



Are you ready to write Touchstone 2?

The sample essay below provides examples in the proficient to advanced range. As you read through each paragraph, notice how the author takes a clear position on the argument and supports her claim with credible evidence.

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Foundations of English Composition

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Teenager Sleep Habits and School Start Times

An average teenager tries to get to high school on time in the mornings. He may set two alarms on his phone. He may skip a shower or breakfast or drive over the speed limit to make the 7:40 bell. Once there, he joins his sleep-deprived peers in mad dashes to their first classes. School is on, whether students are prepared to learn or not.

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, according to Nationwide Children's Hospital. With the average start time for high school in the U.S. 7:59 AM (U.S. National Center for Education Statistics), it's not a great leap to conclude many high school students are sleep-deprived. High

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Comment [1]: The title provides a general idea of what the essay will be about.

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Comment [2]: The opening paragraph provides an anecdote to engage the reader and make him interested to read the rest of the essay. Other "hooks" that draw the reader in include providing an interesting or startling fact, a definition, a rhetorical question, or an analogy.

schools should implement later start times for students to maximize learning and to maintain healthy biological functions.

Sleep deprivation in teens affects their health, including such issues as mood and behavioral changes, an over-reliance on caffeine, tobacco, or alcohol, and even weight gain. Studies show that lack of sleep also has an effect on academic performance (Park, 2014). If a teenager is operating on seven or fewer hours of sleep, how can she be expected to do well on a history exam given before 8:00 AM? Even if the teen is clutching an extra-large coffee in one hand, chances are, her still-waking-up brain isn't going to be working at peak efficiency. If that teen slept in for another two hours – thereby increasing her nightly sleep closer to the recommended nine hours – she would face that exam better prepared to do well.

Circadian rhythm is our internal body clock that regulates 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 with puberty 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.

This shift in sleep patterns 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.

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Comment [3]: The thesis statement takes a clear position – schools should implement later start times – and includes the main ideas – learning and health – that the essay will explore.

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Comment [4]: This paragraph uses logos to appeal to the reader's sense of logic. Facts and reasoning support the essay's claim that teenagers are not getting enough sleep.

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. You wouldn't be the employee of the month very often, would you?

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, n.d., 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 even when they're tired.

Given that teens' biological processes delay the onset of sleep, that most teens chat on Facebook or watch YouTube videos before bed, and that most schools start at 8:00 AM, what is the solution? Later start times.

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, attendance and test scores improved. Fewer students were tardy, and there was a marked decrease in substance abuse and depression issues. Some schools even reported a noticeable decrease in teens involved in auto accidents (Smith, 2014).

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Comment [5]: This is an appeal to pathos in that it invokes the reader's feelings. Anyone can relate to the feeling that lack of sleep makes one feel sluggish and slow.

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Comment [6]: This is an example of a transition. Note how it ties in information from the paragraph above and transitions the reader into the next paragraph. Transitions allow the piece of writing to flow more smoothly and connect ideas between paragraphs and sentences.

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Comment [7]: By anticipating one objection to the argument – teens are on their phones all night – and refuting it, the writer establishes his own credibility and appeals to ethos by building a sense of trust in the reader.

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Comment [8]: The in-text citation for a direct quotation requires three pieces of information per APA style: author, publication date, and page or paragraph number.

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Comment [9]: The in-text citation for paraphrased information requires only two pieces of information per APA style: author and publication date.

The results of this study 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.

Although some school districts worry that a later start time for high school students would disrupt bus, athletic, and work schedules, as well as interfere with other student extracurricular activities, these are minor objections when one considers the benefits of a later start. 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.

Teenagers shouldn't have to forgo breakfast or risk a car accident because they are summoned to school at an hour at which they should still be sleeping. High schools should institute a later start time – some studies state 10:00 AM would be optimum – 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 both the teens' biological and psychological needs to mature and grow 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.

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Comment [10]: The conclusion restates the main points of the argument and includes a call to action – "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."

References

Nationwide Children's Hospital. (n.d.) Sleep in adolescents. Columbus, Ohio. Retrieved from

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Comment [11] : This is your reference page. It should be located on a separate page after your essay and should include all sources cited in the text of the essay.

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Comment [12] : Sources should be listed in alphabetical order by the author's last name.

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Comment [13] : All lines for a reference that come after the first line should be indented one-half inch.

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Comment [14] : For more detailed rules on APA citation, visit <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl>

Reflection Questions

1. How did your purpose and audience shape the way in which you wrote your argument? (1-2 sentences)

My purpose was to take a clear position on starting school later for teenagers and my audience was parents and school administrators who have the authority to make that change. I tried to keep the lifestyle of teenagers in mind as I wrote to make the argument authentic and true to life. I included facts and statistics to help convince adults that teenagers need more sleep.

2. What was the most difficult part of writing your argumentative essay? (2-3 sentences)

The most difficult part was to choose a narrow enough topic. I started with teenagers and sleep and kept working it down to the school start time aspect of teenagers and sleep. It seemed something I could manage in a 3-5 page essay. It also took some time to write a strong thesis statement that took a clear position. Deciding on the order of body paragraphs was also a challenge, but once I had my narrowed topic, working thesis, and a sense of organization for the essay, writing the argument was pretty easy.

3. Which rhetorical appeals did you use and how do you think they strengthened your argument? (3-4 sentences)

I used logos mostly because I wanted to appeal to my reader's intellect and sense of logic. When I presented facts and statistics from credible, documented sources, I was also establishing my own credibility, so I used ethos as well. I didn't want to over-use pathos because I didn't want my reader to feel manipulated, so I limited it to a sentence or two. Using rhetorical appeals strengthened my argument by using logic, reasoning, and personal credibility to convince the reader that my position was valid.

4. How has your understanding of argumentative writing changed after completing this unit? (2-3 sentences)

I always thought I had to win the argument. But I've learned that building an effective argument has more to do with taking a firm position and backing it up with facts and careful thought than it does with being right about an issue. Learning to use research to support my own ideas was helpful because it made my writing and my position more credible. A good argument doesn't have to be confrontational or hysterical; in fact, a reasoned approach, supported by facts and examples, is what makes an argument effective.