

# 2023 MCAS Sample Student Work and Scoring Guide

## Grade 5 English Language Arts

### Question 12: Essay

**Reporting Categories:** Language and Writing

**Standard:** [L.PK-12.1](#) - Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

**Standard:** [L.PK-12.2](#) - Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

**Standard:** [L.PK-12.3](#) - Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

**Standard:** [W.PK-12.2](#) - Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

**Standard:** [W.PK-12.4](#) - Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

**Item Description:** Write an essay that explains an important idea presented in the passage; use important details from the passage as evidence.

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### Essay Prompt

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For this question, you will write an essay based on the passage(s). Your writing should:

- Present and develop a central idea
- Provide evidence and/or details from the passage(s).
- Use correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

Based on the passage, write an essay that explains how the special features of elephants help them to survive. Be sure to use information from the passage to develop your essay.

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*Continue to the following page to see the scoring guides for this question. Sample student responses begin on page 3. The annotations that appear above each sample response describe elements of the response that contributed to its score for Idea Development and Standard English Conventions.*

### Scoring Guide for Idea Development

Select a score point in the table below to view the sample student response.

Score*	Description
<a href="#">4A</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Central idea is clear and fully developed</li> <li>• Effective selection and explanation of evidence and/or details</li> <li>• Effective organization</li> <li>• Clear expression of ideas</li> <li>• Full awareness of the purpose for writing</li> </ul>
<a href="#">4B</a>	
<a href="#">3</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Central idea is general and moderately developed</li> <li>• Appropriate selection and explanation of evidence and/or details</li> <li>• Moderate organization</li> <li>• Adequate expression of ideas</li> <li>• Sufficient awareness of the purpose for writing</li> </ul>
<a href="#">2</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Central idea may be present and is somewhat developed</li> <li>• Limited selection and explanation of evidence and/or details</li> <li>• Limited organization</li> <li>• Basic expression of ideas</li> <li>• Partial awareness of the purpose for writing</li> </ul>
<a href="#">1</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Central idea is not present and/or not developed</li> <li>• Insufficient evidence and/or details</li> <li>• Minimal or no organization</li> <li>• Poor expression of ideas</li> <li>• Minimal awareness of the purpose for writing</li> </ul>
<a href="#">0</a>	The response shows evidence the student has read the text, but does not address the question or incorrectly responds to the question.

### Scoring Guide for Standard English Conventions

Select a score point in the table below to view the sample student response.

Score*	Description
<a href="#">3A</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistent control of a variety of sentence structures relative to length of essay</li> <li>• Consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics relative to complexity and/or length of essay</li> </ul>
<a href="#">3B</a>	
<a href="#">3C</a>	
<a href="#">2</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mostly consistent control of sentence structures relative to length of essay</li> <li>• Mostly consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics relative to complexity and/or length of essay</li> </ul>
<a href="#">1</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little control and/or no variety in sentence structure and/or</li> <li>• Little control of grammar, usage, and mechanics relative to complexity and/or insufficient length</li> </ul>
<a href="#">0</a>	Sentences are formed incorrectly with no control of grammar, usage, and mechanics and/or insufficient length.

\*In both scoring guides, letters are used to distinguish between sample student responses that earned the same score (e.g., 4A and 4B).

**Idea Development—Score Point 4A**

The essay presents a clear and fully developed central idea that explains the special features elephants have that help them to survive. Information about their trunks, family bonds, and memory skills are included in the essay, with appropriate transitional words between ideas. The essay uses evidence well and integrates relevant facts by paraphrasing information from the passage: “One way trunks are helpful is that they help the elephants breathe, drink, smell, and explore objects. Trunks also help these gentle giants spray water on their sensitive skin so they don’t get sunburnt.” Effective organization contributes to a cohesive essay. Precise vocabulary allows a clear expression of ideas throughout: “These animals have an exceptionally good memory, which helps them to survive in a plethora of ways.” The essay reflects a full awareness of the purpose for writing.

**Standard English Conventions—Score Point 3A**

The essay demonstrates consistent control of a variety of sentence structures, as shown in the following examples: “One way a good memory helps elephants to survive is that they can remember where to find water in a drought. Helpful, right? . . . In conclusion, there are many helpful attributes that help these friendly pachyderms survive, like their trunks, their family bonds, and lastly their memory. These vivacious creatures certainly have many features to help them survive successfully!” Although minor punctuation errors are present, they do not detract from the overall meaning, and the essay demonstrates consistent control of standard English conventions for this grade level.

Elephants have many special features that help them survive. For example, elephants have trunks, they are protective of their family, and lastly they have an extraordinary memory skills. All of these features definitely help elephants survive.

An elephant's trunk is an incredibly useful tool for elephants and is an instrumental part of these mammal's survival. One way trunks are helpful is that they help the elephants breathe, drink, smell, and explore objects. Trunks also help these gentle giants spray water on their sensitive skin so they don't get sunburnt. Very important, right? These amazing creatures couldn't survive without these appendages.

Elephants are very protective of their families. This helps them survive in many ways. One way this helps them is that if they are a calf and get stuck in a hole, one member of their family will come dig them out. Secondly, family members will protect each other by looking out for elephants that are sick or hurt. Lastly, they will help fight off predators with their tusks to protect their young. These pachyderms certainly help each other out, which is a large factor in their survival.

These animals have an exceptionally good memory, which helps them to survive in a plethora of ways. One way a good memory helps elephants to survive is that they can remember where to find water in a drought. Helpful, right? Another way memory helps them is that they can remember where that particular juicy berry bush is. They can remember where food and water is, so then there chances of starving dramatically diminish. Finally, memory assists these wonderful creatures by helping them remember where not to travel. For example, if there was a newborn calf in the family, the adults would remember not to go by a predator's lair. Memory is very helpful to elephants.

In conclusion, there are many helpful attributes that help these friendly pachyderms survive, like their trunks, their family bonds, and lastly their memory. These vivacious creatures certainly have many features to help them survive successfully!

**Idea Development—Score Point 4B**

The essay includes a fully developed central idea that identifies special features elephants have to help them survive. Relevant information explains how both the trunk and skin help elephants survive. These and other special features are clearly identified, and explanations are based on quoted evidence from the passage. The essay is organized effectively, with a body paragraph dedicated to each feature. Grade-appropriate vocabulary allows for clear expression of ideas. The essay is fully developed and demonstrates a strong awareness of the purpose for writing.

**Standard English Conventions—Score Point 3B**

The essay contains a variety of sentences structures that show a consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics, such as the following examples: “The special features of elephants help them to survive by giving them food and water and the ability for breathing, which the trunk does, and providing them with moisture, which the skin does. . . . When the trunk takes in air, it enables elephants to get the oxygen they need to live. When elephants are thirsty and need water, the trunk helps the elephants get the water, as the elephants use it to drink.” Minor errors do not detract from the overall meaning. Based on its length and complexity, the essay demonstrates consistent control of standard English conventions for this grade level.

The special features of elephants help them to survive by giving them food and water and the ability for breathing, which the trunk does, and providing them with moisture, which the skin does.

One special feature that helps elephants survive is the trunk, which gives them food, water, and the ability to breathe. For example, in the article [The Elephant Scientist](#), it says, "Helping find all that food is an elephant's versatile trunk---a unique appendage among living mammals....this long fusion of nose and upper lip helps an elephant breathe, smell, drink, and explore objects." When the trunk takes in air, it enables elephants to get the oxygen they need to live. When elephants are thirsty and need water, the trunk helps the elephants get the water, as the elephants use it to drink. Elephants need water to survive, so if elephants had no trunks they could not drink. Also, in the article, it says, "It's so powerful that it can uproot a tree, yet nimble enough to grasp a nut or a berry." To be able to grasp food is a big plus, because if they could not reach any food, they would have none, and elephants need food to live, so if it weren't for the trunk, the elephants could not get food. The trunk is a big part in elephants' survival, but the skin on an elephant helps, too.

Another special feature that helps the elephants to survive is the skin, which helps the elephants keep cool and stay safe from other animals, like bugs. For example, in the article, it says, "Their wrinkly skin, for example, looks tough and impenetrable, but it's really sensitive. To protect it from sunburns and insect bites, elephants spray themselves with water, roll in the mud, and dust their bodies with dirt." Sunburns can be very damaging to elephants, so when the skin is moist, it rejects that danger. Also, in the article, it says, "When an elephant gets wet, water fills all its crinkly crevices, and the skin remains moist longer." If the skin stays moist longer, that means the elephant can be safe longer during their lifetime because when the skin stays moist, it keeps the elephant safe from bug bites and sunburns, which helps them survive.

As you can see, elephants have many special features that help them survive, and the trunk and the skin are just two of them. We have our own water to drink, our own air to breathe, and we can use sunscreen to help sunburns, and insect repellent to stop bug bites, so we're alike in a way.....

**Idea Development—Score Point 3**

The essay has a moderately developed central idea that elephants use their special features to help them survive. This central idea is supported with an appropriate selection of evidence about elephants' special features, including the trunk, tusk, and memory. Explanations of both quoted and paraphrased evidence create a moderately organized essay. Expression of ideas is adequate, and the conclusion generally summarizes the special features discussed in the passage and demonstrates a sufficient awareness of the purpose for writing: "Elephants trunks, tusks, and memories are just some of the amazing features . . . survive in the wild."

**Standard English Conventions—Score Point 3C**

The essay shows consistent control of grammar and usage. The beginning sentences are varied and show grade-level awareness of sentence structure using quotations and paraphrased evidence from the passage. Minor spelling errors (e.g., "firce" and "deffinetly") are present, but do not interfere with the overall meaning. Based on length and complexity, the essay reflects consistent control of standard English conventions for this grade level.

In the passage "The Elephant Scientist" by Caitlin O'Connell and Donna M. Jackson it shows many ways elephants use thier special features to help them surive.

First of all, elephants use their long and srong trunks to help them breath, smell, and drink. It also says in the passage "The Elephant Scientist" by Caitlin O'Connell and Donna M. Jackson " Its so powerful they can uproot a tree" this shows elephants trunks are super strong which will help them in many life threating situations. Later In paragraph three it talks about how elephants can use their trunk as a snorkel to take in and release air. So, if they are in deep water or need to stay under water for a long amount of time they can still breath and it won't effecet thier health. Elephants trunks are a very important feature to elephants and they help them surive in the wild.

In paragraph four of "The Elephant Scientist" it states how elephants tusks help them aswell as their trunks. Their tusks can help them fight off predators to protect themselves and thier calves. They also use their tusks to dig for the food and water they need to stay in good health. Elephants tusks can grow very large as stated in the passage. "They grow throughtout an elephant's life and can extend as long as eight feet and weigh more than two hundered pounds." This shows they probably make elephants look more firce to scare away predators and their tusks will deffinetly help them survive and they are a very important feature to elephants.

Elephants are very intellegent and have an amazing memeory. Their memory will help them during a drought because they will remember where to find water and food just like Caitlin O'Connel said in paragraph seven.

Elephants trunks, tusks, and memories are just some of the amazing feautres elepahants have to help them survive in the wild.

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**Idea Development—Score Point 2**

The essay includes a somewhat developed central idea that elephants have special features to help them survive. Some ideas, such as the trunk and tusks, are identified with limited information about how they aid in survival. A basic expression of ideas is present with heavy reliance on the language of the text. Each sentence is connected to the central idea, but it is not further developed. Organization is also limited; the essay includes a basic introductory sentence with transitions between each feature, but it ends abruptly. There is partial awareness of the purpose for writing.

**Standard English Conventions—Score Point 2**

The essay demonstrates mostly consistent control over grammar, usage, and mechanics. Sentences are not varied, but they are mostly correct. Punctuation, including commas, are used correctly, as in this example: “This massive creature uses their trunk as a way to breathe, greet each other, drink, eat, explore objects, comfort, communicate, protect and play.” Given its length and complexity, the writing demonstrates mostly consistent control of standard English conventions for this grade level.

The special features of an elephant help them survive. One feature is the trunk. It is really powerful. A trunk can uproot a tree. But that's not what it's on an elephant for. This massive creature uses their trunk as a way to breathe, greet each other, drink, eat, explore objects, comfort, communicate, protect and play. Only a single trunk has 40,000 muscles within it! Elephants also use their trunks as a human toy, a snorkel. While swimming under water the elephant will stick his or her trunk out of the water and breathe like a human that is snorkelling. Along with its trunk, the amazing creature has tusks. These tusks are made of the same thing that human teeth are made of; ivory. This feature on an elephant can extend as long as eight feet. Elephants can scrape off bark from a tree using their tusks to make as a nice snack. These tusks can also do some damage. Tusks have a weight up to 200 pounds and elephants use this as a weapon towards predators. Some of the special features of an elephant are really important our research and to them. We should help protect the elephants from danger.

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**Idea Development—Score Point 1**

The response includes a minimally developed central idea with insufficient evidence of ideas. The response states a few facts about how an elephant's trunk helps it "grab food and get a drink of water," but the ideas are not further developed. The response is minimally organized with information drawn from one paragraph of the passage. There is minimal awareness of the purpose for writing.

**Standard English Conventions—Score Point 1**

The response includes only simple sentence structures, and it contains errors throughout. Although there is correct usage of periods, there is no sustained evidence of other mechanics varied language. The response lacks the length or complexity to demonstrate more than minimal control of standard English conventions for this grade level.

Elephants special features help them survive. Their trunk helps them grab food and get a drink of water. Their trunks also help them survive by protecting their loved ones and help them breathe when they swim, they stick their trunk out of the water and suck in air and blow it out.

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**Idea Development—Score Point 0**

The response does not address the central idea of explaining how the special features of elephants help them to survive. A brief reference to African elephants is mentioned and may show the student has read the text. However, no information is related to supporting the task.

**Standard English Conventions—Score Point 0**

The response consists of two lines of text and is of insufficient length and complexity to demonstrate control of standard English conventions for this grade level.

*African elephants are in the soth or noth even west and east*

they live in till 400000000 they are in the minla of the earthl

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