College & Career Composition

The following passage argues that the use of computers in education inhibits rather than improves student learning. As you read the passage, pay close attention to the author's claims that today's students do not benefit from the use of computers in core subject areas like science and English.

Among the challenges confronting our elementary and high school students today, one might list short attention spans, lack of discipline, cynical attitudes, or little interest in reading. OK: Which of these problems are solved by a classroom computer? Which, on the other hand, are made worse?

The one thing that the computer does well is to give our kids more information, faster. But lack of information simply isn't a problem in any school I've visited. Indeed, most teachers complain that they haven't enough time to teach the information that's already available.

We're wiring our classrooms to promote computer literacy, but how much computing does a student need to be taught? I'd say that a high school graduate ought to be able to use a word processor, manipulate a spreadsheet, use e-mail, browse the Web and use a search engine. OK, how long did it take you to learn to use a word processor? A day? Maybe three? Did it take you a week to figure out how to surf the Web? Aside from the mechanical typing lessons, this just isn't challenging stuff. And whatever the problems confronting our students, fear of computers isn't one of 'em. Nor is the inability to use the Internet.

Computer literacy doesn't demand the same level of instruction as English, American history or physics. It's one more way to dumb down the school, giving the appearance of teaching futuristic subjects while dodging the important topics. The fact is, computers don't belong in the classroom. Not only do they not help solve any educational problems, but they very often make existing problems worse.

Whenever I point out the dubious value of computers in schools, I hear the comment, "Look, computers are everywhere, so we have to bring them into the classroom." Well, automobiles are everywhere too. They play an important part in our society; it's hard to get a job if you can't drive. But we don't teach "automobile literacy." Nor do we make cars a central part of the curriculum—indeed, many schools are now dropping driver's ed, recognizing that teenagers can learn to drive without intensive schooling.

And yes, computers seem ubiquitous, but that's no reason to bring them into the classroom. Television is certainly omnipresent, but it's been relegated to a fairly minor role in schools. I don't hear politicians worrying about some "television divide" separating those with the tube from those without.

Adapted from Clifford Stoll, "High Tech Heretic: Reflections of a Computer Contrarian." © 1999 by Clifford Stoll.

Write a persuasive essay in which you argue whether or not using computers in the classroom "makes existing [educational] problems worse." You are encouraged to use the author's ideas in addition to your own knowledge and experience to explain and support your position.

Purpose: To Persuade

	Viewpoint	Development	Organization	Language
Score: 6 Essays at this score point demonstrate effective skill in writing to persuade.	The essay takes a clear position in response to the reading passage, demonstrates insightful understanding of the passage, and addresses the significance of the ideas and/or values reflected in the passage.	The essay effectively supports the writer's position with ample convincing evidence drawn from the reading passage and/or the writer's own knowledge and experience. Ideas are thoroughly explained. The essay maintains a clear and consistent focus on critical ideas.	Organization is unified and coherent, with a logical progression of ideas and effective transitions that clarify relationships among ideas. The essay includes a clear, engaging introduction and an effective conclusion that may extend or elaborate ideas.	A variety of well-constructed sentences and precise word choice clearly and effectively convey ideas. The writer's voice and tone are appropriate for the persuasive purpose and are maintained throughout the essay. Although there may be a few minor errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics, meaning is clear throughout the essay.
Score: 5 Essays at this score point demonstrate competent skill in writing to persuade.	The essay takes a clear position in response to the reading passage, demonstrates clear understanding of the passage, and partially addresses the significance of the ideas and/or values reflected in the passage.	The essay competently supports the writer's position with sufficient relevant evidence drawn from the reading passage and/or the writer's own knowledge and experience. Ideas are clearly explained. The essay maintains focus on critical ideas.	Organization is coherent, with some logical progression of ideas and clear transitions that clarify relationships among ideas. The essay includes a clear, well-developed introduction and a developed conclusion.	Varied sentence construction and some precise word choice clearly convey ideas. The writer's voice and tone are appropriate for the persuasive purpose and are maintained throughout most of the essay. There may be a few errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics, but they are rarely distracting and meaning is clear.
Score: 4 Essays at this score point demonstrate adequate skill in writing to persuade.	The essay takes a clear position in response to the reading passage, demonstrates satisfactory understanding of the passage, and establishes the significance of the ideas and/or values reflected in the passage.	The essay adequately supports the writer's position with some relevant evidence drawn from the reading passage and/or the writer's own knowledge and experience. Ideas are adequately explained. The essay maintains focus on ideas appropriate to the task.	Organization is apparent, with ideas logically grouped and some transitions that clarify relationships among ideas. The essay includes a clear, somewhat developed introduction and conclusion.	Sentences and word choice are usually clear and adequately convey ideas. The writer's voice and tone are appropriate for the persuasive purpose, though they may not be consistently maintained. There may be some distracting errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics, but meaning is usually clear.
Score: 3 Essays at this score point demonstrate some developing skill in writing to persuade.	The essay takes a position in response to the reading passage and demonstrates basic understanding of the passage, but offers little recognition of the significance of the ideas and/or values reflected in the passage.	The essay somewhat supports the writer's position with a little relevant evidence drawn from the reading passage and/or the writer's own knowledge and experience. Ideas are only somewhat explained. The essay usually focuses on ideas appropriate to the task.	Organization is simple, with most ideas logically grouped. A few transitions are used to clarify relationships among ideas. The essay includes an underdeveloped introduction and a brief conclusion.	Most sentences convey ideas clearly, and word choice is general. The writer's voice and tone are somewhat appropriate for the persuasive purpose, but they are inconsistently maintained. Errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics may be distracting and may occasionally impede understanding.
Score: 2 Essays at this score point demonstrate inconsistent or weak skill in writing to persuade.	The essay takes a position, though the writer's position is not entirely relevant to the reading passage and only limited understanding of the passage is demonstrated. There is little or no recognition of the significance of the ideas and/or values reflected in the passage.	The essay minimally supports the writer's position with weak or irrelevant evidence drawn from the reading passage and/or the writer's own knowledge and experience. Explanations are unclear or incomplete. The essay only sometimes focuses on ideas appropriate to the task.	Organization is simple, with some ideas logically grouped and a few transitions used. The essay has a brief introduction and may have a brief conclusion.	Some sentences convey ideas clearly, and word choice is basic. Voice and tone are inconsistent and may not be appropriate for the persuasive purpose. Errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics may frequently be distracting and may sometimes impede understanding.
Score: 1 Essays at this score point demonstrate little or no skill in writing to persuade.	The essay may not take a position; if it does, the writer's position is not clearly relevant to the reading passage. No accurate understanding of the passage is demonstrated. There is no recognition of the significance of the ideas and/or values reflected in the passage.	The essay provides minimal support for any claims and may not provide any evidence drawn from the reading passage or the writer's own knowledge or experience. The essay lacks explanation of ideas and focuses very little on ideas appropriate to the task.	Organization of ideas is not clear, with little or no evidence of the logical grouping of ideas. The essay has a very brief introduction but may have no conclusion.	A few sentences and some word choices convey ideas clearly. Voice and tone are not appropriate for the persuasive purpose. Errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics may frequently be distracting and may significantly impede understanding.
Score: 0	Unscorable: essay is blank, off-topic, illegible, or written in another language.			

Total: 24 points