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*Tennessee Department of Education's  
Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program  
for English Language Arts*

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**Grades 11–12 Writing  
Practice Task I  
2014–2015**

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# ***TCAP Grades 11–12 Writing***

## ***Practice Task I***

### ***Directions***

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#### **Student Directions**

Today you will be taking the Grades 11–12 Writing Task. The task is made up of two texts and two prompts. For each prompt, you are to plan and write an essay about the text(s) according to the instructions provided. Your essays will be scored as rough drafts, but you should watch for careless errors.

There are some important things to remember as you complete the task:

- The time you have for reading both texts and answering the prompts will be 120 minutes.
- Read each prompt carefully and think about the best way to answer it.
- Write only about the texts and prompts you are given.
- You may complete pre-writing activities and notes before beginning your response, but do not write your response on the same pages as your pre-writing activities or notes.
- If you do not know the answer to a prompt, skip it and go on to the next prompt. You may return to it later if there is time.

#### **Topic**

The rise and popularity of the Internet is affecting the readership of newspapers and threatening the existence of some newspapers. This task will address the effect that online news has on the newspaper industry.

#### **Texts**

- **“The Decline of Newspapers Is Bad for the US”** by Laura Finley
- **“Battle of the Brands: A Newspaper War in New Orleans”** by Roger Yu

# *TCAP Grades 11–12 Writing*

## *Practice Task I*

### *Text 1*

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#### **Text 1 Introduction**

In “**The Decline of Newspapers Is Bad for the US**” by **Laura Finley**, the author discusses the problems resulting from the decline in newspaper readership in the United States.

Please read “The Decline of Newspapers Is Bad for the US” and then answer Prompt 1.

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#### **The Decline of Newspapers Is Bad for the US**

**Laura Finley**

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1 **Internet Threat**

2 Some contend that newspapers are being replaced by online sources, and that this shift is  
3 desirable. This is simply not true, as online news sources do not reach the same volume of  
4 people, nor is the information they communicate as accurate as traditional print-based  
5 newspapers. Without newspapers, citizens will be deprived of information essential to  
6 understanding their world and to stimulating critical social, economic, and political engagement.

7 Although complete replacement of print by online sources is undesirable, a combination of print  
8 and online news certainly is acceptable. One recommendation for saving newspapers is to pursue  
9 endowments, much like universities do. Still other newspapers are relying more heavily on  
10 volunteers and students to fill necessary functions and control costs. Yet another suggestion is to  
11 retain print newspapers, but scale them back to cover only local issues, as this is the primary  
12 reason readers select this medium as their news source. . . .

13 Without a doubt, newspapers across the country are declining in circulation and profitability. The  
14 biggest decline occurred between October 2008 and March 2009, when average sales declined  
15 7.1 percent from the same time period a year earlier. Advertising revenues, the mainstay of the  
16 business, declined, on average, 30 percent in the first quarter of 2009. *The Boston Globe* faced  
17 tremendous fiscal danger and potential closure in May 2009 and since 2007, several major  
18 newspapers have ceased publishing completely, while others have experienced serious cuts in  
19 staffing and have reduced the services they provide. After 150 years operating in the Denver,  
20 Colorado, area, the *Rocky Mountain News* shut down in February 2009. From December 2008 to

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# ***TCAP Grades 11–12 Writing***

## ***Practice Task I***

### ***Text 1***

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21 February 2009, thirty-three newspapers, including the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Chicago*  
22 *Tribune*, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. At the end of March 2008, Sun Times  
23 Media, owner of fifty-eight newspapers, including the *Chicago Sun-Times*, declared bankruptcy.

24 Journalists, scholars, and activists worry that, if the trend continues, the US will be a nation  
25 without newspapers. They argue that newspapers are central to a republican form of government,  
26 and that citizens who are unable to obtain adequate information cannot self-govern effectively.  
27 Newspapers keep the public informed so that it can petition, speak, and write when dissatisfied;  
28 can vote with adequate knowledge about the candidates and issues; and can understand their  
29 civic duties and responsibilities. Thomas Jefferson once said that, should he have to choose  
30 between government without newspapers or newspapers without government, he would surely  
31 favor the newspapers.

32 Some have maintained that in the Internet era, there is no longer a need for traditional  
33 newspapers. Citizens can find all the information they need online. Newspapers have tried to  
34 adapt to this new information age by creating and expanding online versions of their hard copy  
35 work. For instance, after 146 years, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* became an entirely online  
36 enterprise. By late 2008, polls had shown the Internet had replaced newspapers as Americans’  
37 favorite source of information about national and international affairs. This is a positive trend  
38 that should continue, but online news sources should never completely replace traditional  
39 newspapers.

40 First, access to the Internet is still not equal. The “digital divide” is very real, as many studies  
41 have confirmed people of color and people of lower socioeconomic classes use the Internet with  
42 less frequency. Consequently, access to key information about national social, economic, and  
43 political issues would not equally reach all segments of the population. Approximately  
44 three quarters of Americans older than age seventy-five are not online, for instance.

45 Internet-based news tends to be more focused on opinions than news. Entertainment related  
46 issues get more attention than do serious newsworthy issues. Although print-based newspapers  
47 are not completely neutral, the problem of bias is far greater on the Internet. Rather than stories  
48 in a news format, much of what can be found on the Internet is in the form of blogs. Bloggers  
49 tend not to be very concerned with accuracy—hence misinformation can very easily be spread.  
50 Bloggers tend to be young (ages eighteen to twenty-nine) and their politics lean towards  
51 Democratic. Thus, they are more likely to offer partisan viewpoints. In contrast, traditional

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# *TCAP Grades 11–12 Writing*

## *Practice Task I*

### *Text 1*

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52 journalism requires fact-checking before an article goes to press. A 2007 report by the Project for  
53 Excellence in Journalism found two-thirds of Americans prefer to receive their information from  
54 neutral sources. While surely there is a place for journalists to question and even evoke outrage,  
55 journalists are relied upon to do more.

56 Another problem resulting from the demise of newspapers is that economic constraints have  
57 forced them to cut essential services. Even of those news sources still in operation, public affairs  
58 reporting (reporting relating to politics and public policy) has been among the first areas of news  
59 to be reduced or cut completely. This is driving some of the most seasoned beat reporters to other  
60 fields or to retirement. The result is fewer people watching out for the public’s interests and  
61 holding politicians accountable. This will have national, regional, and local implications. Mary  
62 Shapiro, chairwoman of the US Securities and Exchange Commission, has argued that financial  
63 reporters play a huge role in uncovering regulatory violations. A study by Princeton University  
64 found a decline in candidates willing to challenge incumbents and a decrease in the number of  
65 people voting in local elections as a result of the 2007 closure of the *Cincinnati Post*. Further,  
66 this means fewer people are reporting about the times when government does well. This, too, is  
67 essential information for an engaged public. The decline in quality journalists will only  
68 exacerbate the decline in readership, as people will determine the news is less worthy of their  
69 attention.

70 The decline in newspapers is also having a ripple effect—having an impact on other forms of  
71 media. Historically, radio and television news take a good portion of their stories from  
72 newspapers, as newspaper reporting has a tendency to delve further into an issue, put stories in  
73 their historical context, and follow the story as it progresses. Further, print journalism has a long  
74 history of credible investigative reporting. The loss of this ability to borrow from newspapers  
75 will likely result in an increase in entertainment coverage and a decrease in information about  
76 politics, economics, and critical social issues. It is hard to argue that information about  
77 “Brangelina” and the latest celebrity going to rehab are more essential than whether our  
78 politicians vote to pass an economic stimulus package, for instance.

79 On a typical weekday, only 52 percent of adults read the newspaper. This is a disturbing statistic,  
80 and one that should prompt the nation to consider ways to increase, not decrease, the public’s

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***TCAP Grades 11–12 Writing  
Practice Task 1***

***Text 1***

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81 access to news. There is some disagreement among experts in the field regarding whether  
82 newspapers need to continue trying to attract younger readers, or whether they would be best to  
83 do whatever it takes to appeal to their core consumers, whose average age is fifty-seven.  
84 Regardless of whom they target, newspapers in some form need to remain a fixture in the US.

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Finley, Laura. "Point: The Decline of Newspapers Is Bad for the US." *Points of View: Decline of Newspapers*, 2014. EBSCO Information Services: Massachusetts. Used by permission Publishing Company, d/b/a Cricket Media, and/or various authors and illustrators. Any commercial use or distribution of material without permission is strictly prohibited. Please visit <http://www.cricketmedia.com/info/licensing2> for licensing and <http://www.cricketmedia.com> for subscriptions.

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*TCAP Grades 11–12 Writing  
Practice Task 1*

*Prompt 1*

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**Prompt 1**

You have now read “The Decline of Newspapers Is Bad for the US.” In this text, Laura Finley develops several central ideas.

Determine two central ideas of the text and write an essay that analyzes how the author develops these ideas over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another. Be sure to cite evidence from the text to support your analysis. Follow the conventions of standard written English.

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# TCAP Grades 11–12 Writing

## Practice Task I

### Text 2

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#### **Text 2 Introduction**

In “**Battle of the Brands: A Newspaper War in New Orleans**” by **Roger Yu**, the author describes the rivalry between two local newspapers with different approaches to reporting news.

Please read “Battle of the Brands: A Newspaper War in New Orleans” and then answer Prompt 2.

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#### **Battle of the Brands: A Newspaper War in New Orleans**

**Roger Yu**

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1 NEW ORLEANS—The pirate flag hanging in the *New Orleans Advocate*’s office in downtown  
2 is something of an inside joke—a hammy reminder of the startup paper’s unlikely insurgency  
3 against its entrenched competitor, the *Times-Picayune*.

4 Other symbols of the year-old paper’s inchoate<sup>1</sup> status are of the more banal variety—the  
5 unkempt entrance, desks crammed into an office no bigger than a McMansion living room, one  
6 unisex restroom serving the entire staff.

7 Seven blocks away, the *Picayune*’s new headquarters boasts the aesthetics of a well-funded  
8 dotcom. The loft-style newsroom occupies the penthouse floor of a commercial high-rise with a  
9 ground-level mall. With large windows encircling the office, the staff has a gorgeous view of the  
10 Mississippi River. . . .

11 Despite the *Picayune*’s avowed campaign of rebirth, competition and lingering market forces  
12 here continue to tug at its once inexorable march toward an unencumbered digital future. There  
13 is an old-fashioned newspaper war here, an improbable and unusual development in the  
14 digital era.

15 On May 24, 2012, New Orleanians woke up to startling news . . . that the 177-year old *Picayune*  
16 would cut back on publishing to three days a week as part of a digital-first approach, making the  
17 city the first major U.S. market to go without a daily. Sensing an opportunity, the *Advocate*,  
18 based in the state capital Baton Rouge 80 miles north, started a New Orleans edition that would

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<sup>1</sup> **inchoate**: not completely developed

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# *TCAP Grades 11–12 Writing*

## *Practice Task 1*

### *Text 2*

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19 be home-delivered daily. A few months later, the *Picayune* counterpunched, launching . . . *TP*  
20 *Street*, a tabloid sold at coin boxes and stores on days the *Picayune* doesn't come out.

21 The papers' head-to-head battle symbolizes two sharply different approaches to newspaper  
22 survival, an upstart's bet on a traditional print-focused approach vs. a corporate incumbent's  
23 fervent pursuit of an uncertain but potentially rewarding digital future. It has morphed into a test  
24 of newspaper brand loyalty as well as a referendum on the merits of slow-cooked stories  
25 developed for the next morning's paper in an age of instant gratification in a 24/7 news  
26 environment.

27 For now, the 16-month old competition has spurred innovations and operational tweaks that have  
28 resulted in more diverse options for readers. The *Advocate* has beefed up staffing to boost metro  
29 coverage in a place racked by crime and corruption but undergoing an economic revival. The  
30 *Picayune* strengthened its depleted reporting staff and vows to continue to pursue investigative  
31 stories. . . .

#### 32 **Going Digital First**

33 The decision by the *Picayune*'s parent company, New York-based Advance Publications, to  
34 adopt a digital-first approach and pull the plug on seven-day publishing hit the city like a  
35 wrecking ball. There were howls of protest and visceral criticism from subscribers, city leaders  
36 and media critics. It was a particularly bitter blow. The paper had exhaustively covered  
37 Hurricane Katrina and the recovery efforts, forging a deep relationship with New Orleanians. . . .

38 The *Picayune*'s decision was based on the inevitable decline of print newspapers, Mathews  
39 [Ricky Mathews, president of NOLA Media group, which publishes the *Picayune*] says. "It's  
40 not to replace all lost print revenue, but to incrementally replace it with digital," Mathews says.  
41 "Death by 1,000 cuts wasn't going to be our approach." . . .

#### 42 **The *Advocate* Ramps Up**

43 By its own admission, the *Advocate*'s New Orleans edition was at first a fumbling effort. Limited  
44 staffing in New Orleans—only six reporters—was an issue. Distribution in the *terra incognita*<sup>2</sup>  
45 suffered as readers complained about undelivered papers. Even with a few New Orleans stories  
46 scattered throughout, the edition remained distinctly a Baton Rouge publication, says Dan Shea,

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<sup>2</sup> *terra incognita*: an unknown area; unfamiliar territory

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# TCAP Grades 11–12 Writing

## Practice Task I

### Text 2

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47 a former *Picayune* managing editor who was hired . . . as the general manager of the *Advocate*.  
48 “They did a great job getting in a foothold, but they were never going to get off the beach.” . . .

49 Shea brought in Peter Kovacs, who was forced out as a *Picayune* managing editor during the  
50 layoffs, to lead the newsroom. They started recruiting seasoned reporters for the new edition,  
51 nearly all of whom were working at or had been laid off by the *Picayune*. The newsroom in  
52 New Orleans now totals about 30. “It was like having eight of the 10 top draft choices,” Kovacs  
53 says. . . .

54 In December 2012, the then-publisher of the *Advocate* told *Columbia Journalism Review* that the  
55 paper’s circulation in New Orleans had quickly reached about 23,500. But the latest figure  
56 supplied by the *Advocate*—about 25,000—shows that circulation growth hasn’t grown much  
57 since then. And it’s a fraction of the broadsheet<sup>3</sup> *Picayune*’s weekday average of about 115,000.

58 Kevin Gibson, a long-time *Picayune* subscriber, echoes a sentiment commonly heard in the city.  
59 While he disagreed with the paper’s decision to cut back, he has “just never moved over” to the  
60 *Advocate*, he says. “It’s just not the *Times-Picayune*,” says Gibson, business analyst at a food  
61 distribution company. . . .

62 Despite the cutback in its publishing schedule, the *Picayune* likely has held on to about 85% of  
63 its print revenue, estimates Ken Doctor, an analyst who writes about the news business. . . .  
64 “They were profitable before. The whole intent (of the cutback) was to increase short-term  
65 profitability and set them up for digital,” he says. . . .

#### 66 **Dueling Philosophies**

67 The contrast between the papers’ editorial philosophies is as stark as the one between their  
68 business models. The *New Orleans Advocate* emphasizes that it has fewer but better journalists  
69 producing more meaningful stories. The *Picayune* points to high volume of digital stories  
70 produced quickly—an approach born of its belief that news consumption habits have changed  
71 forever. . . .

72 Whether the *Picayune*’s readers choose to ride the 24-hour news cycle with the brand they had  
73 come to expect at their doorsteps each morning will determine whether its stunning bet was a  
74 wise choice in the long run.

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<sup>3</sup> **broadsheet:** a newspaper printed on large paper

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# ***TCAP Grades 11–12 Writing***

## ***Practice Task I***

### ***Text 2***

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75 As for the *New Orleans Advocate*, it faces a daunting challenge. It’s very rare for newspapers to  
76 succeed when they plunge into adjacent markets. And it’s placing a big bet on print at a time  
77 when newspapers continue to decline.

78 But this is, after all, New Orleans, distinctive, self-referential New Orleans. Perhaps reading a  
79 newspaper, like chicory coffee, beignets and jazz, will remain a permanent part of the city’s  
80 unique culture.

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Yu, Roger. “Battle of the Brands: A Newspaper War in New Orleans.” From *USA Today*—(Academic Permission), Jan. 29 2014 © 2014 Gannett-USAToday. All rights reserved. Used by permission and protected by the Copyright Laws of the United States. The printing, copying, redistribution, or retransmission of this Content without express written permission is prohibited.

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***TCAP Grades 11–12 Writing  
Practice Task 1***

***Prompt 2***

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**Prompt 2**

You have now read two texts relating to difficulties faced by modern newspapers in today’s digital world:

- **“The Decline of Newspapers Is Bad for the US”** by Laura Finley
- **“Battle of the Brands: A Newspaper War in New Orleans”** by Roger Yu

Write an argumentative essay that supports or opposes the claim that traditional (print) newspapers should be preserved. Be sure to cite evidence from both texts to support your argument. Follow the conventions of standard written English.

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