Text 1

20 The answer lies in the history of the Electoral College itself. In the early days of the
21 United States, when the Constitution was being drafted, the Founding Fathers debated the best
22 method of electing a new president. There were several major obstacles to a successful election.
23 The most important was that the individual states weren't used to working as one big country
24 yet. The newly united states were suspicious of one another, and the Founders worried that each
25 would simply vote for a candidate that would place its interests over those of the other states. In
26 that case, the candidate with support from the state with the largest population would almost
27 always win. In addition, the Founding Fathers wanted to avoid a political party system like we
28 have today. They believed that a president should be chosen for his ability to govern, not his
29 political agenda.

30 To establish their system, the Founders looked to the Ancient Roman Republic. They based the
31 structure of the Electoral College on its Centurial Assembly system. Under that method, the
32 population of adult men eligible to vote was divided into groups of 100, called centuries. When
33 an issue was presented, the members of the century would all cast a ballot. The decision
34 receiving the majority of votes then became one vote, which was cast in the Roman Senate by
35 the century's representative.

36 The Founders tried to set up a similar system: each state would select the most informed
37 members of their region to be electors. The electors would be chosen however the states
38 wished—for many years, the decisions were left entirely up to the state legislatures. (Now,
39 electors are nominated by their party, or campaign in their own states to be elected to the
40 position.) The number of electors per state would depend partly on population, but each state
41 would also be guaranteed two. After the electors had been chosen, each state's electors would
42 gather together and vote for the person they believed was best suited to be the future president. In
43 theory and hopefully in practice, the electors would be intelligent enough to disregard where a
44 candidate came from, and only consider whether or not he or she would make a good president.
45 The system would eliminate the problem of large states dominating the polls, and the potential
46 for political parties to form. . . .

47 Of course, the Electoral College system didn't work out quite the way the Founders hoped.
48 Although it kept large states from dominating the polls, political parties surfaced almost
49 immediately. Today, a typical presidential election ballot has the candidate's name in large
50 letters, and the elector's name in tiny type or not at all. The College continues to address the
51 balance between large and small states, but the assumption of why we need the Electoral College
52 has changed: Today, individuals make their own decision about which candidate to mark on their
53 ballot for president, and electoral votes are more of a stand-in for the popular decision. They also

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Text 1

54 turn the election into a game of strategy for the candidates and their political parties---a very
55 different one than it would be if candidates were merely trying to win the popular vote.

56 **Not Perfect**

57 Clearly some problems exist with this system: It's possible for a presidential candidate to win the
58 popular vote and lose the Electoral College vote. . . .

59 So, if the electoral system has flaws, what would it take to change it? A lot! Small states have a
60 vested interest in keeping the system in place. Remember, all states, big or small, automatically
61 have two electors, one for each senator, plus a number of additional electors based on the state's
62 population. This means that the smaller states actually have more of an electoral vote impact per
63 person than the larger states. Changing to a popular vote would rob them of that power. Since
64 Electoral College procedures are written into the Constitution, a $\frac{3}{4}$ majority of states would be
65 needed to approve a Constitutional amendment doing away with the electoral vote—an
66 extremely unlikely event!

Deatrick, Elizabeth. "Game Theory and the Electoral College." *Odyssey*, Oct. 2012. Vol. 21 Issue 8, p. 10–14. © by Carus Publishing Company. Reproduced with permission. All Cricket Media material is copyrighted by Carus Publishing Company, d/b/a Cricket Media, and/or various authors and illustrators. Any commercial use or distribution of material without permission is strictly prohibited. Please visit <http://www.cricketmedia.com/info/licensing2> for licensing and <http://www.cricketmedia.com> for subscriptions.

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Practice Task 1

Prompt 1

Prompt 1

You have now read “What is the Electoral College?” In this text, the author develops and discusses several ideas.

Determine one central idea and write an essay that explains how the author develops the central idea over the course of the text. Be sure to cite evidence from the text to support your analysis. Follow the conventions of standard written English.

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Text 2

Text 2 Introduction

In “Counterpoint: Why We Need the Electoral College” by Jeffrey Bowman and Tracey M. DiLascio, the authors argue why the Electoral College system is necessary.

Please read “Counterpoint: Why We Need the Electoral College” and then answer Prompt 2.

Counterpoint: Why We Need the Electoral College

Jeffrey Bowman and Tracey M. DiLascio

1 **A Republic, Not a Democracy**

2 In the debates about the creation of the U.S. Constitution, the framers had to devise a system that
3 would allow the states to put aside their differences and work together as a nation. Therefore, the
4 Constitution was designed so that the interests of the nation trumped the interests of the
5 individual states. Through the give-and-take of compromise in the legislative branch, the states
6 find ways to set aside regional differences and work toward the national interest, with the
7 executive branch providing guidance. This is where the Electoral College comes into play.

8 The framers wanted to form a system where the general population could not elect a president
9 who did not have the national interest at heart. At the same time, they did not want to give
10 Congress the right to decide who would be president, since it would make the executive branch
11 beholden to the legislative branch. For both these reasons, they decided to create the Electoral
12 College.

13 The Electoral College is the board that actually elects the president. The people vote for electors,
14 who then cast their state’s vote in the Electoral College. Whichever candidate wins a plurality of
15 votes in the Electoral College becomes the next president. Each state has a number of electors
16 equal to the number of Senators and Representatives from that state. Thus, states with higher
17 populations receive more electoral votes.

18 Of course, there are some obvious contradictions. First and foremost, the winner of the popular
19 vote might not be the winner of the electoral vote. Moreover, there is no law stipulating that the
20 electors must vote for the people’s choice. While these facts might seem contrary to the idea of
21 democracy, it must be stressed that the framers were not democrats. They feared that direct
22 popular election of the president would divide the people into voting solely for local candidates
23 for what was designed as a national office. As a result, the framers allowed for electors that

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Text 2

24 could, if need be, prevent an unqualified candidate from reaching the presidency. Historically,
25 there have been only a handful of times where “faithless electors” have not voted for the people’s
26 choice, but never in large enough numbers to affect the election’s outcome. However, there have
27 been several instances in which candidates won the popular vote but lost the electoral vote.

28 Practice and Theory

29 Controversy has dogged¹ the Electoral College from the very beginning. In 1800, 1824, 1876,
30 1888, and 2000, the presidential elections were thrown into disarray when no candidate won a
31 plurality of electoral votes. As a result, the elections had to be decided either in the House of
32 Representatives or by the courts. In the aftermath of each election, there were calls and appeals
33 to change the way American presidential elections are held. Many reformers want to get rid of
34 the Electoral College and switch to direct popular election of the president. The Electoral
35 College, according to its critics, is undemocratic and subverts the will of the people.

36 This viewpoint denies the vast majority of times the Electoral College has functioned as
37 intended. Any candidate wanting to win the presidential election must think beyond the interests
38 of any single region and express a moderate viewpoint that has national appeal. . . .

39 Moreover, on a state by state level, the Electoral College helps protect the interests of minority
40 groups. When political analysts talk about the “Cuban vote” or the “African American vote” or
41 the “Jewish vote,” they are referring to one of the quirks in the Electoral College. Often, these
42 minorities represent a significant voting bloc on a statewide level, where their votes can be a
43 deciding factor in winning the state. Minority groups have very important influence in the
44 so-called battleground states or swing states, where many ethnic minorities have organized into
45 voting blocs. During presidential elections, most candidates cater to these minority groups in
46 order to win electoral votes. . . .

47 Conclusion

48 No electoral system is perfect. The Electoral College is a flawed but functional system. While it
49 is easy to call for its abolition in the aftermath of a contentious election, few reformers have
50 presented a demonstrably better system. The framers of the Constitution wanted to keep the
51 popular passions that go along with democracy in check. In this respect, the Electoral College
52 works exactly as it was designed to work. Fortunately, one of the strengths of our system is that
53 we are free to make changes to any aspect of government. Before we go about tinkering with the
54 machinery, however, it would serve us well to remember why the machine was designed in the
55 first place, and how it has performed more or less to our expectations for the past two centuries.

Bowman, Jeffrey and DiLascio, Tracey. “Counterpoint: Why We Need the Electoral College.” *Points of View: Electoral College*, 2014. EBSCO Information Services: Massachusetts. Used by permission.

¹ **dogged:** to trouble; to follow persistently

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Prompt 2

Prompt 2

You have now read two texts relating to the Electoral College:

- **“What is the Electoral College?”** by Elizabeth Deatrick
- **“Counterpoint: Why We Need the Electoral College”** by Jeffrey Bowman and Tracey M. DiLascio

Write an argumentative essay that supports or opposes the idea of reforming the Electoral College. Be sure to cite evidence from both texts to support your argument. Follow the conventions of standard written English.

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