



Are you ready to write Touchstone 4?

The essay below provides an example of an advanced level argumentative essay. As you read through the essay, notice how the author effectively incorporates elements of argument, has a strong thesis statement which takes a stand on one side of a debatable topic, and utilizes the classical model of argumentation with effective incorporation and utilization of support.

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English Composition I

March 15, 2018

Teenage Sleep and School Start Times

John, an average teenager, tries to get to school on time in the mornings. He sets two alarms on his phone and often skips a shower or breakfast, or both, so that he doesn't miss the school bus that stops at his corner at 7:00 AM. Once at school, John joins his sleep-deprived peers in mad dashes to their first classes. School is on, whether students are prepared to learn or not. According to numerous studies, the average U.S. teenager gets between 7 and 7.25 hours of sleep a night, while his body needs between 9 and 9.5 hours. With the average start time for high school in the U.S. 8:03 AM (Croft, Ferro, and Wheaton, 2015), it's not a great leap to conclude many high school students are sleep-deprived. High schools should implement later start times to maintain healthy biological functions and to maximize learning for teenagers.

Comment [SL1]: While the sentence structure is a bit repetitive, this introduction does a good job of engaging the reader with the average teenager and providing the necessary background information for the reader to fully understand the importance of the thesis.

Comment [SL2]: This is a well written thesis statement. It takes a clear position on one side of a debatable topic. It is concise, yet provides adequate detail so that the reader knows what your key points within the essay will likely be.

Sleep deprivation in teens affects their health, including issues like mood and behavior, increased anxiety or depression, use of caffeine, tobacco, or alcohol, and even weight gain. Lack of sleep increases the likelihood that teens across all socio-economic spectrums will be unable to concentrate and will suffer poor grades in school as a result. In addition, teens, already in a high risk category as new drivers, are more susceptible to “drowsy-driving incidents.” (Richter, 2015). These are all compelling reasons to consider changes in school start times for teenagers.

Comment [SL3]: Nice job here with your first body paragraph. It provides more background on how lack of sleep negatively affects teens.

Our internal body clocks – what scientists call circadian rhythm - regulate biological processes according to light and dark. When our eyes tell us it’s dark, we begin to tire, and when our eyes tell us it’s light, we begin to waken. Adults often refer to themselves as a “morning person” or a “night person” because they’ve become accustomed to their internal clocks and can anticipate the times they are most alert and active. Teenagers, however, experience a shift in their circadian rhythm when puberty strikes and often feel alert later at night, making it difficult for them to fall asleep. When they have to wake up early to go to school, they are being deprived of the sleep their body needs.

Comment [SL4]: In this second body paragraph, you provide clear biological support for your thesis.

Along with a shift in their sleep patterns, today’s teens are avid users of electronic media. The lack of sleep is “exacerbated when teens are exposed late at night to lit screens, which send a message via the retina to the portion of the brain that controls the body’s circadian clock. The message: It’s not nighttime yet” (Richter, 2015, para. 22). While putting away the electronic gadgets at bed time might help, the fact remains that, biologically, teens’ circadian rhythms are shifting to a later time, and they have trouble getting to sleep at night, even when they’re tired.

Comment [SL5]: This third body paragraph provides more biological information to support your thesis.

Comment [SL6]: Here you have effectively incorporated a direct quotation and appropriately cited it using APA formatting. Well done!

The result of this shift in sleep patterns – due to both puberty and the use of electronic media - can be compared to jet lag. Travelers who cross time zones often need a day for their bodies to adjust to the new light and dark signals they're receiving. When teens wake up too early day after day, they have difficulty thinking or performing well because their internal clocks never have a chance to adjust. Imagine dragging yourself around in a jet-lag fog as you attempt to process information and perform job-related duties on a daily basis. Now imagine our teenage John, sleep-deprived and breakfast-less, striving to organize and write a short essay for a history exam at 8:00 AM.

Comment [SL7]: In this fourth body paragraph, you do a nice job transitioning to problems with learning. The transition is smooth and ties in nicely with the paragraph above.

Beginning in 2014, major national health organizations, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, have issued policy statements that recommend later start times for high school students. (Jens-Olaf, 2016). These institutions recognize the negative impacts an early school starting time can have on not only the health of teenagers, but on their academic performances as well. With later start times, studies find that attendance increases and tardiness decreases. Test scores and grades improve, and there are fewer "drowsy-driving incidents" among teens. A University of Minnesota study released in 2014 was "the first to conclusively link later morning school starts to higher test scores, better grades and fewer teen car crashes" (Smith, 2014, para. 2). The three-year study examined data gathered from over 9,000 students in eight high schools across the Midwest. With a later start to the school day, high school attendance and test scores improved. Fewer students were tardy, and there was a marked decrease in

Comment [SL8]: Nice use of the rhetorical appeal pathos here. You appeal to readers' emotions by asking us to put ourselves in the teenager's shoes.

Comment [SL9]: This fifth body paragraph emphasizes how school start times effect learning. You've provided good support for the thesis here.

Comment [SL10]: Nice job summarizing the source information here and then properly citing the source using APA formatting.

Comment [SL11]: Check your spelling here.

Comment [SL12]: Since this is related to the main idea of the paragraph's topic sentence, it makes sense that you would include this study in the same paragraph. However, a transition word or phrase to start this sentence would be beneficial to the flow of the essay.

substance abuse and depression issues. Some schools even reported a noticeable decrease in teens involved in auto accidents (Smith, 2014).

The results of these studies are strong evidence that teens benefit from a later start for school. Better attendance, better scores on tests, fewer problems with substance abuse and depression, and a decrease in car accidents are all clear indicators that allowing students to sleep an extra couple of hours in the mornings makes a significant difference. Teenagers need a solid educational foundation on which to build their futures, and if they're sleeping through math class because it's offered at 8:00 AM, they're being cheated out of learning opportunities they need. Why then, are many schools reluctant to make these changes?

Comment [SL13]: In this sixth body paragraph, you provide a nice summary of previous points, which serves as further support for your thesis statement

Comment [SL14]: Another good use of pathos as an appeal here.

Body paragraph 7 – Counterarguments and refutations

Some school districts claim that a later start time for high school students would disrupt bus schedules. While bus schedules at many schools are designed by time – transport high school kids first, then middle and elementary school children – as a cost saver, one solution is to simply flip the times. Younger children tend to wake up earlier than teens, so why not make their school start-time earlier and teenagers later? (2016, Jens-Olaf) Another common objection is that a change in school start time for teens would interfere with athletics and other extracurricular activities. However, districts that have adopted a later start time for teens report few problems in this regard. Practice and game times are merely rescheduled. Some schools even report an increase in athletic participation and improved performance of their teams. It just makes sense that a better rested athlete would perform better.

Comment [SL15]: Remove the unnecessary comma here.

Comment [SL16]: In this body paragraph, you discuss an important part of argumentation, which is the counterargument and refutations. Doing so shows your reader that you've thoughtfully considered both sides of the issue and makes you more credible as a writer.

Comment [SL17]: This seems like a good source, but remember that APA format says that the authors name should come first, followed by date. So the correct citation here would be (Jens-Olaf, 2016).

Comment [SL18]: What source should be cited here? Remember to include where you got this information.

Teenagers shouldn't have to forgo breakfast or risk doing poorly on an exam because they are summoned to school at an hour at which they should still be sleeping. High schools should institute a later start time so teenagers can get the sleep they need and arrive at school with their brains fully engaged and ready to learn. This relatively simple fix addresses teens' biological and educational needs and paves the way for them to mature into productive and healthy adults. It's time that all high schools in the U.S. recognize the impact of sleep deprivation on their students' physical and mental health and make adjustments to school start times.

Comment [SL19]: Nice job with your conclusion here. You've provided a summary of your key points and restated the thesis for the reader.

References

Croft, J.B., Ferro, G.A., & Wheaton, A.G. (2015). School start times for middle school and high school students. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6430a1.htm>

Comment [SL20]: Government websites are valid and credible sources, so this was a good choice.

Jens-Olaf, W. (2016, December 20). Why teen brains need a later school start time. Retrieved from <https://theconversation.com/why-teen-brains-need-a-later-school-start-time-65308>

Comment [SL21]: Using an independent news source like this one lowers the risk of bias.

Richter, R. (2015, October 8). Among teens, sleep deprivation an epidemic. Stanford Medicine News Center. Retrieved from <https://med.stanford.edu/news/all-news/2015/10/among-teens-sleep-deprivation-an-epidemic.html>

Comment [SL22]: This is another good choice, as .edu websites are also credible source.

Smith, K. (2014, March 13). Research links later start times to benefits for teens. Star Tribune. Retrieved from <http://www.startribune.com/minn-study-later-school-start-boostsgrades-attendance-moods/249975531/>.

Comment [SL23]: Use of this online newspaper gives you a nice amount of source variety.

Think About Your Writing

1. **What have you learned about how to present a strong argument? How could/will you apply this knowledge in your professional or everyday life?** (3-4 sentences) *Sophia says: Think about the specific skills and techniques that you used while developing and writing your essay. What tools will you take with you from this experience?*

I learned that in order to present a strong argument, it's important to research all of the facts carefully. Credible sources make all of the difference when learning about the topic and they really help me to make sure that I'm backing up my argument effectively. I also learned how important it is to address the counterarguments so that I can see why the other side might feel differently about an issue. This is such an important skill for everyday life, because we often meet people who have different viewpoints and it's important to present our own viewpoints in an unbiased manner. It's also important that we acknowledge and respect the other side so that we can have a rational discussion instead of an argument!

2. **Consider the English Composition I course as a whole. What have you learned about yourself as writer?** (5-6 sentences) *Sophia says: Sophia says: What did you learn that surprised you? Is there anything that you have struggled with in the past that you now feel more confident about?*

I learned that I sometimes have trouble organizing my thoughts or staying on topic, but that proofreading/revising my work or using an outline can be very effective tools at keeping my writing more coherent. I also learned that writing well is really hard. It's not difficult for me to write good sentences, but sometimes it can be really difficult to keep an eye on the wider structure of my work. I found that really thinking about using effective topic and concluding sentences helped me stay on track. I think this was the most surprising thing – you can be good at writing, but it takes a lot of hard work to be a good writer.

SCORING APPEARS ON THE NEXT PAGE

SCORING for Sample Touchstone 4

The sample essay was evaluated according to the Touchstone 4 Rubric, which evaluates an argumentative essay. The rubric evaluates the argumentative topic and thesis statement, argument development and support, organization, flow, research, style, conventions, formatting, and responses to the “Think About Your Writing” questions. Each rubric area is evaluated according to the performance level.

Argumentative Topic and Thesis Statement (5 possible points)

The thesis statement is well written and clearly articulates the position that the writer is taking on the topic. The topic is clearly debatable and has two or more sides. This is a great example of an argumentative thesis statement.

Area Score: 5/5 Advanced

Argument Development and Support (20 possible points)

The writer does a nice job including relevant details which support the argument of the essay. The argument is well developed using the classical model of argumentation and support is provided in the form of rhetorical appeals and source material. However, there may be a few more opportunities to use sources and appeals to further strengthen the argument.

Area Score: 18/20 Proficient

Organization (20 possible points)

The essay includes all of the required components of an argumentative essay according to the classical model. Additionally all elements are effectively utilized.

Area Score: 20/20 Advanced

Flow (10 possible points)

The writer does a nice job sequencing the paragraphs and providing transitions between paragraphs so that the essay has good flow and the reader can easily follow the progression of ideas.

Area Score: 9/10 Advanced

Research (10 possible points)

The author primarily cites outside sources appropriately, incorporates sources effectively through direct quotation, paraphrase, or summary and has referenced 2-4 credible primary or secondary sources. However, there are a few instances in which the formatting of the citation was incorrect, or an in-text citation was missing from the essay.

Area Score: 8/10

Style (10 possible points)

The essay demonstrates effective word choices, primarily avoids redundancy and imprecise language, and uses a variety of sentence structures.

Area Score: 8/10

Conventions (10 possible points)

There are occasional spelling or grammar errors within the writing, but they do not impede the overall flow or reader's understanding of the material.

Area Score: 9/10

Formatting (10 possible points)

The writing primarily adheres to APA formatting requirements for in-text citations and the References page, such that formatting errors are minimal.

Area Score: 9/10

“Think About Your Writing” Questions (5 possible points)

The answers to the questions are thoughtful and insightful. The answers effectively address the question and either adhere to or exceed the length guidelines.

Area Score: 5/5

TOTAL SCORE: 91/100 Advanced

This essay demonstrates that the writer has a thorough understanding of the elements of an argumentative essay as well as how to effectively incorporate those elements. The topic selected is appropriate, the thesis statement takes a clear side on the issue, and the thesis is effectively supported by quality sources and rhetorical appeals. It is clear that the writer has thoughtfully crafted this essay and selected sources that meaningfully support the main claim. Well done!