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  1. Click on the Green ink to launch the session. You may also navigate the lecture by selecting the topic/content of interest.

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ESSAY SKILLS

Knowledge of formal college-level writing

Determine the purpose of writing to task and audience.
Provide a section that effectively introduces the topic.
Formulate a relevant thesis or claim. Organize ideas and details effectively.
Provide adequate, relevant support by citing ample textual evidence; response may also include anecdotal experience for added support.
Use a variety of transitional devices effectively throughout and within a written text.
Demonstrate proficient use of college-level, standard written English (e.g., varied word choice, syntax, language conventions, semantics).
Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from, or supports, the argument or information presented.
Use a variety of sentence patterns effectively.
Maintain consistent point of view.
Apply the conventions of standard English (e.g., avoid inappropriate use of slang, jargon, clichés).

- 50 minutes
  - Plan (5-10)
  - Write (30-35)
  - Edit (10-15)
The Essay: 2 topic choices

Outline

- Thesis  Introduction

- Supporting Body Paragraphs  Support
  1 paragraph for each idea
  provide detail

- Conclusion  Restate the main points

Edit

Correct
Check
Introduction:  
Although those who advocate a back-to-basics approach in education are chided as being reactionary and uninformed, their idea that certain knowledge, information, and critical thinking skills need to precede other courses and disciplines is a concept that certainly can be defended. Among the more important basic skills a student needs to have—and have as early as the first years of elementary school—is an understanding of grammar. While studies are often cited to prove that grammar is not successfully taught apart from writing, I dispute those studies on the basis of my own extensive experience as a college teacher.

Body/Supports:  
First of all, grammar is not difficult. It is simple for a student to understand, for example, that breaking down compound constructions helps to determine the correct pronoun usage. "Bob and me went to the movies," therefore, is clearly wrong. If "Bob" is removed, the sentence reads "Me went to the movies," an unlikely construction indeed. The truth is, much grammar is this easy, and once students learn to have command of the rules and the usage, they feel empowered.  
Many writing teachers maintain that students need "freewriting" and other such exercises to unblock their ideas; on the contrary, I maintain that students frequently clam up when they feel their prose is error-ridden. Under such circumstances, they become self-conscious and afraid to express themselves at all. Over the years, I have had many students say that knowing grammatical rules has in fact freed them to write without fear. Grammar stimulates creativity by giving students confidence that they will say things "right."  
As unlikely as it might seem, grammar also provides a solid foundation for other thinking skills. There is a logic and beauty to the language that students come to appreciate; they benefit, too, by making some of the fine distinctions required in analyzing whether, for example, "The lock was broken" is in passive voice or is instead an instance of a participle functioning as a predicate adjective. Believe it or not, I have had some very lively class discussions because of that sentence. Students also marvel that one comma can actually reverse the meaning of a sentence, as in the example of "They didn't get married because they wanted their freedom," as opposed to "They didn't get married, because they wanted their freedom." The difference in meaning is substantial and definite. Students love it.

Conclusion:  
Frankly, I believe that grammar is currently in disrepute because so many teachers have forgotten the rules of grammar—that, or they find the subject less interesting than another approach; consequently, they cannot teach it. Unfortunately, this educational impasse leaves us with generation after generation of students who learn that their frustration with writing stems from being "blocked" rather than from being inadequately informed.
SCORING CRITERIA FOR THE GENERAL KNOWLEDGE ESSAY:

SCORE of 6: The paper has a clearly established main idea that the writer fully develops with specific details and examples. Organization is notably logical and coherent. Point of view is consistently maintained. Vocabulary and sentence structure are varied and effective. Errors in sentence structure, usage, and mechanics are few and insignificant.

SCORE of 5: The paper has a clearly established main idea that is adequately developed and recognizable through specific details and/or examples. Organization follows a logical and coherent pattern. Point of view is mostly maintained. Vocabulary and sentence structure are mostly varied and effective. Occasional errors in sentence structure, usage and mechanics do not interfere with the writer's ability to communicate.

SCORE of 4: The paper has an adequately stated main idea that is developed with some specific details and examples. Supporting ideas are presented in a mostly logical and coherent manner. Point of view is somewhat maintained. Vocabulary and sentence structure are somewhat varied and effective. Occasional errors in sentence structure, usage, and mechanics may interfere with writer's ability to communicate.

SCORE of 3: The paper states a main idea that is developed with generalizations or lists. The paper may contain occasional lapses in logic and coherence, and organization is mechanical. Point of view is ambiguous. Vocabulary and sentence structure are repetitious and often ineffective. A variety of errors in sentence structure, usage, and mechanics sometimes interferes with the writer's ability to communicate.

SCORE of 2: The paper presents an incomplete or ambiguous main idea. Support is developed with generalizations and lists. Organization is mechanical. The paper contains occasional lapses in logic and coherence. Point of view is confusing and distracting. Word choice is simplistic and sentence structure is disjointed. Errors in sentence structure, usage, and mechanics frequently interfere with the writer's ability to communicate.

SCORE of 1: The paper has no evident main idea. Development is inadequate and/or irrelevant. Organization is illogical and/or incoherent. Point of view has not been established. Vocabulary and sentence structure are garbled and confusing. Significant and numerous errors in sentence structure, usage, and mechanics interfere with the writer's ability to communicate.