

Below you will find fifty writing prompts in the style of the EPT prompts. As you will see, all are thought provoking, but some will need some preparation and discussion.

One way to begin to teach students to approach these prompts is to begin with one that you think your students might know something about without your guidance. For example, number two might work better for this purpose than number one because of the sophistication of thought involved as well as the terminology used.

The first few times you have students write on this kind of prompt, you might guide them through the process. You could start by having them read the prompt and discuss the actual task required. What, in other words, are they actually being asked to do? Then, ask questions like: What is the point of the passage? In what ways might it be addressed? How many ways are there to address this issue? At this point, you will not necessarily be looking for original thinking on the part of the students; rather, your goal might be that they get the idea of what an essay that responds to such a prompt entails and that much of the work of writing is done before any actually writing occurs.

You might then brainstorm together the possible responses to this prompt and work together as a whole class or in small groups to write several possible theses. You might also brainstorm introductions, reasons, and evidence for each thesis. Then have the students write an essay using what you have done as a class. Try to encourage them not to fall into the formulaic "five-paragraph" essay, in which three vaguely connected ideas are connected through what appears to be a thesis but in reality is just an unsupported statement mimicking the words of the prompt but without real substance. This frequently looks something like this: "I agree that computers should be in schools because computers help students do research for their classes, lets them communicate with people, and helps them spell better." This kind of reasoning, with disconnected evidence but no real reasons, will almost surely not pass the EPT. On the other hand, a thesis that says " I agree that computers should be in schools because even though sometimes they are abused, they can help make students better in their class work."

After you have worked with a few of the prompts that are most easily accessible, you might give one to the students that they have not discussed previously.

You might have a class discussion about the ideas in another before you give a prompt or have students read something on the topic. For example, in response to the first prompt, you might start with a discussion of what constitutes the "life of the mind" besides, of course, information. What is "intellectual work"? And what gets in the way of it? In what ways might computers do get in the way of "intellectual work"? and so forth. Then you could give them the prompt and, depending on the sophistication of the discussion, either pre-write ideas for the essay together or have students work alone or in small groups to do so.

One last suggestion: Try writing your own prompt either on a subject that the class has read about or discussed or should know something about. There is a fairly simple formula for this, as you will see below. A quote is given in which the writer makes a claim or a short argument. The student is sometimes asked to explain the argument, and is always asked to agree or disagree with it. Directions are given to encourage the writer to support the position taken. The most important part is that the quote or passage be something that

various people could have different opinions about and have good reasons for them. This is called arguability: a thesis must be arguable, so a prompt that elicits an arguable thesis is necessary.

You might notice that in all of these scenarios, prewriting--brainstorming, listing, planning, etc.-- are the key to the student's eventual success! Teach them to do that adequately, and they will be well on their way toward placing into freshman composition on the EPT as well as succeeding on any other academic writing tasks they may encounter.

**You might want to add this to the binder that was given out at the regional meetings. It would go nicely in section V with the other prompts. This binder contains a myriad of excellent resources; get acquainted with it if you haven't already!**

### **EPT style essay prompts**

1. In "Shakespeare Never Lost a Manuscript to a Computer Crash," Theodore Roszak of CSU Hayward argues that "the computer contributes nothing essential to the life of the mind. No, not even all the information that comes gushing out of the World Wide Web . . . Am I saying that computers might actually get in the way of significant intellectual work? Yes, I am." Drawing from your own experiences, explain whether you agree or disagree with Roszak's claim that "the computer contributes nothing essential to the life of the mind." Support your position with reasons, explanations, and examples.
2. "Over the last decade an estimated \$2 billion has been spent on more than 2 million computers for America's classrooms. Computers should be in the schools. They have the potential to accomplish great things, with the right software. In practice, however, computers make our worst educational nightmares come true. While we bemoan the decline of literacy, computers discount words in favor of pictures and pictures in favor of video." Using logical reasons and specific examples, explain whether you agree or disagree with this author's claims as they relate to computers in the classroom.
3. "Cheating in school reflects a basic confusion in society. By emphasizing the wrong things in student testing, we end up inviting a culture of compromise. Teachers are particularly frustrated when parents reveal at home some pride in beating the system - cheating on income taxes, fooling a boss or supervisor, taking supplies from a workplace to use at home yet want teachers to come down hard on students who cheat." Drawing from your own experiences, explain whether you agree or disagree with this writer that society has created a "culture of compromise" resulting from the mixed messages students receive from people around them. Be sure to support your position with reasons, explanations, and examples.
4. "A secret of America's success, ambition both prods us to achievement and condemns us to failure. It prods people to take risks and exert themselves. Yet because everyone can be someone, the competition to rise above the crowd is unrelenting and often ruthless." Do you agree or disagree with this writer? Support

your position with reasons, explanations, and examples.

5. While citizens in another state debated whether the word "squaw" was offensive, "another word, one almost universally considered the most offensive word in the English language, could be heard in almost every major motion picture and on any New York street. Why is one word being decried, while another is gaining acceptance? Vulgar sexual terms have become acceptable in the last two decades, while all manner of racial or ethnic epithets have become unspeakable. In other words, hatred is finally more dangerous than sex." Do you agree or disagree with this writer? Support your position with logical reasons and examples.
6. "The cultural diversity movement arose partly because of the fragmentation of society by ethnicity, class and gender. To make it the culprit for this fragmentation is to mistake effect for cause. A curriculum that reflects the achievement of the world's great cultures, not merely the West's, is not 'politicized'; rather it situates the West as one of a community of civilizations. After all, culture is always a conversation among different voices." Using logical reasons and specific examples, explain whether you agree or disagree with the writer's claims about the cultural diversity movement.
7. According to one author, "The fact of one's ethnicity is never neutral. One's public treatment, and public behavior, are shaped in large part by one's perceived ethnic identity just as by one's gender." Explain the meaning of the writer's claims about ethnicity shaping our identity. Then, explain the extent to which you agree or disagree with the claim that ethnic identity is "never neutral."
8. "Before Washington journalism turned into blood sport and politics turned into an exercise in serial lying, there was a fairly firm understanding by the press that personal failings were none of the public's business unless misbehavior affected the performance of public duties. No more. Yet there is a national longing to return to the good old days when political news was more about issues and policies and less about private lives." Explain the significance of the writer's claims that this new style of journalism has turned politics into a "blood sport . . . and an exercise in serial lying." Using logical reasons and specific examples, discuss whether you agree or disagree with the author's claims about journalism.
9. Conditioning is a powerful bridge between mind and body. The way our minds work - the degree to which we 'awfulize' (believe that something is going to be 'awful') - depends on previous conditioning. The responses of our parents and other influential role models shape our own reactions to life. Awareness of our conditioning is the first step toward unlearning attitudes that have outlived their usefulness." Drawing from your own experiences, explain whether you agree or disagree that conditioning is a "bridge between mind and body" that may positively or negatively shape "our reactions to life."
10. As far as the news is concerned, "What gets ignored gets forgotten." According to the Rocky Mountain Media Watch Study, when issues such as the environment, education, the economy, science, the arts, children, civil rights, parenting, conflict

resolution, and homelessness don't make the news, these issues are "not on our public agenda." Using logical reasons and specific examples, explain whether you agree or disagree with the claim that if the media ignore the issues, they tend to be forgotten.

11. According to one writer, "Ambition is socially useful. It sustains economic vitality. It prods people to take risks and exert themselves. The Internet is the offspring of workaholics spending long hours to invent a new world and make a fortune . . . Ambition and its creative powers permeate the arts, the professions, academia, science." Using logical reasons and specific examples, explain whether you agree or disagree with the author's claim about the usefulness of ambition.
12. "The self-confessed television addict often feels he "ought" to do other things, but the fact that he doesn't read and doesn't plant his garden or sew or crochet or play games or have conversations means that those activities are no longer as desirable as television viewing. He is living in a holding pattern, as it were, passing up the activities that lead to growth or development or a sense of accomplishment. This is one reason people talk about their television viewing so ruefully, so apologetically. They are aware that it is an unproductive experience, that almost any other endeavor is more worthwhile by any human measure." Using logical reasons and specific examples, explain whether you agree or disagree with the author's claim that television viewing is worthless and damaging.
13. "All over the United States, families are in trouble. It is true that there are many contented homes where families are living in harmony; however, various threats to family life are much greater for some families than for others. There are those today, as at various times in the past - who doubt that the family can survive...." Analyze the significance of the writer's claims about families being "in trouble." Then explain whether you agree or disagree with the writer's assertions concerning the current state of the family in America.
14. One writer states that unlike past generations of workers "who worked 40-hour weeks for 30 years and came out with a pension plan, younger workers will work harder at a younger age to get what they want. They don't want to get stuck in boring jobs. They don't expect one employer to be there for their entire careers. They're eager to learn and rushing to get ahead." Compare and contrast how past and present generations have approached work and careers. Then argue for the approach to work and career that you believe to be most effective.
15. According to a former college president, "Remediation at the college level unquestionably imposes heavy costs on students. It has a demoralizing effect on well-prepared students who are in the same classes as remedial students; it also hurts those students whom it is meant to benefit. However, proponents of remediation argue that the benefits outweigh the costs. . . ." Evaluate the costs and benefits of providing remedial coursework at the university level. Then, state your position on this issue. Remember to support your position with reasons, explanations, and examples.

16. Some people believe that 'purposeful work' - socially and personally meaningful - is growing in importance because of the "erosion of our confidence in traditional foundations: family, school, church, government." Using logical reasons and specific examples, explain whether you agree or disagree with the author's claim that purposeful work is becoming more important as we lose confidence about other areas of our lives.
17. "I know there are a lot of great people out there doing plenty of wonderful things for the greater good. They're risking their lives, giving up huge amounts of time, energy, and money to make our world just. But the concept of heroes is gone. Do you ever hear anyone talking about whom their heroes are? It used to be a common question. Today, most people would be hard pressed to come up with an answer. We've been fooled too many times." Explain the meaning of the word hero, and then examine the validity of the writer's assertion that "the concept of heroes is gone."
18. "The mission of higher education is to enhance society by teaching, research, and service. Colleges and universities have obligations, as well as opportunities, to strengthen the fabric of our society by stressing essential dimensions of life that are not commercial. Many colleges are abdicating their social responsibilities in favor of promoting narrow careerism and private self-interest. As a result, students and their families increasingly see the role of education solely in terms of getting a job." Drawing from your own experiences, explain whether you agree or disagree that universities are abandoning their primary responsibilities by focusing on career preparation.
19. "Historically, most computer programmers had plenty of education, but little of it came from computer science departments. Computer programming has always been a self-taught, maverick occupation. Schools might as well give up on teaching the latest skills, since those skills will soon become obsolete anyway. Instead, they might stress subjects that foster a flexible and open mind. Programmers seem to be changing the world. It would be a relief, for them and for all of us, if they knew something about it." Compare and contrast the importance of skills-based knowledge versus general knowledge in the world today. Then, state which one would allow for "a flexible and open mind"
20. Recent changes in Kansas and other states allow public schools to teach alternative views of human development; however, the New Mexico Board of Education voted overwhelmingly to limit the statewide science curriculum to the teaching of evolution. The vote effectively made New Mexico the first state in recent years to take a firm stand against the teaching of "creationism," which generally relies on a literal interpretation of the Bible as the ultimate authority on how the world was formed. Using logical reasons and specific examples, explain to what extent schools should play a role in the decisions about how to teach human origin.
21. "A proliferating number of for-profit companies are offering to provide sophisticated World-Wide Web sites to colleges and universities for little or no money. Those sites not only allow students to perform many personal and academic activities, but they

also serve as portals that provide links to other sites on the Internet. In exchange for its services, each company gains the right to sell commercial advertisements on the institution's Web pages. . . . But there are enough tugs and pulls on students without trying to catch their eyes, minds, and wallets when they log on" to their institutions' computers. Compare and contrast the possible advantages and disadvantages of corporate sponsorship in universities and other institutions. Then discuss whether you agree or disagree with the writer's claims.

22. "Many people think that ethnic diversity contributes to the richness and variety of activities available to those living in and near the cities. Others believe that serious problems arise when people from different cultures try to live together." Explain the possible benefits and drawbacks of cultural diversity. Then, drawing from your own experiences, discuss whether you agree or disagree that ethnic diversity "contributes to the richness and variety" of a given culture.
23. According to one writer, sacrifice is necessary to the development of the social order, of culture and of economy. Sacrifice is not only necessary, it is basic; it makes society what it is. Using logical and specific examples, explain whether you agree or disagree that sacrifice is essential to the "development of social order."
24. "Some cultures tend to regard health and illness as biological phenomena, but our health is not simply a matter of biology. Social and economic circumstances affect our body states (physical condition) and also shape the ways we perceive and categorize them. Biology cannot be separated from social and economic realities, because they are intertwined in complex ways and build upon each other." Drawing from your own experiences and observations, explain whether you agree or disagree that health and illness go beyond a "matter of biology" and are affected by other "social and economic realities."
25. A well-known educator and politician wrote, "As an immigrant to this nation, I am keenly aware of the things that bind us as Americans and unite us as a single people. Foremost among these unifying forces is the common language we share. While it is certainly true that our love of freedom and devotion to democratic principles help to unite and give us a mutual purpose, it is English, our common language, that enables us to discuss our views and allows us to maintain a well-informed electorate of democratic government." Using logical reasons and specific examples, explain whether you agree or disagree with the writer's claims that English as a "common language" is a key component in uniting us "as a single people" in a number of important ways.
26. One writer asserts that prejudice "isn't about your personal beliefs that are contrary to others'; it's about your actions toward them and your lack of respect for their views. There are many explanations for intolerant attitudes, some dating back to childhood. It is likely that intolerant folks grew up imitating intolerant parents and the cycle of prejudice has simply continued for generations. Perhaps intolerant people are so set in their ways that they find it easier to ignore anything that might not conform to their limited view of life." Analyze the content of the writer's claims about prejudice, and

explain why you agree or disagree with the remark that intolerance and prejudice are derived from a "cycle of prejudice."

27. According to one writer, "Studying science is excellent training for the mind. Science can teach that some things are quite definitely wrong; that knowledge is a much better guide than ignorance, and it can teach humility in posing endless questions to which we have no good answers." Drawing from your own experiences explain whether you agree or disagree with the writer's claims about studying science as a broad, enriching, and "excellent training for the mind."
28. A great statesman once said, "The test of progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much, it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little." Explain the significance of this remark about progress. Then, using logical reasons and specific examples, discuss whether you agree or disagree with the writer's claims about the true "test of progress" being determined by what we provide not for those "who have too much," but for those "who have too little."
29. One corporate analyst notes that "vicious competitiveness can be ugly and socially destructive." On the one hand, "competition can be nasty," at the same time, "it's useful." Compare and contrast the possible advantages and disadvantages of competition in our world today. Then, using logical reasons and specific examples, explain whether you agree or disagree that competition is an inherent part of business, social, and/or academic practices and is essentially useful in making progress or demonstrating achievement of one kind or another.
30. "It goes without saying that language is also a political instrument, means, and proof of power. Language is the most vivid and crucial key to identity: it reveals the private identity, and connects one with, or divorces one from, the larger public or communal identity." Explain the significance of this writer's remarks about language. Then, using logical reasons and specific examples, discuss whether you agree or disagree with the writer's claims about language being not only a powerful resource, particularly as it applies to our "larger public or communal identity."
31. One author talks about "putting a human face on work," decrying technology which often keeps us from talking to a real person face to face . . ."Relying as we do on transmitting messages via email or fax, we may forget that talking to real people, in person, is still one of the most satisfying and productive ways to work. Talking to another person is often the only way to get to the heart of the problem. The human connection is the foundation on which all productive work is built." Drawing upon your own experiences and observations, explain why the "human connection" is the "most satisfying and productive way to work."
32. "America's immersion in television is not to be taken as an attempt by a malevolent government or an avaricious corporate state to employ the age-old trick of distracting the masses with circuses. The problem is not that TV presents the masses with entertaining subject matter but that television presents all subject matter as entertaining. What is dangerous about television is not its junk. Every culture can

absorb a fair amount of junk, and in any case, we do not judge a culture by its junk but by how it conducts its serious public business. What is happening in America is that television is transforming all serious public business into junk." Using logical reasons and specific examples, explain whether you agree or disagree with the author that "television is transforming all serious public business into junk."

33. "Everywhere I turn I'm being urged to dial, punch, vote, fax, e-mail, double click, or simply stand up, grab the microphone, and let loose with my comment, my question, my need, my self. It's our new interactive way of being, and it's all about control; I don't think I want that much." Using logical reasons and specific examples, explain whether "our new interactive way of being" does or does not give us more control over our lives.
34. According to one writer, "Cloning is not the focus of most biotech research. It has simply received the most publicity. But it does most dramatically illustrate what some have called the technological imperative - which means that if we can do something, we will, whether there is wisdom in the enterprise or not. But are we ready to turn loose all the forces of technology, no matter what the material, societal, and psychological costs?" Using logical reasons and specific examples, explain whether you agree or disagree with the author's views about technological advances. In other words, just because we can do something, should we?
35. People seem to have begun to feel that it no longer makes sense to observe the rules. In a 1999 survey conducted by a social research firm, more than four out of five Americans (83 percent) agreed that "those who flout the rules are rewarded" while those who observe the rules typically end up empty-handed. Using logical reasons and specific examples, explain whether you agree or disagree that those who ignore or even defy the rules are rewarded while those who observe the rules typically end up empty-handed. Support your position with reasons, explanations, and examples.
36. "As anyone knows who has seen a house turned inside out at a yard sale, furnishing a home entails the acquisition of more objects than there are in a spring housewares catalog. With all the time, money and space we devote to the acquisition, arrangement, and maintenance of these household possessions, it is curious that we know so little about our relationships to our possessions. Our possessions give us a sense of security and stability. They make us feel in control. Besides control, we use things to compete." To what extent, if any, do you agree with this writer's claims about our 'relationships to our possessions'? Be sure to develop your point with logical reasons, explanations, and examples.
37. "The furnishings of a home, the style of a house, and its landscape are all part of a system - a system of symbols; and every item in the system has meaning. Some objects have personal meanings, some have social meanings which change over time. People understand this instinctively and they desire things, not from some mindless greed, but because things are necessary to communicate with. They are the vocabulary of a sign language. To be without things is to be left out of the conversation." Using logical reasons and specific examples, explain whether you

agree or disagree with the author's claims concerning how our home, furnishings, and personal landscape are all part of a larger system of symbols which enable us to communicate with others.

38. "Advertisements, no matter how carefully engineered, cannot succeed unless they capture our attention. They would not succeed if they did not reflect the values and motivations of the real world. But advertising, like any form of mass communication, can be a force for both 'good' and 'bad.' Good, responsible advertising can serve as a positive influence for change, while generating profits. It can just as readily reinforce or encourage irresponsible behavior." Compare and contrast the 'good' and 'bad' side of advertising. Then argue and defend the side you believe is most valid
39. "Everywhere one meets the idea that reading is an activity desirable in itself. It is understandable that publishers and librarians - and even writers - should promote this assumption, but it is strange that the idea should have general currency. People surround the idea of reading with piety and do not take into account the purpose of reading or the value of what is being read. But this piety is silly; and most reading is not more cultural or intellectual or imaginative than shooting pool or watching television." Using logical reasons and specific examples, explain whether you agree or disagree with the author's claim about reading.
40. Only a generation ago, retirement in rich countries followed a general pattern. The pattern said that men were entitled to a pension at age 65, women sometimes earlier. Yet over the past few years, governments have had to rethink this policy. People past the official retirement age can expect to live another 15-20 years without economic activity. Since the number of potential retirees is growing fast, some countries are changing their official retirement ages, and some people who had planned to retire early have decided to continue working. Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of each side of this argument. Then, state your position as it applies to this issue.
41. "The School Board of Fairfax County, Virginia, had a problem: complaints from high-school students and principals that class rankings were unfair. On a grade scale of 0 to 4, a majority of students had averages of 3.0 (B) or better. Yet many students were naturally ranked in the lower half of the class. The solution: eliminate rankings, which were artificial and therefore unfair. Low ranks were hurting students in college admissions. Thus kids shy away from demanding courses or demanding teachers because taking such courses or teachers will affect class rank." Compare and contrast the possible benefits or drawbacks with the ranking system as a credible way to determine academic excellence.
42. "Science is a part of humanity's cultural heritage. Being educated in science is as important as being educated in philosophy, or psychology, or foreign languages because without a scientific education one is ignorant. To be scientifically literate is to understand that." Using logical reasons and specific examples, explain whether you agree or disagree that the study of science is essential to "humanity's cultural heritage" and not to study science is to remain scientifically illiterate.

43. According to one author, "Not only is science shaped by the society housing it; science profoundly influences the character of society - attitudinally, politically, and ethically, as well as physically." Explain the ways in which science tends to influence our culture. Then, drawing from your own experiences, explain whether you agree or disagree with the writer's claims that science profoundly influences the fabric of our society on a number of levels relating to attitude, politics, ethics, and/or our physical environment.
44. One scientist states, "The scientific community is molded by the society of which it is a part. Scientists, and the data they produce, are not and cannot be free from the prejudices, ideologies, or interests of the larger society." Drawing from your readings and/or observations, explain how "the prejudices, ideologies, or interests of the larger society" may have an impact on scientists and their work
45. According to one writer, "Science can benefit our health, our pocketbooks, and our ability to have interesting, pleasant experiences. Knowledge that was newly discovered ten, fifty, or a hundred years ago has now become solid enough that technologies use it. If we want more control over our environment a hundred years from now, then we should continue doing science." Drawing from your own experiences, explain how one or two scientific discoveries or inventions may provide some of the benefits the writer describes. Using relevant examples, explain, as well, how current scientific technology might influence our future.
46. Anne Morrow Lindbergh spent a month alone by the ocean, and wrote of her experience in *Gift from the Sea*: ". . . more of us in America than anywhere else in the world have the luxury of choice between simplicity and complication in life. And for the most part we, who could choose simplicity, choose complication. War, prison, survival periods, enforce a form of simplicity on man. The monk and the nun choose it of their own free will. But if one accidentally finds it, as I have for a few days, one finds also the serenity it brings." Drawing from your own experiences, explain whether you agree or disagree that simplicity in life brings serenity. Support your position with reasons, explanations, and examples.
47. "DNA testing is used mostly in police work or to prove familial relationship. At first DNA testing seemed fail-proof and advisable, but the circumstances of its use proved more complicated and troublesome than was anticipated." Do you agree or disagree? Support your position with reasons, explanations, and examples.
48. "We inhabit a self-congratulatory society in which we constantly reassure each other how well we're doing. You can't tell anyone anymore that they're no good - or less good - than their peers. One way to view this rampaging flattery is as constructive hypocrisy: hypocrisy, because we know it's false; constructive, because the pretense does us good. Not everyone can win every game, so we devise consolation prizes that make the losers feel better without hurting feelings and puff up our self-esteem; but it's harmful when the truth ultimately intrudes, as it usually does." Using logical reasons and specific examples, explain whether you agree or disagree with the author's claim about "constructive hypocrisy."

49. "The Kansas Board of Education voted to remove evolution, and the Big Bang theory as well, from the state's science curriculum. The new standards do not forbid the teaching of evolution, but the subject will no longer be included in statewide tests for evaluating students. Evolution is not a peripheral subject but the central organizing principal for all biological science. No one who has not read the Bible or the Bard [Shakespeare] can be considered educated in Western traditions; so no one ignorant of evolution can understand science." Drawing from your own experiences, explain whether you agree or disagree that "no one ignorant of evolution can understand science." Support your answer with logical reasons, explanations, and examples.
50. "The profusion of commodities is a genuine and powerful compensation for oppression. It is a bribe, but like all bribes it offers concrete benefits - in the average American's case, a degree of physical comfort unparalleled in history. Under present conditions, people are so occupied with consumer goods not only because they are brainwashed, but because buying is the one pleasurable activity not only permitted but actively encouraged by our rulers. The pleasure of eating an ice cream cone may be minor compared to the pleasure of meaningful work, but the former is easily available while the latter is not. A poor family would undoubtedly rather have a decent apartment than a new TV, but since they are not likely to get the apartment, what is to be gained by not getting the TV?" Using logical reasons and specific examples, explain whether you agree or disagree that we buy some things to make up for other things we cannot do or have. Support your answer with logical reasons, explanations, and examples.