

[cla] Practice Tasks

OVERVIEW

The Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) is an open-ended assessment that measures your critical thinking, analytic reasoning, problem solving, and written communication skills.

The CLA consists of two main tasks:

- Performance Task
- Analytic Writing Task

PERFORMANCE TASK (PAGES 2-5)

A **Performance Task** presents a real-world situation in which an issue, problem, or conflict is identified. You are asked to assume a relevant role to address the issue, suggest a solution or recommend a course of action based on the information provided in a document library.

Typically a full CLA performance task contains six to twelve documents in the library, and students have 90 minutes to complete the task. The document library contains a variety of reference sources that can vary from a technical report, a data table, a newspaper article, an office memorandum, an e-mail, and other every-day materials.

What is presented in the practice is a much abbreviated version of a performance task. It illustrates some of the key components you will find in completing the CLA. The example only includes two documents, with only one question posed.

ANALYTIC WRITING (PAGES 6-14)

The Analytic Writing Task includes a pair of prompts called Make-an-Argument and Critique-an-Argument.

A **Make-an-Argument** prompt typically presents an opinion on some issue and asks students to write, in 45 minutes, a persuasive analytic essay to support a position on the issue.

A **Critique-an-Argument** prompt asks students, in 30 minutes, to critique an argument by discussing how well-reasoned they find it to be (rather than simply agreeing or disagreeing with the position presented).

On the following pages are an example examples of all CLA Tasks.. In addition there are responses that demonstrate and explain the student's critical thinking, analytic reasoning, and written communication skills.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- The CLA is an Online Assessment
- It is delivered through a secure browser
- Scores will be sent to the email address you enter when logging in
- For more information about the CLA please visit usersportal.org/clastudentguide
- You may also email the CLA Team at questions@cae.org.



PERFORMANCE TASK: INSTRUCTIONS

This is an example of a brief performance task. In the course of this practice performance task, you will prepare a written response to a hypothetical but realistic situation. The performance task is made up of an introductory scenario, a question, and some documents that include several information sources. You will use information from the documents in carrying out the task.

While your personal values and experiences are important, you should base your response on the evidence provided in these documents.

TASK INFORMATION

ROLE

You are a staff member for an organization that analyzes the accuracy of policy claims made by political candidates. The organization is non-partisan, meaning that it is not influenced by, affiliated with or supportive of any one political party or candidate.

SCENARIO

Leila Jainson is running for reelection as the mayor of Stoneville. Mayor Jainson’s opponent in this contest is Dr. Carl Greer. Dr. Greer is a member of the Stoneville City Council. During a recent TV interview about cell phone use, Dr. Greer claimed that these phones interfered with people’s ability to operate a motorized vehicle and caused vehicle-related accidents in Stoneville. Dr. Greer said that reducing cell phone usage while driving motorized vehicles would lower the city’s vehicle-related accident rate. To support this argument, Dr. Greer presented a chart that compared the percentage of drivers who use cell phones while driving to the number of vehicle-related accidents. Dr. Greer based this chart on cell phone use and community data tables that were provided by the Stoneville Police Department and government population counts.

TASK

Your job is to evaluate Dr. Greer’s claims. To do so, please answer the question that follows, using the supporting documents provided (labeled A and B). Your answers should include the appropriate or relevant evidence (drawn from documents A and B) necessary to support your position.

QUESTION

Dr. Greer claims that “reducing cell phone usage while driving motorized vehicles would lower the city’s vehicle-related accident rate” (Document B exhibits the chart Dr. Greer used to support this statement).

1. What are the strengths and/or limitations of Dr. Greer’s position on this matter? What specific information in Documents A and B led you to this conclusion? What additional information, if any, would you like to have had?



SERVING STONEVILLE FOR OVER 50 YEARS

The two tables below present data about the city’s five regions. The percentage of registered drivers who use cell phones while operating a motorized vehicle (Table 1) was obtained from a population survey. The middle column of Table 1 shows the number of registered drivers involved in a motorized vehicle-related accident. The number of registered drivers (Table 1) and the percentage who are college graduates (Table 2) are based on 2005 government population counts. The percentage of moving violation offenders in Stoneville (Table 2) is based on 2005 Stoneville Police Department data.

TABLE 1: VEHICULAR ACCIDENTS STATISTICS

Region	Percentage of drivers who use cell phones while operating a motorized vehicle	Number of registered drivers involved in a vehicle-related accident	Number of registered drivers	Number of vehicle-related accidents per 1,000 drivers
East	1	72	8,396	8.58
South	3	110	13,099	8.40
North	5	171	18,886	9.05
West	8	204	23,993	8.50
City Center	10	222	25,875	8.58

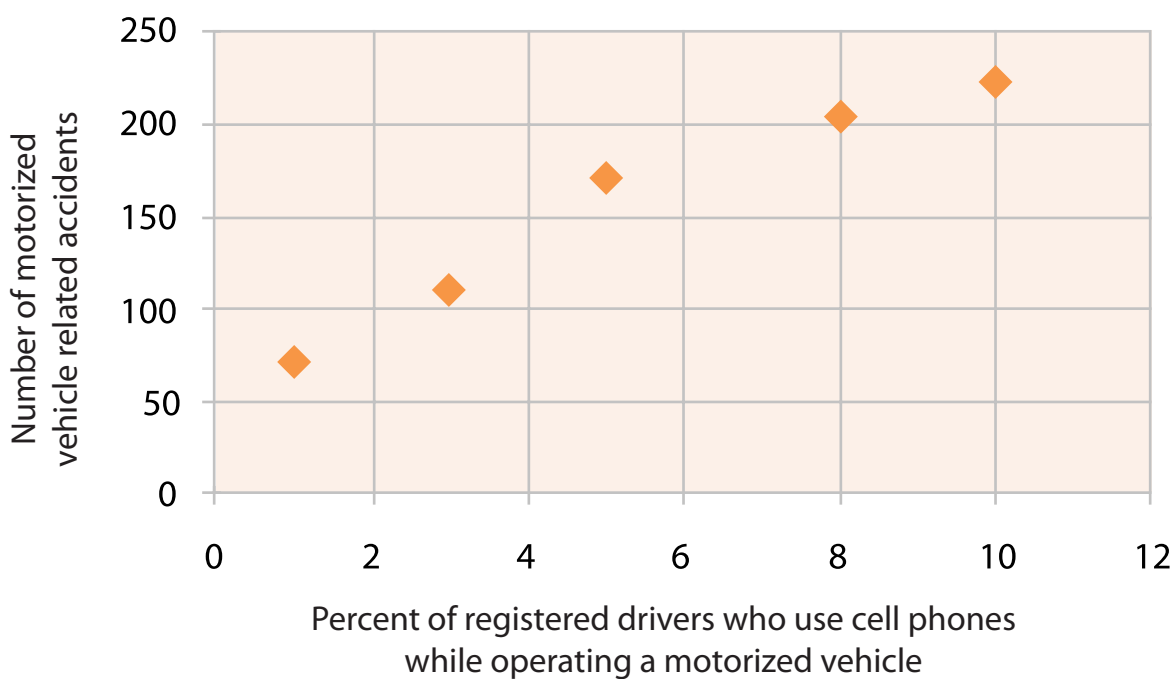
TABLE 2: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Region	Percentage of moving violation offenders in Stoneville	Percentage of drivers who are college graduates
East	60	22
South	50	16
North	40	11
West	35	9
City Center	45	3

DR. GREER'S CHART

Dr. Greer used the chart below during a TV interview to show the relationship between the number people who use cell phones while driving a motorized vehicle and vehicular accidents in Stoneville. This chart is based on data that were provided to Dr. Greer by the Stoneville Police Department (Document A).

Motorized Vehicle Accident and Cell Phone Use in Stoneville



PERFORMANCE TASK: ANSWER SHEET

Please use the pages provided to answer question from the performance task scenario section. If necessary additional paper can be used.

Dr. Greer claims that “reducing cell phone usage while driving motorized vehicles would lower the city’s vehicle-related accident rate” (Document B exhibits the chart Dr. Greer used to support this statement).

1. What are the strengths and/or limitations of Dr. Greer’s position on this matter? What specific information in Documents A and B led you to this conclusion? What additional information, if any, would you like to have had?

PERFORMANCE TASK: SAMPLE RESPONSE

Below is a sample of a high quality response to this performance task and some rationale as to why it is considered such. This was developed to help you understand what is expected of a good response. However, please keep in mind that it by no means covers every possible response.

It is highly recommended that you take time to formulate your own response before reviewing this one.

I cannot agree with Dr. Greer that “reducing cell phone usage while driving motorized vehicles would lower the city’s vehicle-related accident rate.” Dr. Greer’s strategy of looking for root causes of vehicle-related accidents is a good one, but cell phone use while driving may not be the primary cause of vehicular accidents in Stoneville.

The chart he showed in his TV interview (Document B) seems to show that vehicle-related accidents increase along with the percent of registered drivers using cell phones while driving. However, Dr. Greer is either misunderstanding the information he gathered from Document A to create his chart, or he is misleading the public. What his chart (Document B) does not show is the population of each region. Therefore, the chart ends up comparing a number with a percent, which is not meaningful. Dr. Greer is correct in saying that the number of vehicle-related accidents increases with the total number of registered driver living in each region, but he fails to consider number of accidents per 1,000 drivers. When I look at the tables provided by the police department (Document A), I can see that the number of vehicle-related accidents per 1,000 drivers stays relatively constant regardless of the percentage of drivers using cell phones while operating a motorized vehicle. You would expect the region with 1% cell phone users while driving and the one with 10% to have very different vehicular accident rates, but in fact, they are the same at 8.59. This suggests that reducing cell phone use while driving a motorized vehicle may not affect the vehicular accident rate at all.

There are many things that cause vehicle-related accidents. The North region has 5% of cell phone users while operating a motorized vehicle, but a noticeably higher vehicular accident rate of 9.04%, so it leads one to wonder what is going on in this region. It would be wise to examine this region to get an idea of all the other possibilities that may exist for vehicular accidents.

WHY THIS IS A HIGH QUALITY RESPONSE

- Clearly states position and provides rationale
- Weighs other options, but presents a position based on available evidence
- Raises issues about cause and provides specific supporting evidence that raises doubts about cause
- Discards irrelevant information (e.g. percent of registered drivers who are college graduates)
- Provides a well-organized response
- Provides a well-constructed response with complex sentences that vary in structure and length
- Recognizes a need for additional information and made a specific recommendation on the type of information

MAKE-AN-ARGUMENT: INSTRUCTIONS

You will have 45 minutes to plan and write an argument on the prompt that is presented. You should take a position to support or oppose the statement. Use examples taken from your reading, coursework, or personal experience to support your position. Your essay will be evaluated on how well you do the following:

- State your position
- Organize, develop, and express your ideas
- Support your ideas with relevant reasons and/or examples
- Address counter arguments to your position
- Control the elements of standard written English

Before you begin writing, you may want to take a few minutes to decide on a position and to plan a response. Be sure to develop your ideas fully and organize them coherently.

PROMPT

Government funding would be better spent on preventing crime than in dealing with criminals after the fact.

MAKE-AN-ARGUMENT: ANSWER SHEET

Please use the page provided to answer question from the Analytic Writing: Make-an-Argument section. If necessary additional paper can be used.

PROMPT

Government funding would be better spent on preventing crime than in dealing with criminals after the fact.

CRITIQUE-AN-ARGUMENT: INSTRUCTIONS

There is something wrong with the argument presented below. It is your job to explain what is wrong with the argument. Discuss:

- Any flaws in the argument
- Any questionable assumptions
- Any missing information
- Any inconsistencies

What we are interested in is your critical thinking skills and how well you write a response. You will have 30 minutes to respond to the argument. You will be judged on how well you do the following:

- Explain any flaws in the points the author makes
- Organize, develop, and express your ideas
- Support your ideas with relevant reasons and/or examples
- Control the elements of standard written English

Do not discuss the structure of the argument. Please avoid sentences like the following.:

- "The argument needs a better introductory sentence."
- "This argument has some facts that help support its ideas, but the ideas are somewhat unorganized."
- "The argument needs more details, more evidence to get its points across."
- "The argument does a great job of recommending a solution and a way to fix the problem."
- Your essay should be about what the argument says, not how it's organized.

PROMPT

The number of marriages that end in divorce keeps growing. A large percentage of them are from June weddings. Because June weddings are so popular, couples end up being engaged for a long time just so that they can get married in the summer months. The number of divorces gets bigger with each passing year, and the latest news is that more than 1 out of 3 marriages will end in divorce. So, if you want a marriage that lasts forever, it is best to do everything you can to prevent getting divorced. Therefore, it is good advice for young couples to have short engagements and choose a month other than June for a wedding.

CRITIQUE-AN-ARGUMENT: ANSWER SHEET

Please use the pages provided to answer question from the Analytic Writing: Critique-an-Argument section. If necessary additional paper can be used.

PROMPT

The number of marriages that end in divorce keeps growing. A large percentage of them are from June weddings. Because June weddings are so popular, couples end up being engaged for a long time just so that they can get married in the summer months. The number of divorces gets bigger with each passing year, and the latest news is that more than 1 out of 3 marriages will end in divorce. So, if you want a marriage that lasts forever, it is best to do everything you can to prevent getting divorced. Therefore, it is good advice for young couples to have short engagements and choose a month other than June for a wedding.

compatibility, and above all hard work at maintaining the relationship. If a couple wants to try to prevent getting divorced, they should work on these things, not simply avoiding a June wedding as the author suggests. My brother is divorced. Yes, he was married in June. But in my opinion the date of their wedding was the least of their problems.

WHY THIS IS A HIGH QUALITY RESPONSE

- Information is well-organized. The reader knows exactly which part of the prompt is being critiqued at every point in the response
- Uses complex sentence structure and varied vocabulary
- Uses examples (e.g., reasoned hypothetical examples and common knowledge) to support and illustrate valid points
- Identifies numerous flaws (complex and subtle)
- Explanation/justification: The response not only mentions numerous flaws throughout the argument, but also explains the flaws clearly, completely, and convincingly for the reader
- Demonstrates solid understanding of several important critical thinking concepts. For example:
 - The difference between interpreting proportions versus just raw numbers in statistics and how doing so can lead to different conclusions
 - Correlation is not causation