

2025 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 how individuals addressed challenges presented in two passages; use information from both passages as evidence.

This item can be found in the released item sets on the [MCAS Resource Center](#).

Essay Prompt

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 *Bridges and Tunnels* and *Beneath the Streets of Boston*, write an essay that explains how engineers and workers address the many challenges of tunnel building. Be sure to use information from both passages to develop your essay.

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
4A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central idea is clear and fully developed Effective selection and explanation of evidence and/or details Effective organization Clear expression of ideas Full awareness of the purpose for writing
4B	
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central idea is general and moderately developed Appropriate selection and explanation of evidence and/or details Moderate organization Adequate expression of ideas Sufficient awareness of the purpose for writing
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central idea may be present and is somewhat developed Limited selection and explanation of evidence and/or details Limited organization Basic expression of ideas Partial awareness of the purpose for writing
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central idea is not present and/or not developed Insufficient evidence and/or details Minimal or no organization Poor expression of ideas Minimal awareness of the purpose for writing
0	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
3A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistent control of a variety of sentence structures relative to length of essay Consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics relative to complexity and/or length of essay
3B	
3C	
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mostly consistent control of sentence structures relative to length of essay Mostly consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics relative to complexity and/or length of essay
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little control and/or no variety in sentence structure and/or Little control of grammar, usage, and mechanics relative to complexity and/or insufficient length
0	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., 3A and 3B).

Idea Development—Score Point 4A

The essay includes a clearly stated central idea and a fully developed explanation of how engineers and workers address the challenges of tunnel building. The essay provides relevant quotations to support the central idea. Additional information includes a full description of how engineers and workers solve the challenges of tunnel building: "Engineers all have to consider every challenge a site has such as if a body of water or a transportation route needs to be spanned and see if there [are] fault zones." The essay is well organized, using the first body paragraph to address one passage and the second body paragraph to address the other passage. Transitional words and phrases such as "another way," "in addition," and "in conclusion" are used to move from one idea to the next. The essay includes a clear expression of ideas and demonstrates a full awareness of the purpose for writing.

Standard English Conventions 3A

The essay shows consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics. The sentences are varied and well constructed, contributing to the clarity of the writing: "Another way that workers and engineers address the challenges of tunnel building by solving them is when tunnelers excavate a passage, it has a chance to collapse so engineers build a support that keeps it from collapsing." Based on length and complexity, the essay demonstrates consistent control of standard English conventions for this grade level.

In the passages *Bridges and Tunnels* and *Beneath the Streets of Boston*, engineers and workers address the many challenges of tunnel building. The workers and engineers in both passages address the challenges of tunnel building by solving them.

In *Bridges and Tunnels*, the workers and engineers address the challenges of tunnel building by solving them in different ways. "Like a bridge, a tunnel must be strong enough the force of its dead load," (7) This shows that workers and engineers address the problems by solving them because the challenge of a tunnel having to support its own weight and its live load by building an arch. Another way that workers and engineers address the challenges of tunnel building by solving them is when tunnelers excavate a passage, it has a chance to collapse so engineers build a support that keeps it from collapsing. Engineers all have to consider every challenge a site has such as if a body of water or a transportation route needs to be spanned and see if there is fault zones. In *Bridges and Tunnels*, the engineers and workers address the many challenges of tunnel building by solving them in many different ways.

In *Beneath the Streets of Boston*, the engineers and workers also address the challenges of tunnel building by solving them. "Plans for the first tunnel along Tremont Street required the tangle of pipes and conduits carrying the city's utilities to be relocated and re-routed around the path of the subway," (2). This shows that the engineers and workers address the challenges of tunnel building by solving them because the engineers had to study the city utility maps to solve the challenge of removing the right utility pipe. Also, the engineers and workers solve the challenges of tunnel building is when they needed to keep the earth walls of the trench from collapsing, workers build temporary wooden bracing for support. In addition, the challenge of moving steel cables, they use cranes to raise or lower it. In *Beneath the Streets of Boston*, engineers and workers address the challenges of tunnel building by solving them.

In conclusion, the workers and engineers in *Bridges and Tunnels* and *Beneath the Streets of Boston* address the many challenges of tunnel building by finding solutions for them. In *Bridges and Tunnels*, engineers and workers built supports and arches to solve their tunnel building challenges. In *Beneath The Streets of Boston*, engineers and workers build wooden bracings and use cranes to move cables.

Idea Development—Score Point 4B

The essay is a clear and well developed explanation of how engineers and workers address the many challenges of tunnel building. The essay is organized effectively with a clearly stated central idea in the introduction, a body paragraph dedicated to each challenge, and a concluding statement. Information from both passages is effectively selected and is relevant to explaining how engineers and workers make sure tunnels do not collapse, remain dry, and keep safe. Effective quotations are included and supported with additional explanation: "This shows that the tunnel could collapse if they do not build it well. They fix this problem by building a support." The use of transitional words and phrases, such as "my first reason" and "another example," between ideas and paragraphs contributes to the overall organization of the essay. There is a clear expression of ideas and a full awareness of the purpose for writing.

Standard English Conventions 3B

The essay includes a variety of sentence structures, including complex sentences, as evident in the introductory sentence: "In the passages, *Bridges and Tunnels* and *Beneath the Streets of Boston* the workers address many challenges with tunnel building such as, keeping the tunnels from collapsing, keeping the tunnels dry, and staying safe and happy." Although minor errors in punctuation and spelling are present ("chisled" and "excavaition"), they do not detract from the overall understanding of the essay. The essay demonstrates consistent control of standard English conventions for this grade level.

In the passages, *Bridges and Tunnels* and *Beneath the Streets of Boston* the workers address many challenges with tunnel building such as, keeping the tunnels from collapsing, keeping the tunnels dry, and staying safe and happy.

My first reason is, a big challenge while building tunnels are making sure the tunnels do not collapse. For example, in *Bridges and Tunnels* it says, "Once tunnelers excavate a passage, there's a danger of collapse." This shows that the tunnel could collapse if they do not build it well. They fix this problem by building a support. I know this because it says, "To ensure a safe environment both for digging and for the structure itself, engineers build a support." Another example is in *Beneath the Streets of Boston* when it says, "To keep the earth walls of the trench from collapsing, workers built temporary wooden bracing for support." This shows how in both passages the workers kept the tunnels from collapsing.

A big challenge while building tunnels is keeping the tunnels dry. For example, in *Bridges and Tunnels* it says, "Constructing underwater tunnels beneath bays, channels, and rivers is especially tricky." This shows how they have a hard time making tunnels underneath water. They fix this problem by making the tunnels waterproof. Another example is in *Beneath the Streets of Boston* when it says, "Both were made using a combination of concrete, steel beams, reinforcing bar, and a layer of waterproof grout." This shows how they make sure water doesn't get in by making the tunnels waterproof.

Another big challenge when building tunnels is keeping yourself safe and happy. For example, in *Bridges and Tunnels* it says, "First, laborers used pickaxes to hack away earth and hand drills to bore holes. They painstakingly chisled through rock. Hand excavation was backbreaking." This shows how it was very hard to build tunnels by hand. They fix this problem by using machines. Another example is in *Beneath the Streets of Boston* when it says, "A coal-fired steam engine powered the cranes. Operators used a system of levers to control the cranes' positions and to operate the winches that paid out steel cables that raised and lowered materials into the trench." This shows how they used machines to help them.

All this shows how there are lots of challenges when you are building a tunnel like keeping it from collapsing, keeping it dry, and keeping yourself safe and happy.

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Idea Development—Score Point 3

The essay includes a moderately developed explanation of how engineers and workers address the many challenges of tunnel building. There is an appropriate selection of quotations to support the central idea. The expression of ideas is adequate and uses paraphrased evidence from the passages: "workers built shields around the roof and walls of the tunnel." The essay is moderately organized following a logical structure, with clear transitions such as "firstly," "second," and "in addition" between ideas and paragraphs. The essay demonstrates sufficient awareness of the purpose for writing.

Standard English Conventions 3C

The essay demonstrates consistent control of a variety of sentence structures: "Everything goes when building a tunnel and using this machine." and "In addition, when a subway station is built, they build brick shields around the curved roof and walls to build tracks and so the tunnel can hold a train." Although there are minor spelling errors ("address" and "important"), they do not detract from the overall understanding of the essay. Given its length and complexity, the essay demonstrates consistent control of standard English conventions for this grade level.

In the stories, engineers and workers address the challenges of building a tunnel by putting up temporary supports and building shields around the roof and sides of the tunnel.

Firstly, workers put up temporary supports while building to make sure the tunnel does not collapse on them or break any equipment. For example, in the text it states that, "To keep the earth walls of the trench from collapsing, workers also built temporary wooden bracing for support." This shows that workers wanted to keep the earth walls from collapsing, so they put up a kind of brace to keep it from doing that. Also, workers put up wooden support to keep the tunnel in shape and also to keep the water and the earth from shifting. To add on, they used the brace as a "road" for a very important piece of equipment used while building a tunnel under a city, water or just plain land. In the text it states, "The bracing also served as a "road" for one of the most important pieces of equipment used on the subway's construction." This shows that the bracing had many uses in buildings of all tunnels, including this one. Everything goes when building a tunnel and using this machine.

Second, workers build shields around the roof and walls of the tunnel. For example, in the text it states that, "To stop cave-ins, engineers build tunnel shields." This shows that they do not want to have to worry about the hazard of a cave in and they want to protect the people inside of the tunnel. In addition, when a subway station is built, they build brick shields around the curved roof and walls to build tracks and so the tunnel can hold a train.

All in all, workers and engineers use all sorts of different methods to ensure a convenient and safe travel through a tunnel including, building wooden braces to keep the grounds from shifting and using shields in soft ground tunnel to make sure the wet dirt doesn't collapse.

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Idea Development—Score Point 2

The essay includes a somewhat developed central idea of how engineers and workers address the many challenges of tunnel building. Two main challenges are identified: “safety of tunnel building” and “Squishy waterlogged dirt.” Information to support the central idea is limited and lacks additional explanation: “Workers had to [do] all of this work through boiling temperatures in tight spaces with [their] feet folded against dusty rock and [their] arms and legs stiff.” Organization is limited, following a basic structure with weak transitions (“one challenge” and “another challenge”) between ideas. There is a basic expression of ideas and a partial awareness of the purpose for writing.

Standard English Conventions 2

The essay demonstrates mostly consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics. There are some simplistic sentences, such as “These areas are unstable because goopy ground doesn’t stand up on its own. Collapse and cave-ins are hazards because of this waterlogged soil.” Minor errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation are present throughout but do not detract from the overall understanding of the essay: “Another challenge workers and engineers addressed was when there was Squishy waterlogged dirt were they were trying to build a tunnel.” Given its length and complexity, the writing demonstrates a mostly consistent control of standard English conventions for this grade level.

Based on *Bridges and Tunnels* by Donna Latham and *Beneath the Streets of Boston* by Joe McKendry engineers and workers address many challenges of tunnel building.

One challenge workers and engineers addressed was the safety of tunnel building. At first workers didn't have a lot machinery to them build tunnels, so they had to use pickaxes and hand drills to carve out the tunnel, which was backbreaking. Workers had to to all of this work through boiling temperatures in tight spaces with thier feet folded against dusty rock and thier arms and legs stiff. There was also no air circulation so the workers choked on dust, ashy smoke, and gagged on toxic fumes. All of the labor done only carved out about a few inches of the tunnel a day. Now engineers have developed machinery that smashes through rock quickly and explosives that make construction go a lot faster without all the labor and hazards that I stated above.

Another challenge workers and enginneers addressed was when there was Squishy waterlogged dirt were they were trying to build a tunnel. These areas are unstable because goopy ground doesn't stand up on its own. Collapse and cave-ins are hazards because of this waterlogged soil. To stop the tunnel from collapsing or caving -in workers built temporary wooden bracing for support or temmporary tunnel shields made out of steel that support the tunnel head during excavation.

Based on the passages *Bridges and Tunnels* and *Beneath the streets of Boston* those are couple of challenges engineers and workers addressed while building tunnels.

Idea Development—Score Point 1

The response minimally develops the central idea about how engineers and workers address the many challenges of tunnel building. The response includes information about tunnel construction and utility pipes, but it lacks evidence and specific examples from the passages to support the central idea. The response is a minimally organized block of text without clear transitions or a logical structure. Ideas are poorly expressed. There is minimal awareness of the purpose for writing.

Standard English Conventions 1

The response demonstrates little variety in sentence structure and contains errors throughout. The sentences are simple and repetitive, lacking complexity and variation: "That also helps prevent the earth from shifting around the entry way. Also prevents ground water from getting inside the tunnel." Although there is correct usage of periods, there is no sustained evidence of other mechanics. There are multiple errors in spelling, including "bulid" and "utilitie." The response lacks the complexity and length to demonstrate more than minimal control of standard English conventions for this grade level.

In *Bridges and Tunnels* to prevent the tunnel from collapsing engineers bulid a support. That also helps prevent the earth from shifting around the entry way. Also prevents ground water from getting inside the tunnel. To prevent soil and rocks from slipping, engineers build a lining inside. The are mostly made of steel and are fire proof. In *Beneath the streets of boston*, workers studied the intricate lay out of the utilitie pipes and removed the old utilitie pipe to place new ones in.

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Idea Development—Score Point 0

The response does not address the question. A brief reference to engineers and workers may show that the student has read the text. However, no information related to the challenges of tunnel building is provided.

Standard English Conventions 0

The brief response consists of two lines of text with no evident control of grammar, usage, and mechanics. There are numerous errors, and the response is of insufficient length and complexity to demonstrate control of standard English conventions for this grade level.

egeners and workers were very hard working and engenerss did the creating and
desighning the workers did the making and digging

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