

Writing workout 3

Essay

1 Choose the option (a or b) which you think best applies to an essay.

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|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 a factual | b discursive |
| 2 a continuous prose | b sections and sub-sections |
| 3 a fiction | b non-fiction |
| 4 a a specific topic | b no specific topic |
| 5 a informal | b neutral |

2 Note down some ideas for and against spending money on exploring space. Try to think of two reasons why it is worth spending money on and two reasons why it is not a good idea. Here are some words and phrases that might help you.

world population	scientific discoveries
natural resources	political problems
hunger	economic crisis

3 Read these two short texts about space exploration. Underline the two key points in each text and compare them with your notes for exercise 2.

Into space

When Armstrong set foot on the moon, it was a triumph for the engineers and scientists who made it possible. The innovations they were responsible for were immensely beneficial to us all because they could be applied to other fields, although this is not widely recognised. The stark reality is that it is very much in our long-term interest to take space exploration seriously. The most pessimistic forecasts envisage a global population of 16 billion by 2100. To make matters worse, the world's resources are dwindling rapidly. Space exploration is a first step towards colonising new worlds and potentially solving both problems.

Back to Earth

We should never forget that space exploration was originally driven first and foremost by political ambitions and rivalries. This remains the case. Any country wishing to demonstrate its power on the global stage will sooner or later send astronauts into space. We now hear that NASA is demanding a budget of \$19 billion. My question is just how many hospitals and schools could this fund? Space exploration is a colossal waste of money, particularly when famine and disease remain the fate of millions. With such problems staring us in the face, it seems that our priorities are wrong.

4 Here are some more ideas about space exploration. Which of these ideas are linked to the four points you identified in exercise 3 and which ideas are *completely new*? Write *N* for new ideas not covered in the original texts.

- 1 Launching a rocket is hardly the most environmentally-friendly action. Think of the millions of tons of rocket fuel that are required.
- 2 Some scientists believe that the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter could be a rich source of precious metals and minerals.
- 3 The so-called "space race" of the 1950s and 1960s did not benefit the world at all. In fact, it only led to the production of ever more sophisticated military technology.
- 4 It is important for us to get some perspective on human affairs, and often the only way we can do that is to see the Earth from space. We need to be reminded that the Earth is just an insignificant speck in the vastness of space, and that the things we incessantly worry about are really not very important at all.
- 5 Many areas of human life have indirectly benefited from the work of NASA and other space agencies. Breakthroughs that were originally made as part of the space programme have also been useful for surgeons conducting complicated operations, builders constructing offices and homes, and the manufacturers of both cars and planes.
- 6 Surely the most fundamental question that needs addressing is exactly how life developed on our planet and whether conditions exist elsewhere in the universe for other life forms.
- 7 If countries spent even a fraction of the money they spend on the development of space rockets and probes to solving the serious problems of famine and mass starvation, then the world would be a much better place.
- 8 It may be unwise to pour money into programmes that aim to pick up signals from other planets and to make contact with aliens. We cannot be sure that any alien civilisation to which we extended the hand of friendship would be benevolent in its intentions.

5 You have been asked to respond to the points in the texts and to evaluate them. You can either support the points or disagree with them. Decide if these student responses support the key points in the two texts or disagree with them. Write *S* for 'support' and *D* for 'disagree'.

A Evangelists for space exploration push the idea of colonising distant worlds, and their enthusiasm is admirable. The implausibility of this vision should trouble anyone who thinks for a moment about it. The moon and Mars are inhospitable, barren worlds. We would never even be able to set foot on the surface without a spacesuit. And as for the nearest planets outside the solar system, they are hundreds of years away.

B It is easy for the cynics to go back into the history books and remind us that the race to put a man on the moon was tinged with political motivations. This is a fair point but it overlooks what has happened since. We now have an international space station which brings former rivals together in a spirit of co-operation.

C Within 50 years reserves of metals such as zinc, gold, silver, tin and copper could be exhausted. These are vital to our manufacturing industries and there are no obvious replacements lined up. Despite the cost of mining such metals on the surface of neighbouring planets and asteroids, it may be the only option open to us.

D It can be argued that turning our backs on the space programme shows a lack of vision and imagination. Yet lacking compassion is a greater failing in my judgement. Estimates of nearly 900 million people without enough to eat on a daily basis should be enough to make even the biggest advocates of the space programme think again.

6 In a discursive essay you can take a strong position for or against an idea. However, it is a good idea to show some awareness that there is another side to the argument. Look again at the four extracts in exercise 5 and identify the sentences which show the writer is aware there is another side to the argument.

Optional writing task

Write an essay summarising the key points in the two texts in exercise 3 and giving your opinion on them. You should include your own ideas. You can also use the ideas from exercises 4 and 5 if you wish. Make sure your style and tone are appropriate for an essay and that you use a range of appropriate vocabulary. You should also make sure your answer is well organised, with a variety of linking words and phrases. Your answer should be about 240–280 words.

7 Which of these sentences do you think would be best to introduce an essay on space exploration containing the four points you identified in exercise 3? Give reasons for your answers.

- a I remember my parents telling me about Neil Armstrong landing on the moon and how thrilled they were. My father was only a boy but he was so excited he could hardly sleep.
- b Space exploration has some big advantages. On the other hand, there are some obvious disadvantages too.
- c Since the dawn of time human beings have always sought to explore and to extend their knowledge of the world around them. Space exploration is the latest expression of this basic human instinct, yet the expenditure of vast sums of money on it remains highly controversial.
- d It is ridiculous to claim that we have benefited from the space programme. Many of the innovations space scientists say they are responsible for would have happened anyway, even if NASA and other space agencies had never existed.

8 The final paragraph of an essay is very important. It is an opportunity to leave the reader with a positive final impression and bring the essay to a satisfying conclusion. Which of these things (a–c) do you think would be the best way to conclude the essay on space exploration if you were writing about 240–280 words?

- a A summary of the points you have already made earlier in the essay.
- b A strong re-statement of your opinion for or against, possibly supported by some new information.
- c A statement that says this topic is controversial and it is difficult to have a clear opinion for or against.