

HiSET® Language Arts – Writing Test

Scored Sample Writing Responses

Below you will find two passages in which the authors put forth differing perspectives on an issue of importance. Read both passages carefully, noting the strengths and weaknesses of each discussion. Then, you will write an essay in which you explain your own opinion on the issue.

The following articles about casual dress codes at work were written by columnists of a business magazine and appeared side-by-side in a recent issue.

Dressing for Creativity

- 1 The business “uniform” of the 1950s was the gray flannel suit. However, modern America has a different uniform. Companies are increasingly adopting dress codes that favor casual wear. They hope to encourage creativity, rather than conformity, in the workplace.
- 2 The term “casual Friday” began in Hawaii in the 1960s, a place and time noted for a more casual outlook. “Aloha Friday” started in support of the state’s garment industry by promoting floral print Hawaiian shirts. As the fad spread to the mainland, more and more businesses saw an increase in employee morale and creativity.
- 3 This trend accelerated with the rise of Internet start-up companies. Most of these companies were formed by young people who dressed very casually. Their typical attire was sneakers, jeans and T-shirts. This was fitting since some of these start-up enterprises began in dorm rooms, garages, and basements. As the companies became successful, their founders were suddenly in charge of million-dollar businesses.
- 4 Business culture did not change these leaders; rather, they changed business culture. These young professionals adopted casual attire as their dress code, believing that nonconformity in clothing could spawn creativity. In some companies, it is not unusual to see CEOs and employees wearing jeans and sweatshirts. In fact, casual clothing is even considered a company benefit. Who wouldn’t prefer wearing T-shirts rather than suits?
- 5 The business world has entered a less formal age. Research shows that casual clothing inspires confidence and ingenuity. Gone are the days when one had to deny individuality by hiding inside the mandatory business suit. When the White House had problems with its Website, they brought in an executive from a computer company. To do so, they had to alter their outdated dress code. The good news? The expert wearing tennis shoes solved their problems without a coat and tie.

The Myth of Casual Friday

- 1 Think of a construction worker, a medical doctor, and a police officer. Chances are, you pictured in your mind a person with a hard hat, a lab coat, or a blue uniform. This illustrates the fact that many careers have standards for employee attire. With some jobs, the picture of what is appropriate to wear may not be as distinctive. However, having a formal dress code in the workplace is important for maintaining professionalism and customer confidence.
- 2 People argue that we live in an informal age, so we should dress less formally. Why is this a problem? One reason is productivity. Research shows that people match their attitudes to the clothing they wear. In fact, having clothes that are worn only at work, whether actual uniforms or simply following company dress code, makes people more focused. Casual clothing contributes to casual attitudes toward work. In fact, one study even connects informal dress with increased absenteeism.
- 3 Another concern is that customers have less trust in people who dress casually at work. Even if an employee is fully engaged in serving the customer, casual clothing signals that comfort, rather than job performance, is the first priority. If employees don't look professional, then how can customers trust them to actually be professional?
- 4 This is even more important today given the rise of "casual Friday," a day when dress codes are more relaxed. Unfortunately, some people decide to wear clothing more suited to the beach than a place of business. Also, evidence shows that casual dress days influence employees to dress less professionally throughout the week. Casual Friday becomes casual Thursday, and Wednesday, and so on. Before long, the entire week is casual.
- 5 Employees should be required to dress professionally in order to work more efficiently and instill customer confidence. Casual clothes have their place, but it is not in the workplace.

Write an essay in which you explain your own position on the issue of whether or not businesses should allow employees to wear casual clothing in the workplace.

Be sure to use evidence from the text passages provided as well as specific reasons and examples from your own experience and knowledge to support your position. Remember that every position exists within the context of a larger discussion of the issue, so your essay should, at minimum, acknowledge alternate and/or opposing ideas. When you have finished your essay, review your writing to check for correct spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Score = 1

I agree that what I'm wearing don't mean I don't do good work. I work better cuz I am relaxed, comferble. NOT uptight in a suit, NOT able to move around. I get better ideas when lm comferble. If uncomferble, all I think is changing into jeans and a t shirt. So, yea, casual clothes for work is cool for me.

Scoring Guide

Essays at this score point demonstrate weak command over writing an argument on a given substantive topic using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

- The response has little or no development of a central position or claim(s). No correct and/or understandable context of the topic is provided for the discussion. The writer's own position on the issue or claim(s) may not be clear. A few ideas may be provided but these lack explanation of ideas, only repeat ideas, or ideas are derived entirely from provided texts.
- The response lacks an introduction and/or conclusion, and fails to demonstrate any understanding of paragraphing. Transitions are not used or may be used incorrectly.
- Language control is minimal. Word choice and sentence structure are simple. The response lacks formal style and an objective tone.
- Minimal or no command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage is demonstrated. Errors in capitalization, punctuation and spelling frequently appear.

Score = 2

I think businesses should allow casual clothes. On regular days its ok to leave the suite at home because it improves everyones state of mind to wear cloths they choose instead of cloths they don't like. But if you have important days you should "dress professionally" like the second article said. One problem I see at my work is nowadays folks don't know how to dress nice. Maybe the boss needs to talk to them about whats nice and whats casual if they know the difference they won't make the mistake on the inportant days. Also some people don't have money to by expensive fancy dresses or slacks for work and that's not fare either. I say let us dress casual accept on special days.

Scoring Guide

Essays at this score point demonstrate limited command over writing an argument on a given substantive topic using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

- The response demonstrates limited development of a central position or claim(s). A context of the topic that is only somewhat correct or understandable is provided for the discussion. The writer's own position on the issue or claim(s) may be somewhat unclear or confusing. A few ideas are provided but explanation is thin and/or superficial and parts of the explanation may be repetitious or derived too heavily from provided texts without interpretation.
- The introduction and conclusion are minimally developed. Some related ideas are grouped together though paragraphing may not be used. Few transitions are used.
- Beginning skill in language is demonstrated. Word choice is general and repetitive. The response has repetitive sentence structure and/or long, uncontrolled sentences. The response lacks formal style and/or an objective tone.
- Limited command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage is demonstrated. Numerous errors in capitalization, punctuation and spelling appear and may interfere with understanding.

Score = 3

Bosses should allow casual clothes on Fridays. However, employees need to know what casual clothes means. Employees need to understand: the boss expects everyone to dress professional the other days and anytime an important meeting takes place on Friday. If you let people dress casually they will feel more happier in the workplace! The boss should show an example of the dress code, to show workers what's appropriate on each day. This way employees know exactly what types of outfits are allowed.

There are some jobs that just can't allow casual Fridays. It's too bad these workers can't enjoy casual Fridays, but that's the job they choose. You can't let EVERY job have casual Fridays. So, it's okay for some workers to have casual Fridays if the boss explains what types of clothes are okay, it's too bad for the workers like my uncle who is a police officer and has a "uniform" to wear every day, no matter what day. But "that is how the cookie crumbles."

Scoring Guide

Essays at this score point demonstrate partial command over writing an argument on a given substantive topic using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

- The response demonstrates partial development of a central position or claim(s). A brief context of the topic is provided for the discussion, including introduction of alternate claims and/or counterclaims. The writer's own position on the issue or claim(s) is evident. Several ideas with limited or uneven explanation are provided; few or only general examples and/or details support ideas. The response uses evidence drawn from provided texts but this is limited or overused, poorly chosen or misrepresented.
- The response has an introduction and conclusion, though one or both of these may be underdeveloped. Ideas are grouped together in paragraphs, though the relationship among ideas may at times be unclear. Transitions are simple and used inconsistently.
- Some developing skill in language is demonstrated. Word choice is general and the response demonstrates a little variety in sentence structure, although a few long, uncontrolled sentences may be used. The response attempts to maintain formal style and an objective tone but may fail to sustain these throughout discussion.
- Partial command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage is demonstrated. Errors in capitalization, punctuation and spelling are regularly present throughout the response and may sometimes interfere with understanding.

Score = 4

The saying, "Never judge a book by its cover" appropriately addresses the issue regarding casual clothing in the workplace. Since work ethic is determined by one's performance rather than outward appearance, it is unreasonable to consider one's clothing as a factor in determining what makes a good employee.

Those who consider casual clothing as unprofessional claim that Casual Friday will gradually move to Casual Wednesday. However, companies should have firm guidelines that professional dress is reserved for Monday through Thursday, and Casual Friday is a privilege as long as it does not interfere with work. My last two jobs have followed this idea.

There are advantages to Casual Friday such as increased productivity. Absenteeism may decrease since employees will enjoy coming to work on Fridays in jeans and T-shirts instead of suits and ties. Also, casual attire on Fridays will boost morale among employees and lead to more confidence.

The advantages outweigh the negative consequences of casual attire in the workplace. A straightforward guideline regarding professional versus casual clothing will prevent employees of taking advantage of this benefit. Companies that have a Casual Friday policy will benefit from increased productivity, increased company morale and decreased absenteeism. Therefore, employers should allow casual clothing in the workplace.

Scoring Guide

Essays at this score point demonstrate adequate command over writing an argument on a given substantive topic using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

- The response demonstrates adequate development of a central position or claim(s). A context of the topic is provided for the discussion, including some discussion of alternate claims and/or counterclaims. The writer's own position on the issue or claim(s) is clear. Several ideas with adequate explanation are provided; some specific and relevant examples and/or details support ideas, including relevant evidence drawn selectively from provided texts and appropriately integrated.
- A clear, functional introduction and conclusion are provided. Relationships between ideas are clarified by organization: transitions are consistently used, though they may be simple, and some evidence of logical sequencing of ideas is demonstrated. The response uses appropriate paragraphing.
- Adequate skill in language use is demonstrated. Word choice is mostly specific and somewhat varied. The response demonstrates control of sentences with some variety in length and structure. A formal style is established and an objective tone maintained throughout the discussion.
- Adequate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage is demonstrated. Some errors in capitalization, punctuation and spelling appear but do not interfere with understanding.

Score = 5

“You never get a second chance to make a good first impression.” This statement couldn’t be more true when it comes to the issue regarding casual dress codes in the corporate world. Rather than maintain professionalism in the workplace, up-and-coming corporations are settling for jeans and T-shirts in the name of creativity and morale.

Allowing employees to dress casually at work sends the wrong message to teenagers. Parents and teachers frequently discuss the importance of dressing appropriately and maintaining dress codes on campus, yet as an adult, you can wear jeans and a T-shirt to work. Teens with part-time jobs have to wear a uniform and look presentable at all times, but CEOs and VPs can dress casually for meetings. Why should I dress professionally for a job interview if expectations change once a job is secured? I’ve only had one job so far, and I felt uncomfortable because I dressed more professionally than everyone, including my boss.

Casual dress codes confuse teenagers about what is appropriate and professional in business and also boasts benefits that are not supported. People claim casual wear encourages individuality which leads to confidence, which doesn’t compare to the confidence one would feel in a business suit. People also claim casual wear inspires rapport and morale, yet nothing does this better than a business suit.

Corporations need to rethink casual dress codes because of the adverse effect it has on employees. First, a casual dress code reduces employee confidence because jeans and a T-shirt, while comfortable, do not exude confidence. Second, company morale reduces because employees will adopt a laid-back attitude towards the company. If corporations expect to maintain a professional image to the general public, they need to display this from the onset because “you never get a second chance to make a good first impression.”

Scoring Guide

Essays at this score point demonstrate strong command over writing an argument on a given substantive topic using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

- The response demonstrates competent development of a central position or claim(s). A context of the topic is provided for the discussion, including balanced discussion of alternate claims and/or counterclaims. The writer’s own position on the issue or claim(s) is clear and considered. Several ideas with complete explanation are provided; specific, relevant and somewhat elaborated reasons, examples, and/or details support ideas, including clear and relevant evidence drawn from provided texts and skillfully integrated.
- The introduction and conclusion are clear and sufficient. Clear and appropriate paragraphing is used. Varied transitions and logical sequencing of ideas are used throughout to link major sections of text, create cohesion and clarify relationships between ideas.
- The response demonstrates competent skill in language. Word choice is usually precise and varied. The response uses well-controlled sentences that are varied in length and complexity. A formal style is established and an objective tone maintained throughout; counterclaims are discussed fairly, without bias.
- Able command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage is demonstrated. Few errors in capitalization, punctuation and spelling appear, and most are superficial.

Score = 6

From flappers in the 1920s to the hippie movement of the 1960s, every decade has featured a debate about what is and is not appropriate attire. Although we are in a new millennium, the concern over others' perceptions based on clothing has not changed. Thus is the issue over casual clothing in the workplace.

As fashion trends have changed, so have workplace dress codes. The "gray flannel suit" has a long history, with its origins in formal dress appropriate to wear in a king's court. Since those days, the business suit has undergone many changes for many reasons. For example, during World War II, wool was rationed, and men's suits became more simple. Lapels were smaller and pants were no longer cuffed, which saved fabric. Overall, suits were considered a sort of uniform for both male and female businesspeople.

Decades later another shift took place: "start-up enterprises began in dorm rooms, garages, and basements" (Dressing for Creativity article). Anything "traditional" was out, and the business world embraced informality out of the belief that it encouraged creativity and company morale. Professionalism remains even though CEOs and VPs wear jeans and T-shirts instead of suits and ties. This laid-back attire has removed the gilded-ness which existed in the corporate world where the "dog and pony show" indicated a company was successful. Casual attire in the workplace establishes focus ON business rather than "the look of the company." I know a lot of technology workers who have never worn a suit, and I consider all of them to be very professional.

Opponents of casual attire claim productivity suffers, attitudes become lax and customer trust decreases. However, none of these inherently improve by requiring employees to wear professional attire. Productivity can suffer if executives make poor decisions which adversely affect output. Attitudes can become lax if employees are dissatisfied at work for reasons other than being unable to wear casual clothing. Customers can distrust a company due to poor manufacturing instead of speaking to someone in a suit and tie.

While professional attire and standard uniforms still have their place in the world of work, the shift to casual attire in the office is simply that – a shift attributed to a change in perspective which naturally occurs in society.

Scoring Guide

Essays at this score point demonstrate superior command over writing an argument on a given substantive topic using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

- The response demonstrates expert development of a central position or claim(s). A context of the topic is provided for the discussion, including balanced discussion of the strengths and limitations of alternate claims and/or counterclaims. The writer's own position on the issue or claim(s) is clear, considered and nuanced. Several ideas with effective and thorough explanation are provided; relevant and fully elaborated reasons, examples and/or details support ideas, including compelling evidence drawn from provided texts and effectively integrated.
- The response has an effective introduction and conclusion. Clear and appropriate paragraphing is used, creating a coherent whole. Effective transitions and logical sequencing of ideas are used throughout to link major sections of text, create cohesion and clarify the relationships between claims(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.
- The response demonstrates proficient skill in language. Word choice is precise, varied and engaging. The response effectively varies sentence length and complexity. A formal style is established and an objective tone that enhances the effectiveness of the response maintained; counterclaims are discussed fairly, without bias.
- Expert command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage is demonstrated, and the response demonstrates sophisticated use of grammar, usage and mechanics. Few or no errors in capitalization, punctuation and spelling appear.