

MCAS Sample Student Work and Scoring Guides

Grade 10 English Language Arts Practice Test Question 22: 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-12.1](#) - Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

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 arguing why specific skills are important based on an excerpt and an article on similar topics; use information from the excerpt and the article to develop the essay.

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Essay Prompt

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

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

Based on *The Lost Art of Listening* and “Talk Less. Listen More. Here’s How.,” write an essay arguing why listening skills are important. Be sure to use information from **both** the excerpt and the article 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 |
|--|---|
| 5A 5B | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central idea/thesis is insightful and fully developed • Skillful selection and explanation of evidence and/or details • Skillful and/or subtle organization • Rich expression of ideas • Full awareness of the task and mode |
| 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central idea/thesis is clear and well-developed • Effective selection and explanation of evidence and/or details • Effective organization • Clear expression of ideas • Full awareness of the task and mode |
| 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central idea/thesis is general and moderately developed • Appropriate selection and explanation of evidence and/or details • Moderate organization • Adequate expression of ideas • Sufficient awareness of the task and mode |
| 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central idea/thesis 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 task and mode |
| 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central idea/thesis is not developed • Insufficient evidence and/or details • Minimal organization • Poor expression of ideas • Minimal awareness of the task and mode |
| 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 3B 3C 3D | <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 |
| 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., 5A and 5B).

Idea Development—Score Point 5A

The central idea of this fully developed and insightful essay states how “strong listening skills can provide conflict resolution, valuable information, and a better sense of selfhood.” The introduction of the essay argues that “listening skills are decreasing by the year, and simply hearing what another person has to say is not enough to sustain fulfilling relationships.” In the first body paragraph, the essay discusses the negative impact of poor listening skills. The essay further argues that poor communication has been detrimental to society, as not listening to others’ opinions can make conflicts worse. In the second body paragraph, the essay skillfully transitions to an explanation of the positive effects of listening skills on improving relationships with others: “When someone takes the time to focus, removing attention from themselves and onto someone else, the person they are talking to can recognize this generosity and feel uplifted.” In the third body paragraph, the essay skillfully explains how listening skills can lead to personal improvement through the development of empathy and can foster “a culture of good communication.” The conclusion reiterates how strong listening skills can have benefits for everyone in society. The essay maintains a strong argumentative tone throughout the paragraphs. Overall, the essay is fully developed and demonstrates full awareness of the task and mode.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 3A

Grammar, usage, and mechanics are consistently controlled across a variety of complex sentence structures: “A main reason for the failure to listen in society is due to the plethora of thoughts and worries people project inwards, even while chatting with someone else.” The essay is relatively free of errors, and its length and complexity provide the opportunity to demonstrate control of standard English conventions.

The ability to listen is one taken for granted so often, it has almost entirely ceased to exist. As argued in the articles *The Lost Art of Listening* by Michael P. Nichols and “Talk Less. Listen More. Here’s How” by Kate Murphy, though people may think they are adept at listening, our listening skills are decreasing by the year, and simply hearing what another person has to say is not enough to sustain fulfilling relationships. Along with that benefit, strong listening skills can provide conflict resolution, valuable information, and a better sense of selfhood for those willing to put down their devices and pick up a real conversation.

Poor communication has been a significant blow to society, with many issues stemming from a lack of listening skills. As Michael P. Nichols explains, “Within couples and families we unnecessarily hurt each other by failing to acknowledge what each other says” (Nichols 8). Disputes are inevitable between members of the human race, yet holding our opinion above all else has become preferable to truly hearing what another has to say, only exasperating conflict. However, not all is lost: by taking a conversation seriously, and remembering that the other person has their own thoughts that they wish to express through listening, we can prevent selfish anger from taking over relationships. Kate Murphy writes, “... the degree to which you facilitate the clear expression of another person’s thoughts and, in the process, crystallize your own” (Murphy 18). Rather than sitting in quiet disinterest or tense disagreement, assisting someone else with the expression of their thoughts provides an opportunity for you to gather your own, and talk out any issues with civility.

In fact, listening can provide more benefits than conflict resolution, such as a better understanding of someone. Michael P. Nichols explains that, "The essence of good listening is empathy, which can be achieved only by suspending our preoccupation with ourselves and entering into the experience of the other person" (Nichols 17). A main reason for the failure to listen in society is due to the plethora of thoughts and worries people project inwards, even while chatting with someone else. When someone takes the time to focus, removing attention from themselves and onto someone else, the person they are talking to can recognize this generosity and feel uplifted. Given this positive state of mind, it is no wonder that, "Researchers... found that attentive listeners received more information, relevant details and elaboration from speakers, even when the listeners didn't ask any questions" (Murphy 18). As an active listener uses energy to engage with what another person is saying, they feel as though they are truly being heard, possibly for the first time in a while, and become more comfortable with revealing information that would have been hidden from someone who didn't care about what they were saying.

Not only does listening improve relationships with others, learning how to be a good listener will improve one's personhood, helping the active listener to feel better about themselves while they help others feel valued through empathy. Strong listening skills have a reflective effect, as "...listening to other people makes it more likely other people will listen to you... because good listening improves your chances of delivering a message that resonates" (Murphy 19). Some might be dubious of active listening, fearing that by sitting back and encouraging the other person, their own thoughts will be cut short by those who aren't learning how to be better listeners. The truth is, caring for the words of others allows someone to better convey their own, since someone who feels understood and appreciated is more likely to lend a sympathetic ear. Michael P. Nichols corroborates, stating that, "Thus, in giving an account of our experience to someone who listens, we are better able to listen to ourselves" (Nichols 19). In a cyclical way, those who listen well can inspire others to do the same, creating a sort of chain reaction that can benefit all members of society, allowing everyone to feel accepted and fostering a culture of good communication.

Listening skills may be on the decline, but by acknowledging what others say, empathizing with their viewpoint, and recognizing that the better we listen, the more benefit everyone receives, a society that cares more about each other than themselves will be created. Instead of every person turning their ears inwards, solely focused on their own issues and condemning anyone who disagrees, those who use empathy and calmness can cut the small talk and truly communicate. Listen now and listen well, for a brighter, more connected tomorrow.

[Back to Scoring Guides](#)

Idea Development—Score Point 5B

This insightful essay supports its central idea through fully developed paragraphs that argue for the importance of listening skills: "Listening to others is an incredibly important skill, and can help you sustain and build better relationships, and can also help you create a better sense of self." In the first body paragraph, the essay includes a skillful selection of evidence from the excerpt and the article and richly expresses how listening skills can build and improve relationships: "by becoming a better listener, you can fully appreciate and understand what people are telling you, and it will allow you to become more comfortable with each other, and have a stronger relationship where both people feel as though they can open up and share their feelings." The essay expands upon the central idea in the second body paragraph, noting that listening skills "can strengthen your sense of self." The conclusion includes a rich expression of ideas emphasizing that "everyone should learn how to become a better listener." The essay maintains a strong argumentative tone throughout the paragraphs and demonstrates full awareness of the task and mode.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 3B

Consistent control is evident across a wide variety of complex sentence structures: "Getting to know yourself can be a long and difficult process, but if others around you allow you to talk while they listen actively, it can speed up the lengthy process." Grammar and usage demonstrate consistent control. The essay is relatively free of errors and length and complexity provide opportunity to demonstrate control of standard English conventions.

Have you ever felt as though you are talking over people, or that often people talk over you, and that it makes it difficult to have meaningful conversations? This is most likely because you and the people you are talking to are not very good at listening. Listening to others is an incredibly important skill, and can help you sustain and build better relationships, and can also help you create a better sense of self.

One of the most important things in a human's life is our relationships with others. Talking and communicating with others allows us to share ideas and come up with new things that we never could have on our own. Listening actively can help build and create new relationships that allows more innovation and creativity than before. In *The Lost Art of Listening* by Michael P. Nichols, Nichols says, "A listener's empathy—understanding what we're trying to say *and* showing it—builds a bond of understanding, linking us to someone who understands and cares and thus confirming that our feelings are recognizable and legitimate" (paragraph 18 of *The Lost Art of Listening*). This means that by becoming a better listener, you can fully appreciate and understand what people are telling you, and it will allow you to become more comfortable with each other, and have a stronger relationship where both people feel as though they can open up and share their feelings. In "Talk Less. Listen More. Here's How." by Kate Murphy, Murphy exemplifies how when you are a good listener, other traits follow that can help you build friends by saying, "Good listeners ask good questions. One of the most valuable lessons I've learned as a journalist is that anyone can be interesting if you ask the right questions. That is, if you ask truly curious questions that don't have the hidden agenda of fixing, saving, advising, convincing or correcting" (paragraph 10 of "Talk Less. Listen More. Here's How."). Murphy explains how if you don't interrogate people and ask them more open ended questions, that you actually listen to, people open up more. When they don't feel like they are being interrogated, often people will share more details about themselves, which will lead to more connection and better trust between friends, and allow budding friends to learn things about each other in a more exploratory and less interrogating way.

Another reason why developing listening skills is important is that you can strengthen your sense of self. Getting to know yourself can be a long and difficult process, but if others around you allow you to talk while they listen actively, it can speed up the lengthy process. In *The Lost Art of Listening* by Michael P. Nichols, Nichols demonstrates how listening actively can help you learn more about yourself by saying, "In the presence of a receptive listener, we're able to clarify what we think and discover what we feel. Thus, in giving an account of our experience to someone who listens, we are better able to listen to ourselves" (paragraph 19 of *The Lost Art of Listening*). He illustrates how if people listen to you without interrupting or trying to change your thoughts, and if they just listen and ask questions about what you really think, then you are able to better express yourself. This is further proven in *Talk Less. Listen More. Here's How.* by Kate Murphy when she says "Researchers have found that when talking to inattentive listeners, the speakers volunteered less information and conveyed information less articulately" (paragraph 18 of "Talk Less. Listen More. Here's How."). The research proves that when you are not listened to, you don't express as much as when you are listened to, meaning that if you want to develop a better sense of self through talking to others and create your thoughts from non-interrogative questions, then it is better to speak to those with good listening skills.

In the modern day world, technology is present in the majority of our lives, which makes active listening even more important. When we do engage with those in person instead of online, it is imperative that we actually listen to them, in order to form better bonds and at the same time learn more about yourself from having engaging conversations. Everyone should learn how to become a better listener, so that your life is more enjoyable and filled with strong friendships.

[Back to Scoring Guides](#)

Idea Development—Score Point 4

This well-developed essay argues for the “importance of listening in our everyday lives.” The last sentence of the introduction includes the central idea emphasizing that listening to others can help someone “become a better person.” In the first body paragraph, the essay argues that listening can help strengthen “relationships, ease conflict, and lead to better, more meaningful conversations.” In the second body paragraph, the essay claims that “the benefits of listening are not only confined to help your relationships with other people” but can also “help you better yourself.” The paragraph goes on to argue that becoming a better listener can “strengthen your ‘sense of self’” and provide benefits at work or school. Evidence is effectively organized throughout the body paragraphs. The essay integrates relevant evidence from the excerpt and the article. The conclusion notes the “positive [e]ffects” that listening can have on our relationships with others and with ourselves. Overall, the essay demonstrates full awareness of the task and mode.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 3C

The essay demonstrates consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics, relative to its length and complexity. While some errors are present (e.g., comma splicing, “focous”), they are relatively minor and do not interfere with communication. The essay shows consistent control of standard English conventions.

We have all been hurt because no one would listen to what we had to say, so why do we still chose not to listen to others? In *The Lost Art of Listening* and "Talk Less. Listen More. Here's How.", both passages explain the importance of listening in our everyday lives. Although some people may say that listening to others is not as important as being able to express your opinions, listening is just as if not more important than being able to share your thoughts with others, the ability to listen to your surroundings can in turn help you become a better person.

Listening can help strengthen you relationships, ease conflict, and lead to better, more meaningful conversations. Over the years, people's attention spans have shortened and our lives have become more hurried and rushed, due to technology. This has caused many people to not listen to their peers as many people are more likely to give into distractions and worry more about "their own galloping thoughts" (Murphy). Listening and staying engaged in a conversation might be harder for others, that is why listening is "part effort" (Nichols). To be able to have a good conversation, both people need to put in effort. Listening has many benefits to our relationships. Not listening can drive our relationships apart, and conflict is "certain to get worse" (Nichols) if we don't try to hear other people's point of view. Listener's empathy, listening and understanding what others are trying to tell you "builds a bond of understanding" (Nichols) and trust. Being able to listen to one another will give you more "interesting conversations" (Murphy) that are also legitimate and can give you more information about the person you are talking to. It teaches you the skill of how to "explore the other person's point of view" (Murphy) without trying to turn the conversation into an argument.

The benefits of listening are not only confined to help your relationships with other people, hearing and understanding others can also help you better yourself. In order to be a good listener, you have to first learn more about yourself. To understand each other, we have to first "recognize our own defensive reactions" (Nichols) and be able to control and harness our emotions without pushing them onto the person we are talking to. Understanding your peers can help to strengthen your "sense of self" (Nichols). Hearing other experiences and different opinions, can give us new ideas, "clarify what we think, and discover what we feel" (Nichols). Listening can also help you to focus in many different situations, even one where you might not be talking to someone directly. Good focus habits like acknowledging "distractions, then return to focusing" (Murphy) can help you in work, school, and in conversations. Listening to your peers more helps you build a connection and a trust bond, which can come with some benefits for yourself. The more you listen to others the "more likely other people will listen to you" (Murphy), you will have to experience the hurt feeling of being ignored less. Not understanding others can prevent "you from becoming the best you can be." (Murphy) only truly listening can bring you to your full potential.

Thus, listening is one of the most important skills we can have. The more you listen, the better and easier it will become. Listening does not only have positive affects on your relationships, but also self benefits. It can help us learn to express ourselves more and have stronger connections to the people around us. The more actively we listen, the more we are prone to be listened to as well. So why do we still let other things get in the way and chose not listen to others?

[Back to Scoring Guides](#)

Idea Development—Score Point 3

This essay is moderately developed and organized. The three aspects of the essay's central idea are outlined in the introduction (listening skills help people engage in better conversations, create better connections with friends and family, and be more social and sincere). Body paragraphs are adequately developed. The essay is moderately organized with little transition between paragraphs, but expression of ideas is adequate overall. Appropriate details are selected from the excerpt and the article to support the essay's argument. The conclusion emphasizes the importance of "good listening skills" as "something we should all strive for." The essay demonstrates sufficient awareness of the task and mode.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 3D

The length and complexity of the essay are sufficient to demonstrate consistent control of standard English conventions. While some errors are present (e.g., comma splicing in the third paragraph), they are relatively minor and do not interfere with communication. Overall, the student demonstrates control of grammar, usage, and mechanics.

Listening skills, not everyone has them, but everyone should work towards bettering them. Listening skills are important because they can help you and other people engage in deeper and better conversations, they can help you gain better connections with your friends and family, and they also will help you be more social and get more sincere answers.

When in conversations we need to listen to our companion to better understand them and gain the deeper meaning of their words. When talking to someone, they will take "the failure to be heard as an absence of concern"(8, Lost Art of Listening). When people feel like you are not concerned with their problems they begin to feel as if they are not taken seriously. This can lead to the person disliking you and what you do. On the other hand "Good listeners ask good questions"(10, Talk Less. Listen More. Here's How.). Good questions will lead to deeper conversations and will have a positive effect on your companion.

It is important to be close with your family and friends, listening skills play a big role in that connection with your family and friends. When engaging in conversations, "listening to other people makes it more likely other people will listen to you"(19, Talk Less. Listen More. Here's How.). When you can listen to people and they listen to you, it will automatically form a stronger bond between you and the other person. As well as "Listening well can help you understand other people's attitudes and motivations"(20, Talk Less. Listen More. Here's How.). If you understand your friends and families motivations and attitudes, that also will create an even stronger bond and build more trust between you and the person you are talking to.

Listening skills are important because they will help you be more social and get more sincere answers from people. Researchers have found that "when talking to inattentive listeners, the speakers volunteered less information and conveyed information less articulately"(18, Talk Less. Listen More. Here's How.). But also found that "attentive listeners received more information, relevant details and elaboration from speakers, even when the listeners didn't ask any questions."(18, Talk Less. Listen More. Here's How.). This shows that the more attentive we are while listening, the more social and sincere the people who are talking will be.

Overall, good listening skills are something we should all strive for because there is no consequence to being a good listener. Listening skills are also important because listening is something we do for a big part of our day. If we don't have good listening skills we would not be able to function as a society.

[Back to Scoring Guides](#)

Idea Development—Score Point 2

This essay is somewhat developed and includes a central idea that argues for “how listening skills can be an important and fundamental part” of a person’s life. Limited text evidence is used to support the essay’s argument. Expression of ideas is basic: “Listening to these conversations could help you get in deeper into it.” Organization is limited, with a brief, somewhat ineffective introduction and conclusion: “All people need to do is just listen and problems like a phone wouldn’t exist.” Body paragraphs are connected through basic transitions. Overall, the essay demonstrates partial awareness of the task and mode.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 2

The essay shows mostly consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics relative to the length and complexity of the essay. Errors in spelling (“distracitons”), punctuation, and capitalization are present, as well as awkward usage and phrasing.

Listening to people is a lot more important then you think it is because of its range benefits. Be honest and think about when was the last time you actually listened to somebody. In the article, "The Lost Art of Listening" by Michael P. Nichols and "Talk Less. Listen More. Here's How." by Kate Murphy both show how listening skills can be an important and fundamental part of your life.

First, in the article, "Talk Less. Listen More. Here's How." listening is important is a needed fundamental in life because of its perks. Like opening up to new conversations, going deeper into conversations, increasing relationships, etc; "I discovered that listening goes beyond simply hearing what people say. it also involves paying attention to how they say it and what they do while they are saying it, in what context, and how what they say resonates within you." Listening to these conversations could help you get in deeper into it. Listening can also help you increase the attention of the conversation like becoming more involved and actually speaking from your heart rather then thinking up of a response on the spot.

Next, the article "The Lost Art of Listening" shows why not listening is impactful to yourself and to others. Most conversations this day are interrupted by passive distracitons like phone notifications. They don't feel engaged in the conversation; "Conversation is often preempted by soothing and passive distractions. Too tired to talk and listen, we settle instead for the lulling charms of electronic devices that project pictures." It's these type of distractions that kill conversations and they mostly happen because the person feels like the other person doesn't listen to them. They dont have the spark in that conversation because they just think for a second and give out a response. This isn't how people are meant to conversate

In conclusion, Listening is a very important skill that all others should need to do so they could built that relationship deeper. All people need to do is just listen and problems like a phone wouldn't exist.

[Back to Scoring Guides](#)

Idea Development—Score Point 1

The central idea arguing why listening skills are important is not developed in this response. The response explains how listening can build bonds between people but uses minimal evidence to support the central idea. Explanations are brief. Little organization is present. The response demonstrates minimal awareness of the task and mode.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 1

This brief response has numerous errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics, including errors with spelling (“brong”) and punctuation (end punctuation, quotations). Little control of standard English conventions is demonstrated.

Listening skill are important because it can help the person whose speaking and it can build a bond. In the article The Lost Art of Listening, it says " A listener’s empathy—understanding what we’re trying to say *and* showing it—builds a bond of understanding,. This shows how listening skill are important because the person talking can talk to someone and feel better .

In Talk Less.ListenMore. Here's How, it says " Research indicates that when people who don’t know each other well ask each other these types of questions, they feel more connected than if they spent time together accomplishing a task. " Talking to someone brong people closer

[Back to Scoring Guides](#)

Idea Development—Score Point 0

This response shows evidence the student has read the excerpt and/or article by addressing the topic of listening but does not address the question.

Standard English Conventions—Score Point 0

The response consists of one brief sentence in which no control of grammar, usage, or mechanics is demonstrated.

They tend to listen is more easy because it my comfort listening to speaking.

[Back to Scoring Guides](#)