



TNCore

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

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**Grade 8 Writing  
Practice Task II  
2014–2015**

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# ***TCAP Grade 8 Writing***

## ***Practice Task II***

### ***Directions***

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#### **Student Directions**

Today you will be taking the Grade 8 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**

Many people have debated the effects that video games have on young people. This task will address research into the effects of video games.

#### **Texts**

- **“The Violent Side of Video Games”** by Emily Sohn
- **“What Video Games Can Teach Us”** by Emily Sohn

# ***TCAP Grade 8 Writing***

## ***Practice Task II***

### ***Text 1***

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#### **Text 1 Introduction**

In “**The Violent Side of Video Games**” by **Emily Sohn**, the author discusses the possible effects of violence in video games.

Please read “The Violent Side of Video Games” and then answer Prompt 1.

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#### **The Violent Side of Video Games**

**Emily Sohn**

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*Playing video games and watching TV and movies can change the way we act, think, and feel.*

1 When I was a kid, I was obsessed with video games.

2 I saved my allowance to buy new games every month. I read Nintendo magazines for tips about  
3 solving the Super Mario Brothers adventures. I played so many hours of *Tetris* that I used to  
4 dream about little blocks falling perfectly into place.

5 There were physical effects, too. My thumbs turned into machines, quick and precise. During  
6 especially difficult levels of play, my palms would sweat. My heart would race. I’d have knots in  
7 my stomach from anxiety. It was the same feeling I’d sometimes get from watching scary movies  
8 or suspenseful TV shows.

9 After a while, I started to think that looking at screens and playing games all the time might be  
10 affecting me in ways I didn’t even suspect. It turns out that I was probably right.

11 Scientists are discovering that playing video and computer games and watching TV and movies  
12 can change the way we act, think, and feel. Whether these changes are good or bad has become a  
13 subject of intense debate.

#### **14 Concerns About Violence**

15 Violence is one of the biggest concerns, especially as computer graphics and special effects  
16 become more realistic. Some parents and teachers blame school shootings and other aggressive  
17 behavior on media violence—as seen in TV programs, movies, and video games.

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# *TCAP Grade 8 Writing*

## *Practice Task II*

### *Text 1*

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18 “If you’ve ever watched young children watching kickboxing,” says child psychologist John  
19 Murray, “within a few minutes they start popping up and pushing and shoving and imitating the  
20 actions.” Murray is at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas.

21 There’s also evidence that people become less sensitive to violence after a while, Murray says. In  
22 other words, you get so used to seeing it that you eventually think it’s not such a big deal.

23 Then there’s the “mean world syndrome.” If you watch lots of violence, you may start to think  
24 the world is a bad place. I still sometimes have trouble falling asleep if I watch the news on TV  
25 or read the newspaper right before going to bed.

26 Still, it’s hard to prove that violence on TV leads to violence in real life. It might be possible, for  
27 example, that people who are already aggressive for other reasons are more drawn to violent  
28 games and TV shows.

#### **29 Brain Clues**

30 To try to make the link between seeing violence and acting violently, Murray is looking for clues  
31 in the brain.

32 In his most recent study, eight boys and girls between the ages of 8 and 12 watched a series of  
33 video clips. Some clips showed violent fighting scenes of Sylvester Stallone from the movie  
34 *Rocky IV*. Other clips were full of action, but no violence. Others were just blank screens.

35 During the experiment, each kid lay inside a special brain-imaging machine. Such a machine  
36 takes pictures of the brain and shows which parts of the brain are working at different times.

37 Murray and his colleagues found that exposure to violent video clips activated the amygdala, a  
38 thumbnail-sized area in the brain. The right side was particularly active.

39 The amygdala is best known as the “fight or flight” organ. It senses danger and prepares you to  
40 either go to battle or run away. Your breathing slows down. You become hyper-aware of  
41 movements in the environment. And blood rushes to your brain’s core, among other effects.

42 “If someone drops a snake in front of you, most people . . . gasp,” Murray says. “That’s actually  
43 the amygdala responding.”

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# ***TCAP Grade 8 Writing***

## ***Practice Task II***

### ***Text 1***

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#### 44 **Video Power**

45 Most of the research has focused on TV and movie violence, mainly because TV and movies  
46 have been around much longer than video games, says psychologist Craig Anderson of Iowa  
47 State University in Ames, Iowa. Anderson has a Web site dedicated to looking at the link  
48 between video games and violence.

49 In his own research and in analyses of research by others, Anderson says that he has detected a  
50 connection between violent video games and violent behavior. He has found that people who  
51 repeatedly play violent games have aggressive thoughts and become less helpful and sociable.  
52 Physically, their heart rates accelerate.

53 Video games might have an even more powerful effect on the brain than TV does, Murray says.  
54 Players actively participate in the violence. In games like *Grand Theft Auto 3*, for example, the  
55 goal is to kill as many people as you can. The more violent you are, the more points you win.

56 Next time you play a violent video game, Murray suggests, check your pulse just before and after  
57 each round as one way to see how the game affects you.

58 “Ninety-nine percent of the time, I’ll bet your heart rate will have increased rather dramatically  
59 while playing one,” Murray says. “This indicates that . . . you are being affected.”

60 Three teenagers from Puerto Rico have data to back up that observation. At the International  
61 Science and Engineering Fair in Cleveland last year, Wildaliz Arias Perez, Derek Mercado  
62 Rivera, and Jacqueline Velez Gonzales presented a study looking at how video games affect  
63 people.

64 With the help of a school nurse, the high school seniors found that people of all ages showed a  
65 rise in blood pressure and heart rate after playing the superviolent game *Capcom vs. SNK Pro*.  
66 Playing *Super Bust-A-Move 2*, an active, nonviolent game, did not have the same effect.

67 Kids in Puerto Rico are addicted to video games just like in the United States, Derek told me,  
68 and he worries about the consequences. “So many kids have to play all day, like more than 4  
69 hours,” he said.

70 Not so fast, some researchers say. Although violent video games increase a person’s heart rate  
71 and blood pressure, it doesn’t necessarily follow that such games make a person more violent. It

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# ***TCAP Grade 8 Writing***

## ***Practice Task II***

### ***Text 1***

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72 might not be fair to blame all—or even a part—of society’s problems on media violence, these  
73 critics say.

74 And there’s more to video games than just violent content. In fact, a variety of studies are  
75 starting to show that playing video games can actually help people develop visual skills, learn  
76 about computers, and stay interested in school.

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Sohn, Emily. “The Violent Side of Video Games.” *Science News for Students*. January 12, 2004. Reprinted with Permission of Science News.

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# *TCAP Grade 8 Writing*

## *Practice Task II*

### *Prompt 1*

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#### **Prompt 1**

You have now read “The Violent Side of Video Games.” In this text, the author presents several ideas about the effects of playing video games.

Write an essay that determines the author’s point of view and analyzes that point of view, including how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints. Be sure to cite evidence from the text to support your analysis. Follow the conventions of standard written English.

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# ***TCAP Grade 8 Writing***

## ***Practice Task II***

### ***Text 2***

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#### **Text 2 Introduction**

In “**What Video Games Can Teach Us**” by **Emily Sohn**, the author discusses whether video games can be educational.

Please read “What Video Games Can Teach Us” and then answer Prompt 2.

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#### **What Video Games Can Teach Us**

Emily Sohn

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*If used in the right way, video and computer games can inspire learning and improve some skills.*

1 Here’s some news for you to share with your parents and teachers: Video games might actually  
2 be good for you.

3 Whenever a wave of teenage violence strikes, movies, TV, or video games often take the heat.  
4 Some adults assume that movies, TV, and video games are a bad influence on kids, and they  
5 blame these media for causing various problems. A variety of studies appear to support the link  
6 between media violence and bad behavior among kids. . . .

7 But media don’t necessarily *cause* violence, says James Gee. Gee is an education professor at the  
8 University of Wisconsin, Madison. . . .

9 Video games are innocent of most of the charges against them, Gee says. The games might  
10 actually do a lot of good. Gee has written a book titled *What Video Games Have to Teach Us*  
11 *About Learning and Literacy*.

12 A growing number of researchers agree with Gee. If used in the right way, video and computer  
13 games have the potential to inspire learning. And they can help players improve coordination and  
14 visual skills.

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# ***TCAP Grade 8 Writing***

## ***Practice Task II***

### ***Text 2***

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#### 15 **Attention-Getting Games**

16 A good video game is challenging, entertaining, and complicated, Gee says. It usually takes 50 to  
17 60 hours of intense concentration to finish one. Even kids who can't sit still in school can spend  
18 hours trying to solve a video or computer game. . . .

19 The captivating power of video games might lie in their interactive nature. Players don't just sit  
20 and watch. They get to participate in the action and solve problems. Some games even allow  
21 players to make changes in the game, allowing new possibilities.

22 And kids who play computer games often end up knowing more about computers than their  
23 parents do. "Kids today are natives in a culture in which their parents are immigrants," Gee says.

24 In his 2 to 3 years of studying the social influences of video games, Gee has seen a number of  
25 young gamers become computer science majors in college. One kid even ended up as a teaching  
26 assistant during his freshman year because the school's computer courses were too easy for him.

#### 27 **Screen Reading**

28 Video games can enhance reading skills, too. In the game *Animal Crossing*, for instance, players  
29 become characters who live in a town full of animals. Over the course of the game, you can buy  
30 a house, travel from town to town, go to museums, and do other ordinary things. All the while,  
31 you're writing notes to other players and talking to the animals. Because kids are interested in  
32 the game, they often end up reading at a level well above their grade, even if they say they don't  
33 like to read.

34 Games can inspire new interests. After playing a game called *Age of Mythology*, Gee says, kids  
35 (like his 8-year-old son) often start checking out mythology books from the library or join  
36 Internet chat groups about mythological characters. History can come alive to a player  
37 participating in the game. . . .

#### 38 **Improved Skills**

39 Video games might also help improve visual skills. That was what researchers from the  
40 University of Rochester in New York recently found.

41 In the study, frequent game players between the ages of 18 and 23 were better at monitoring  
42 what was happening around them than those who didn't play as often or didn't play at all. They

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#### ***Text 2***

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43 could keep track of more objects at a time. And they were faster at picking out objects from a  
44 cluttered environment.

45 “Above and beyond the fact that action video games can be beneficial,” says Rochester  
46 neuroscientist Daphne Bavelier, “our findings are surprising because they show that the learning  
47 induced by video game playing occurs quite fast and generalizes outside the gaming experience.”

48 The research might lead to better ways to train soldiers or treat people with attention problems,  
49 the researchers say, though they caution against taking that point too far.

50 Says Bavelier, “We certainly don’t mean to convey the message that kids can play video games  
51 instead of doing their homework!”

52 If Gee gets his way, though, teachers might some day start incorporating computer games into  
53 their assignments. Already, scientists and the military use computer games to help simulate  
54 certain situations for research or training, he says. Why shouldn’t schools do the same thing?

55 “Kids are beginning to see school as really out of step with culture,” Gee says. Making computer  
56 technology part of the learning experience could change all that.

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Sohn, Emily. “What Video Games Can Teach Us.” *Science News for Students*. January 19, 2004. Reprinted with Permission of Science News.

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# *TCAP Grade 8 Writing*

## *Practice Task II*

### *Text 2*

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#### **Prompt 2**

You have now read two texts about the effects of playing video games:

- **“The Violent Side of Video Games”** by **Emily Sohn**
- **“What Video Games Can Teach Us”** by **Emily Sohn**

Write an essay in which you argue whether video games are good for young people **or** whether video games result in harmful behavior. Be sure to cite evidence from both texts to support your argument. Follow the conventions of standard written English.

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