



nth Degree Tutoring

GRE-2: Essays

First-timers: Basic essay practice

If you have not yet gotten essay feedback from me, then choose one of these two basic essays and email it to me for feedback. I can work with up to three students, and I will prioritize those who have not yet received feedback. Remember that the first time you practice an essay, you can give yourself some leeway with time. Focus on producing a good response of 400 – 600 words for an AAA or 500 – 800 words for an AAI. After your first essay of each type, you should practice with the 30-minute time limit.

AAA

The following appeared as a letter to the editor from a Central Plaza store owner.

"Over the past two years, the number of shoppers in Central Plaza has been steadily decreasing while the popularity of skateboarding has increased dramatically. Many Central Plaza store owners believe that the decrease in their business is due to the number of skateboard users in the plaza. There has also been a dramatic increase in the amount of litter and vandalism throughout the plaza. Thus, we recommend that the city prohibit skateboarding in Central Plaza. If skateboarding is prohibited here, we predict that business in Central Plaza will return to its previously high levels."

Write a response in which you discuss what questions would need to be answered in order to decide whether the recommendation is likely to have the predicted result. Be sure to explain how the answers to these questions would help to evaluate the recommendation.

AAI

To understand the most important characteristics of a society, one must study its major cities.

Write a response in which you discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement and explain your reasoning for the position you take. In developing and supporting your position, you should consider ways in which the statement might or might not hold true and explain how these considerations shape your position.

Advanced students: Alternative Explanation Essays

There are ten AAA essays (besides the “Firstborn” essay discussed in class) that ask for an “alternative explanation”. For these essays, you do not necessarily have to write a full response, but:

1. Identify the “observation.”
2. Identify the “proposed explanation”.
3. Formulate at least one “alternative explanation.”
4. If you’ve already written basic essays and you are feeling daring, respond to one of these prompts in a full essay!

(Prompts begin on next page)

1. "Happy Pancake House"

The following memorandum is from the business manager of Happy Pancake House restaurants.

"Recently, butter has been replaced by margarine in Happy Pancake House restaurants throughout the southwestern United States. This change, however, has had little impact on our customers. In fact, only about 2 percent of customers have complained, indicating that an average of 98 people out of 100 are happy with the change. Furthermore, many servers have reported that a number of customers who ask for butter do not complain when they are given margarine instead. Clearly, either these customers do not distinguish butter from margarine or they use the term 'butter' to refer to either butter or margarine."

Write a response in which you discuss one or more alternative explanations that could rival the proposed explanation and explain how your explanation(s) can plausibly account for the facts presented in the argument.

2. "Xanadu National Park"

The following is a letter to the editor of an environmental magazine.

"Two studies of amphibians in Xanadu National Park confirm a significant decline in the numbers of amphibians. In 1975 there were seven species of amphibians in the park, and there were abundant numbers of each species. However, in 2002 only four species of amphibians were observed in the park, and the numbers of each species were drastically reduced. One proposed explanation is that the decline was caused by the introduction of trout into the park's waters, which began in 1975. (Trout are known to eat amphibian eggs.)"

Write a response in which you discuss one or more alternative explanations that could rival the proposed explanation and explain how your explanation(s) can plausibly account for the facts presented in the argument.

3. "Leeville and Masonton – Health benefits"

Workers in the small town of Leeville take fewer sick days than workers in the large city of Masonton, 50 miles away. Moreover, relative to population size, the diagnosis of stress-related illness is proportionally much lower in Leeville than in Masonton. According to the Leeville Chamber of Commerce, these facts can be attributed to the health benefits of the relatively relaxed pace of life in Leeville.

Write a response in which you discuss one or more alternative explanations that could rival the proposed explanation and explain how your explanation(s) can plausibly account for the facts presented in the argument.

4. "Panoply Industries"

The following appeared in a memo from a vice president of a manufacturing company.

"During the past year, workers at our newly opened factory reported 30 percent more on-the-job accidents than workers at nearby Panoply Industries. Panoply produces products very similar to those produced at our factory, but its work shifts are one hour shorter than ours. Experts say that fatigue and sleep deprivation among workers are significant contributing factors in many on-the-job accidents. Panoply's superior safety record can therefore be attributed to its shorter work shifts, which allow its employees to get adequate amounts of rest."

Write a response in which you discuss one or more alternative explanations that could rival the proposed explanation and explain how your explanation(s) can plausibly account for the facts presented in the argument.

5. "Pest Control"

The following appeared in a memo from the vice president of a food distribution company with food storage warehouses in several cities.

"Recently, we signed a contract with the Fly-Away Pest Control Company to provide pest control services at our warehouse in Palm City, but last month we discovered that over \$20,000 worth of food there had been destroyed by pest damage. Meanwhile, the Buzzoff Pest Control Company, which we have used for many years in Palm City, continued to service our warehouse in Winterville, and last month only \$10,000 worth of the food stored there had been destroyed by pest damage. This difference in pest damage is best explained by the negligence of Fly-Away."

Write a response in which you discuss one or more alternative explanations that could rival the proposed explanation and explain how your explanation(s) can plausibly account for the facts presented in the argument.

6. "Groveton College"

Evidence suggests that academic honor codes, which call for students to agree not to cheat in their academic endeavors and to notify a faculty member if they suspect that others have cheated, are far more successful than are other methods at deterring cheating among students at colleges and universities. Several years ago, Groveton College adopted such a code and discontinued its old-fashioned system in which teachers closely monitored students. Under the old system, teachers reported an average of thirty cases of cheating per year. In the first year the honor code was in place, students reported twenty-one cases of cheating; five years later, this figure had dropped to fourteen. Moreover, in a recent survey, a majority of Groveton students said that they would be less likely to cheat with an honor code in place than without.

Write a response in which you discuss one or more alternative explanations that could rival the proposed explanation and explain how your explanation(s) can plausibly account for the facts presented in the argument.

7. "UltraClean hand soap"

The following appeared in a memo from the director of a large group of hospitals.

"In a controlled laboratory study of liquid hand soaps, a concentrated solution of extra strength UltraClean hand soap produced a 40 percent greater reduction in harmful bacteria than did the liquid hand soaps currently used in our hospitals. During our recent test of regular-strength UltraClean with doctors, nurses, and visitors at our hospital in Worktown, the hospital reported significantly fewer cases of patient infection (a 20 percent reduction) than did any of the other hospitals in our group. The explanation for the 20 percent reduction in patient infections is the use of UltraClean soap."

Write a response in which you discuss one or more alternative explanations that could rival the proposed explanation and explain how your explanation(s) can plausibly account for the facts presented in the argument.

8. "Kaliko Islands"

Humans arrived in the Kaliko Islands about 7,000 years ago, and within 3,000 years most of the large mammal species that had lived in the forests of the Kaliko Islands were extinct. Previous archaeological findings have suggested that early humans generally relied on both fishing and hunting for food; since archaeologists have discovered numerous sites in the Kaliko Islands where the bones of fish were discarded, it is likely that the humans also hunted the mammals. Furthermore, researchers have uncovered simple tools, such as stone knives, that could be used for hunting. The only clear explanation is that humans caused the extinction of the various mammal species through excessive hunting.

Write a response in which you discuss one or more alternative explanations that could rival the proposed explanation and explain how your explanation(s) can plausibly account for the facts presented in the argument.

9. "Dillton"

The following appeared as part of an article in a Dillton newspaper.

"In an effort to bring new jobs to Dillton and stimulate the city's flagging economy, Dillton's city council voted last year to lower the city's corporate tax rate by 15 percent; at the same time, the city began offering generous relocation grants to any company that would move to Dillton. Since these changes went into effect, two new factories have opened in Dillton. Although the two factories employ more than 1,000 people, the unemployment rate in Dillton remains unchanged. The only clear explanation for this is that the new factories are staffed with out-of-town workers rather than Dillton residents."

Write a response in which you discuss one or more alternative explanations that could rival the proposed explanation and explain how your explanation(s) can plausibly account for the facts presented in the argument.

10. "Leeville and Masonton -- Physicians"

There is now evidence that the relaxed pace of life in small towns promotes better health and greater longevity than does the hectic pace of life in big cities. Businesses in the small town of Leeville report fewer days of sick leave taken by individual workers than do businesses in the nearby large city of Masonton. Furthermore, Leeville has only one physician for its one thousand residents, but in Masonton the proportion of physicians to residents is five times as high. Finally, the average age of Leeville residents is significantly higher than that of Masonton residents. These findings suggest that the relaxed pace of life in Leeville allows residents to live longer, healthier lives.

Write a response in which you discuss one or more alternative explanations that could rival the proposed explanation and explain how your explanation(s) can plausibly account for the facts presented in the argument.