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

**Grades 9–10 Writing
Practice Task I
2014–2015**

TCAP Grades 9–10 Writing Practice Task I

Directions

Student Directions

Today you will be taking the Grades 9–10 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

Numerous statistics have shown that the number of people who read for pleasure has declined sharply in recent years. This task will examine some of the causes and consequences of this decline.

Texts

- **“Reading for Pleasure Is in Painful Decline”** by Stephen L. Carter
- **“Twilight of the Books”** by Caleb Crain

TCAP Grades 9–10 Writing Practice Task I

Text 1

Text 1 Introduction

In “**Reading for Pleasure Is in Painful Decline**” by **Stephen L. Carter**, the author discusses the decline of reading for pleasure in our society and examines some of the possible long-term consequences of this trend.

Please read “Reading for Pleasure Is in Painful Decline” and then answer Prompt 1.

Reading for Pleasure Is in Painful Decline

Stephen L. Carter

- 1 Exiting the movie theater after a showing of “The Hunger Games: Catching Fire,” I overheard
2 the following conversation between two teenagers:
- 3 Girl 1: “So, what happened at the end?”
- 4 Girl 2: “You have to read the book.”
- 5 Girl 1: “You know I don’t read. Just tell me!”
- 6 Curmudgeon that I am, I was tempted to draw from this snippet sorrowful and far-reaching
7 conclusions about the state of reading among our youth. . . .
- 8 Being a nonreader is nothing to be proud of. A rise in proud nonreaders would bode ill for the
9 nation’s future.
- 10 Let us distinguish (as the scholarship does) between what we might call reading as obligation
11 and reading for fun. Presumably, Girl 1 was not suggesting that she skips her academic
12 assignments (although I am willing to believe that she, ahem, economizes on them). It’s likely
13 that her statement “You know I don’t read” meant “You know I don’t read except when I’m
14 forced to.”
- 15 Every now and then, we tend to go into a tizzy about the decline of reading among young people.
16 I do, too. But I wonder whether we might be tizzying for the wrong reasons. The tendency
17 nowadays is to sound the alarm by pointing to the pretty well-established correlation between

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Practice Task 1

Text 1

18 reading for fun and academic achievement. Reason for concern, yes—but more basic principles
19 are at stake.

20 A decade ago, a National Endowment for the Arts report, “Reading at Risk,” linked the rapid fall
21 in “literary” reading to a decline in civil participation generally. We should be especially
22 worried, the report warned, if we believe “that active and engaged readers lead richer intellectual
23 lives than nonreaders and that a well-read citizenry is essential to a vibrant democracy.”

24 I am one of those believers. Democracy needs readers—in particular, readers of literature.
25 Tackling a book (whether print or e-¹) is a considerable undertaking, requiring an investment of
26 time, attention and serious thought—and the tougher the text, the more serious the thought. In
27 return, we readers learn the importance of reflection, of patience, of trying to understand
28 another’s point of view—all skills that are vital to democratic politics and seriously in decline
29 across the spectrum.

30 The more of us who reduce reading to no more than an unpleasant obligation, the faster we
31 descend toward the world of Ray Bradbury’s novel *Fahrenheit 451*. In a much-quoted and much-
32 misconstrued passage in Bradbury’s masterpiece, the fire chief, Capt. Beatty, is explaining why
33 they burn books: “What traitors books can be! You think they’re backing you up, and they turn
34 on you. Others can use them, too, and there you are, lost in the middle of the moor, in a great
35 welter of nouns and verbs and adjectives.”

36 Beatty’s point—and thus Bradbury’s—is often overlooked: The censorship that the novel
37 describes moved from the bottom up, not the top down. The motive force wasn’t the regime’s
38 desire to stifle dissent; the motive force was the public’s desire to stifle complexity. To the end
39 of his days, Bradbury insisted that his polemic² wasn’t against state power; it was against a
40 public that decided to stop reading.

41 Reading that challenges us is important—for adults and young people alike. I don’t mean reading
42 that challenges our ideas; I mean reading that calls upon significant intellectual resources. I mean
43 books that are hard.

44 Even if one accepts the conclusion of recent research that reading for fun among the young is
45 enjoying a resurgence . . . the surge is due largely to the explosion of the market for young adult

¹ **e-book:** a book published in electronic form instead of traditional print, readable on computers and other devices.

² **polemic:** a strong, often negative, statement of opinion

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Text 1

46 fiction. (The book a teenage girl was most likely to have read in 2011, the most recent year for
47 which data are available, is *The Hunger Games*.)

48 Young adult fiction is a fine thing, but the lingering question is whether the upsurge will prove a
49 gateway to literature of greater complexity or whether young people will sit around waiting for
50 the next big trilogy, until at some point they age out of reading for fun completely. We don't yet
51 know the answer, but I remain hopeful.

52 Which brings us back to the two teenagers outside the movie theater.

53 In my optimistic imagination, I see Girl 2 refusing Girl 1's entreaties, and Girl 1, still perplexed
54 about an ending that even otherwise favorable reviewers found "an incoherent, rapid blur,"
55 decided to pick up the novel after all, and so enjoyed it that she embarked on a lifelong quest to
56 read ever more difficult literary texts, and so to embrace the patience, tolerance and appreciation
57 for complexity so crucial to democracy.

58 On the other hand, maybe she just looked up a summary on the Internet.

Carter, Stephen L. "Reading for Pleasure Is in Painful Decline." *StarTribune*. Dec. 8, 2013. Used by permission.
www.startribune.com/opinion/commentaries/234824601.html

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***TCAP Grades 9–10 Writing
Practice Task I***

Prompt 1

Prompt 1

You have now read “Reading for Pleasure Is in Painful Decline.” In this text, Stephen L. Carter makes an argument regarding the impact of the decline of pleasure reading.

Write an essay in which you determine the author’s point of view and explain how the author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view. Be sure to cite evidence from the text to support your analysis.

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Text 2

Text 2 Introduction

In “**Twilight of the Books**” by **Caleb Crain**, the author makes a case that the decline of reading also leads to a decline in critical thinking.

Please read “Twilight of the Books” and then answer Prompt 2.

**excerpt from
Twilight of the Books
Caleb Crain**

What will life be like if people stop reading?

1 In 1937, twenty-nine per cent of American adults told the pollster George Gallup that they were
2 reading a book. In 1955, only seventeen per cent said they were. Pollsters began asking the
3 question with more latitude. In 1978, a survey found that fifty-five per cent of respondents had
4 read a book in the previous six months. The question was even looser in 1998 and 2002, when
5 the General Social Survey found that roughly seventy per cent of Americans had read a novel, a
6 short story, a poem, or a play in the preceding twelve months. And, this August, seventy-three
7 per cent of respondents to another poll said that they had read a book of some kind, not
8 excluding those read for work or school, in the past year. If you didn’t read the fine print, you
9 might think that reading was on the rise.

10 You wouldn’t think so, however, if you consulted the Census Bureau and the National
11 Endowment for the Arts, who, since 1982, have asked thousands of Americans questions about
12 reading that are not only detailed but consistent. The results, first reported by the N.E.A. in 2004,
13 are dispiriting. In 1982, 56.9 per cent of Americans had read a work of creative literature in the
14 previous twelve months. The proportion fell to fifty-four per cent in 1992, and to 46.7 per cent in
15 2002. Last month, the N.E.A. released a follow-up report, “To Read or Not to Read,” which
16 showed correlations between the decline of reading and social phenomena as diverse as income
17 disparity, exercise, and voting. In his introduction, the N.E.A. chairman, Dana Gioia, wrote,
18 “Poor reading skills correlate heavily with lack of employment, lower wages, and fewer
19 opportunities for advancement.” . . .

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Text 2

20 More alarming are indications that Americans are losing not just the will to read but even the
21 ability. According to the Department of Education, between 1992 and 2003 the average adult’s
22 skill in reading prose slipped one point on a five-hundred-point scale, and the proportion who
23 were proficient—capable of such tasks as “comparing viewpoints in two editorials”—declined
24 from fifteen per cent to thirteen. The Department of Education found that reading skills have
25 improved moderately among fourth and eighth graders in the past decade and a half, with the
26 largest jump occurring just before the No Child Left Behind Act took effect, but twelfth graders
27 seem to be taking after their elders. Their reading scores fell an average of six points between
28 1992 and 2005, and the share of proficient twelfth-grade readers dropped from forty per cent to
29 thirty-five per cent. The steepest declines were in “reading for literary experience”—the kind that
30 involves “exploring themes, events, characters, settings, and the language of literary works,” in
31 the words of the department’s test-makers. In 1992, fifty-four per cent of twelfth graders told the
32 Department of Education that they talked about their reading with friends at least once a week.
33 By 2005, only thirty-seven per cent said they did. . . .

34 No effort of will is likely to make reading popular again. Children may be browbeaten, but adults
35 resist interference with their pleasures. It may simply be the case that many Americans prefer to
36 learn about the world and to entertain themselves with television and other streaming media,
37 rather than with the printed word, and that it is taking a few generations for them to shed old
38 habits like newspapers and novels. The alternative is that we are nearing the end of a pendulum
39 swing, and that reading will return, driven back by forces as complicated as those now driving it
40 away.

41 But if the change is permanent, and especially if the slide continues, the world will feel different,
42 even to those who still read. Because the change has been happening slowly for decades,
43 everyone has a sense of what is at stake, though it is rarely put into words. There is something to
44 gain, of course, or no one would ever put down a book and pick up a remote. Streaming media
45 give actual pictures and sounds instead of mere descriptions of them. “Television completes the
46 cycle of the human sensorium,” Marshall McLuhan proclaimed in 1967. Moving and talking
47 images are much richer in information about a performer’s appearance, manner, and tone of
48 voice, and they give us the impression that we know more about her health and mood, too. The
49 viewer may not catch all the details of a candidate’s health-care plan, but he has a much more
50 definite sense of her as a personality, and his response to her is therefore likely to be more full of
51 emotion. There is nothing like this connection in print. A feeling for a writer never touches the
52 fact of the writer herself, unless reader and writer happen to meet. In fact, from Shakespeare to
53 Pynchon, the personalities of many writers have been mysterious. . . .

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Text 2

54 The viewer feels at home with his show, or else he changes the channel. The closeness makes it
55 hard to negotiate differences of opinion. It can be amusing to read a magazine whose principles
56 you despise, but it is almost unbearable to watch such a television show. And so . . . we may be
57 less likely to spend time with ideas we disagree with.

58 Self-doubt, therefore, becomes less likely. In fact, doubt of any kind is rarer. It is easy to notice
59 inconsistencies in two written accounts placed side by side. With text, it is even easy to keep
60 track of differing levels of authority behind different pieces of information. The trust that a
61 reader grants to the *New York Times*, for example, may vary sentence by sentence. A comparison
62 of two video reports, on the other hand, is cumbersome. Forced to choose between conflicting
63 stories on television, the viewer falls back on hunches, or on what he believed before he started
64 watching. . . .

65 The N.E.A. reports that readers are more likely than non-readers to play sports, exercise, visit art
66 museums, attend theatre, paint, go to music events, take photographs, and volunteer. Proficient
67 readers are also more likely to vote. Perhaps readers venture so readily outside because what they
68 experience in solitude gives them confidence. Perhaps reading is a prototype of independence.
69 No matter how much one worships an author, Proust wrote, “all he can do is give us desires.”
70 Reading somehow gives us the boldness to act on them. Such a habit might be quite dangerous
71 for a democracy to lose.

“Twilight of the Books” by Caleb Crain, originally published in the New Yorker. Copyright © 2007 by Caleb Crain, used by permission of The Wylie Agency LLC.

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***TCAP Grades 9–10 Writing
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Prompt 2

Prompt 2

You have now read two texts about the decline of reading for pleasure:

- **“Reading for Pleasure Is in Painful Decline”** by Stephen L. Carter
- **“Twilight of the Books”** by Caleb Crain

Write an essay that argues which author better uses valid reasoning and sufficient evidence to support his argument about the state of reading in the U.S. Be sure to cite evidence from both texts to support your argument. Follow the conventions of standard written English.

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