



# The GED Language Arts, Writing Test

## *Getting Ideas on Paper*



**Frances L. Roberson, M.A.**

ABE/ASE/GED/ESL Teacher

Vocational Counselor

Grant Writing Specialist

California Distance Learning Project

[www.cdlponline.org](http://www.cdlponline.org)

# GED

## Video Partner



#3

### Passing the GED Writing Test

I write entirely to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I see and what it means. What I want and what I fear.

Joan Didion, Writer

Video 3 Focus: how to get started as a writer and putting ideas on paper

#### You Will Learn From Video 3:

- How to come up with ideas for writing.
- How to keep journals and diaries to improve writing.
- To write what you know best; make list of what you believe in.
- To read what you write aloud so you remind yourself that we write to communicate with others.



#### Words You Need to Know:

While viewing the video, put the letter of the meaning by the correct vocabulary word. Answers are on page 14.

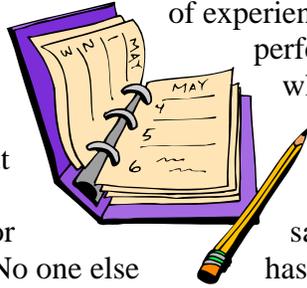
- |                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| _____ 1. 5 Ws and H   | a. a diary where you record your thoughts, feelings and experiences |
| _____ 2. free writing | b. who, what, when, where, why, how                                 |
| _____ 3. snapshot     | c. “nugget” of an idea from free writing                            |
| _____ 4. kernel       | d. writing giving no thought to time, corrections, or organization  |
| _____ 5. journal      | e. word “picture”   |

#### Points to Remember:

- Everyone is capable of putting ideas on paper.
- The more you practice a skill, the better you become at it, so write, write, write.
- Get used to essay writing by choosing an issue important to you, state your position on it, then write all you believe or feel about it.

Writing skills improve just as any other skills improve--through practice. If you want to improve, then you should write every day. Basketball players, chess players, artists, boxers, drummers all become better because they practice continuously. Writers must do the same.

Every day, you can keep a diary or poem. It doesn't have to be spelling, punctuation, organization worry about the best strategies You don't even have to worry about Just keep your "inner editor," the poorly, or using the wrong words, or "inner creator" for the time being. No one else



of experiences and thoughts, write a story or a perfect. You don't have to worry about when just starting out, as you wouldn't when first learning a new sport. writing in complete sentences. little voice that says you're spelling saying unjust things, away from your has to read it but you.

Everyone is capable of putting words on paper. Just write about what you know: your family, your dreams, experiences, likes, dislikes, ideas, beliefs, or observations. Keep your writing in a bound journal or diary (no scraps of paper, please) so you can always look back and see how you have progressed. Spend but a few minutes every day writing in your journal, and you will soon find that writing can be fun. Try to work up to ten minutes or more each day.

Just practice free writing during that period of time. Tell yourself you will start writing and not stop. Let the ideas flow onto the paper without judgment as to their mechanical or literary value. You will be surprised how much you can write down.



*“But how do I come up with ideas for writing stories and essays?”*

Actually, ideas for writing are all around you. There are “kernels” of ideas sprinkled through your free writing that can be pulled out and expanded. There are pictures in magazines, cartoons, and everyday scenes that will inspire an idea that you will want to write about.

You could make lists of beliefs, hobbies, issues important to you, favorite foods, or just about anything. You could even make a list of “funny characters in my family,” and that could just as easily take you into a story.

Another good means of finding ideas is to “brainstorm.” This is a process somewhat similar to free writing, but different because you are merely jotting down words and phrases, rather than whole thoughts, related to your original idea with no intention of trying to make sentences. Decide what you want to focus on (“my ideal job,” for example), and let your mind wander. Write down everything that comes to mind. Only after you have finished compiling a list of ideas can you make a judgment about whether the idea is one to keep or throw away. Later on, you can use brainstorming again to come up with supporting ideas for the topic you've chosen.

***Tuesday,  
Went to Uncle Joe's b'day  
party tonight. He sure is a  
charater! Lot of others  
there. Had a lot of laffs.  
He said he could help me  
get a job at the plant. I sure  
hope so. I want to get a job  
where I can use my hands.***

### Journal Entry

Check the writing topic(s) that can be taken from this journal entry.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. How can people you know help you get a job?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. What type of job duties makes you happy?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Talk about the different kinds of people you have in your family.

Obviously all of these ideas would work for an essay. And all of this from just a short journal entry!

Note: there are several errors in this entry, but that's acceptable in free writing.



*“Now that I have an idea or have a picture I can use, how do I write about it?”*

When writing about an observation (an event or scene), it is necessary to be descriptive. Using your own words, tell about the people, place, time of day or year, and emotions involved. In short, use the “news reporter’s formula”: the 5 Ws and an H. It is called this because news reporters have traditionally tried to give the most information about a news story in the first one or two paragraphs of the story. The most “economical” way of doing this is to follow this formula.

Who, what, when, where, why, and how is an excellent way to gather all the information for your story. Look at the following picture:

- ❖ Who? an elderly couple in evening clothes
- ❖ What? on a cruise, watching the seagulls
- ❖ When? obviously warmer weather: summer
- ❖ Where? on a ship's deck
- ❖ Why? to celebrate their anniversary
- ❖ How do they feel? we think happy



Story using 5 Ws and H:

*(when)* Last summer, *(who)* Grandma and Grandpa Henderson finally got *(what)* to go on their long-awaited cruise. *(why)* They were celebrating their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. They would dress for dinner and then go *(where)* up on deck to watch the sunset and the seagulls. *(how did they feel)* They said it was one of the most enjoyable times of their lives!

# TRY THIS!

It's important to be able to recognize just what information you have to use for your writing. Look at these "news" items and identify the 5 Ws and the H. You may not be able to identify all of them, but note as many as you can. Answers are on page 14.

Gary Gordon was elected chairman of the board of Ludite Toys at the annual board meeting held in San Francisco Sunday night. Mr. Gordon rose through the ranks through years of hard work starting in the mail room. He is particularly well-qualified for the job, he says, because he spent many years developing toy programs and many years before that playing with toys!



Who?  
What?  
When?  
Where?  
Why?  
How?



Hickory, dickory, dock,  
The mouse ran up the clock.  
The clock struck one,  
The mouse ran down!  
Hickory, dickory, dock.

Who?  
What?  
When?  
Where?  
Why?  
How?

You may not be able to answer every question, but the more you can, the more complete your story will be.

- ❖ Who is in this picture?
- ❖ What are they doing?
- ❖ When is this happening?
- ❖ Where is this?
- ❖ Why are they there?
- ❖ How do the people seem to feel about it?

Write a story using as many of the Ws and H as you can.



Unlike free writing in your journal, when you are writing a story, a letter, a narrative, an e-mail, or an essay, you will be writing for someone else to read. Therefore, you must be careful with the mechanics (grammar, spelling, usage, punctuation) and organization of your writing. Here's where the 5Ws and an H are often quite useful, especially for writing that tells a story, describes a scene or activity, or is meant to entertain or inform.

You will find that using the 5 Ws and H is the easiest way to organize a letter, promotional material, memo, or even an e-mail. See how this memo seems to fall into place:

Who? Miller Hat Company  
What? Annual Fall Wholesalers' Meeting and Show  
When? Wednesday, June 14, 2003  
Where? Ramada Inn conference room  
Why? to unveil new fall line  
How? video and live presentation

To: All Miller Wholesalers  
From: Miller Hat Company Distribution Dept.  
Date: March 15, 2003  
Re: Annual Fall Wholesalers' Meeting and Show

Miller Hat Company will be holding its Annual Fall Wholesalers' Meeting and Show on Wednesday, June 14, 2003, in the Ramada Inn conference room. Live and video presentations will be used to unveil Miller's new fall line. Please plan to attend. RSVP.

When you write an essay, letter of complaint, promotional material, "how to" article, or even an e-mail, you are writing something decidedly different from your free writing: expository writing. In expository writing, you are dealing more with ideas than with events or scenes. In this type of writing, which is used to inform, explain, or even compare and contrast, ideas must be set down in an orderly fashion; they must be structured and must contain a "topic statement." In an essay, the main thesis statement is usually in the first paragraph. In following paragraphs, the topic statement for that paragraph is usually the first sentence of the paragraph. This gives an ordered direction to the essay.



In every essay, each paragraph should be closely related to the thesis statement; in every paragraph, each sentence should be closely related to the topic statement (sentence) of that paragraph. Any sentence or paragraph that does not support the topic or relate to the main idea needs to be eliminated.

You need to be careful not to simply restate the topic. You need to support the topic statement with details such as examples, reasons, and/or personal experiences. Whether it's a letter of complaint or a GED Essay question, this type of organization is necessary.



*“Say I know what my topic statement is, because they gave it to me for the test. How do I come up with the supporting details?”*

First of all, they may have given you the topic for your essay, but you still have to make some choices regarding it. With this topic, for instance: “Which would you prefer: a job where you work with your hands, your mind, or with people?” you would have to choose one of these, explain your reasoning (talents, training), give examples, and relate personal experiences. In other words, you will probably be told to use “your personal observations, experience, and knowledge to support your essay.”

Here is where the brainstorming comes in again. You can sit down with your topic and make a list of possible supportive statements including examples, reasons, and personal experiences. Jot down words and phrases without regard to whether they are good or not. You may have a long list before you are done, but that is okay. After you are finished, simply go back and eliminate anything that does not relate to the topic or is too complicated to use easily in the essay. If you can whittle the list down to three good supportive statements (which will be used as topic sentences for three different paragraphs), then you are a long way toward writing your essay!

Another useful tool that is related to brainstorming is “mind-mapping.” Here you can use a device as shown and insert the brainstorming information that will give you supporting details for each paragraph. Example:

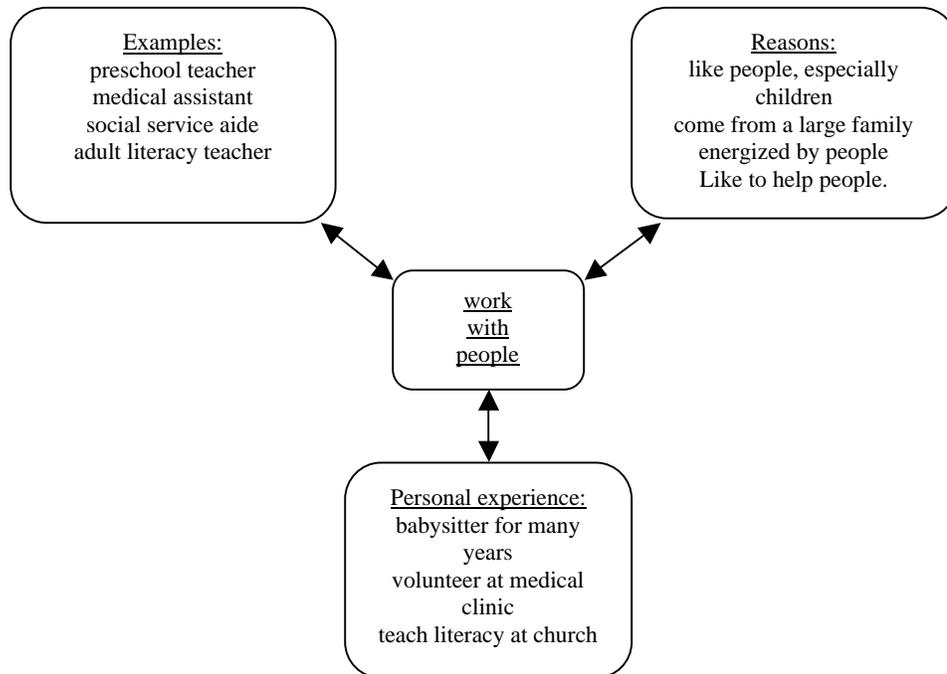
Topic statement: “I would prefer to work in a job where I work with people.”

*Free Writing for Topic*

from a large family  
preschool teacher  
~~help my fishing buddies~~  
like to help people  
like children  
energized by people

social service aide  
medical assistant  
babysitter for years  
read a lot  
from a large family  
~~think a lot~~

~~got along well in school~~  
teach literacy at church  
adult literacy teacher  
volunteer at medical clinic  
~~good with tools~~  
~~jog every day~~



Examples of topic statements you might use for each of the three supporting paragraphs could be:

- “There are several reasons I would like to work with people”
- “I have a good deal of personal experience working with people.”
- “There are several occupations I could follow which would allow me to work with people.”

Then, of course, you would use the information you have gathered through brainstorming and mind-mapping to support the topic statements in each paragraph.



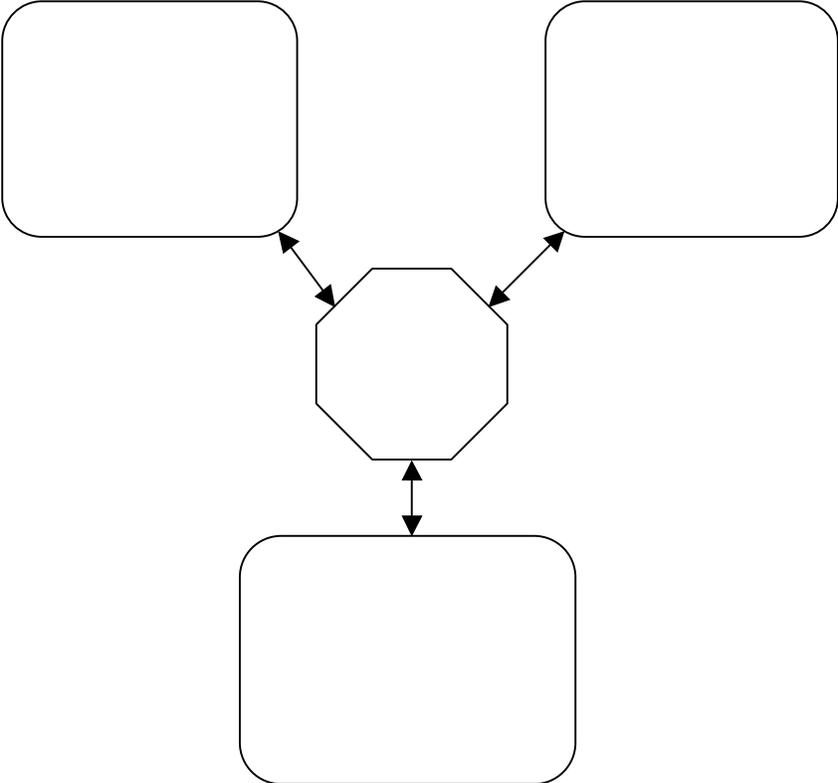
*“Okay, let me try that!”*

Here’s a sample essay topic. “Suppose you were somehow able to travel back to a different time to live. Which era would you choose and why? Use your personal observations, experience, and knowledge to support your essay.”

Use this topic to brainstorm, eliminate words or phrases that don't relate, then use the results from the brainstorming to fill in the mind-mapping grid. Remember: **THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS ON AN ESSAY, ONLY POORLY PRESENTED TOPICS AND SUPPORT SENTENCES!**

Check on pages 14-16 of this packet for an example of one possible way to use the information to construct the essay.

**BRAINSTORMING**





Writing is not just something we are forced to use for work. If there were no writing, there would be no reading; therefore, no government, no entertainment. There would be no notes to family members; no sports trading cards with biographies on them; no election ballots; no magazines, books, internet; no television or movie scripts; no business plans or advertisements; no warnings or highway signs or maps; no preserved history or newspapers for current events; no comic strips. Writing is necessary for reading, and both are required for a civilized society.

The earliest known writing was in the Sumerian society of Southern Mesopotamia more than 5000 years ago. The first writing systems were a limited series of symbols used for practical reasons such as keeping track of goods and money as shown here in the Philadelphia Tablet, which records the sale of acreage. Societies have since expanded on the earlier systems to use writing more for the expression, distribution, and discussion of ideas.



Univ. of Pennsylvania Museum  
(neg. #000000)

Practice your writing every day so you can better express your ideas.

## GED EXERCISE 1

Read the following pieces and choose the one best answer for each question. Answers are on page 16.

Roxanne is one of many dancers in the Radio City Music Hall in New York City who have trained as a ballet dancer. She, like all the other dancers, started as a young girl with lessons and practices with dance teachers that ran many hours a day. Her life is glamorous today she has achieved the fame she probably never would have had as a ballet dancer.

**the fame she probably never would have had as a ballet dancer.**

1. In the 5Ws and H, what noun is the “who” in this paragraph?
  - 1) Radio City Music Hall
  - 2) dancers
  - 3) New York City
  - 4) Roxanne
  - 5) dance teachers
2. What changes should be made to this: **Her life is glamorous today she has achieved**

- 1) Her life is glamorous. Today, she has achieved the fame she probably never would have had as a ballet dancer.
  - 2) Her life is glamorous today. She has achieved the fame she probably never would have had as a ballet dancer.
  - 3) Her life is glamorous today, and she has achieved the fame she probably never would have had as a ballet dancer.
  - 4) None of the above is correct.
  - 5) Numbers 1-3 are all correct.
3. Make the correction to this sentence if necessary: **Roxanne is one of many dancers in the Radio City Music Hall in New York City who have trained as a ballet dancer.**

- 1) change one to some
- 2) change have to has
- 3) change ballet dancer to ballet dancers
- 4) sentence is correct as it stands
- 5) remove capitals from Radio City Music Hall

Memo: to Production Division  
 From: Marketing  
 Re: rollout of power hammer

Be advised that the new power hammer will be introduced into the Fresno market by Division Manager John Holloway. Unveiled at an all-star event with guests from *This Old House*. Its very important that we have the stock on hand to supply, what we expect to be, an overwhelming demand.

4. In this sentence: **Be advised that the new power hammer will be introduced into the Fresno market by Division Manager John Holloway.**

- 1) put a comma after Division Manager
- 2) replace knew with new
- 3) remove commas on Division Manager
- 4) remove comma on Fresno
- 5) sentence is correct as it stands

5. In this memo, which of the 5Ws and H is missing?

- 1) what?
- 2) where?
- 3) when?
- 4) how?
- 5) who?

6. **Unveiled at an all-star event with guests from *This Old House*.**

- 1) is a run-on sentence
- 2) remove capitals from *This Old House*
- 3) sentence is correct as it stands
- 4) add s to event
- 5) is a fragment

7. **Its very important that we have the stock on hand to supply, what we expect to be, an overwhelming demand.**

- 1) remove commas from before and after what we expect to be
- 2) place comma after on hand
- 3) change Its to It's
- 4) this is a run-on sentence
- 5) this is a fragment

Note to Mrs. Fitzgerald

Please excuse Johnny from school tomorrow we have a doctor's appointment. All my childrens are sick right now. He do his homework for you before he comes back.

8. **Please excuse Johnny from school tomorrow we have a doctor's appointment.**

- 1) remove the apostrophe from doctor's
- 2) change sentence to: Please excuse Johnny from school tomorrow, because we have a doctor's appointment.
- 3) sentence is a fragment
- 4) change have to has
- 5) sentence is correct as it stands

9. **All my childrens are sick right now.**

- 1) change are to is
- 2) fragment
- 3) run-on sentence
- 4) remove s from childrens
- 5) change right to write

10. **He do his homework for you before he comes back.**

- 1) replace period with question mark
- 2) add helping verb will before do
- 3) sentence is correct as it stands
- 4) put comma after homework
- 5) make this sentence the first sentence in the note

## GED EXERCISE 2

Read the following passages and choose the one best answer for each question. Answers are on page 16.

According to an article in the May 24, 2004 New York Post, a 19-month old Rottweiler became a hero when she helped save the life of two workers who were hanging from their harnesses six stories above a New York Street. There scaffolding had collapsed, and their co-workers on the street did not know and could not hear them yell for help.

Boogey Baby heard them though. She dropped her bone and ran around barking, thus alerting her owner who went to the window and heard the workers yelling for help. He ran down to the street and got the co-workers who, together with the fire department, managed to haul the men in through a window with a rope.

But if it hadn't been for Boogey baby, those workers might not be around today to sing the glories of a canine hero!

1. Which of the 5 Ws and H is/are missing from this piece?
  - 1) who?
  - 2) where?
  - 3) what?
  - 4) all of them are missing
  - 5) none of them is missing
  
2. What change, if any, needs to be made to: **According to an article in the May 24, 2004 New York Post, a 19-month old Rottweiler became a hero when she helped save the life of two workers who were hanging from their harnesses six stories above a New York Street.**
  - 1) change who to whom
  - 2) capitalize hero
  - 3) remove capital s from Street
  - 4) sentence is correct as it stands
  - 5) remove capitals from New York Post

3. **There scaffolding had collapsed, and their co-workers on the street did not know and could not hear them yell for help.**

- 1) change there to they're
- 2) remove comma after collapsed
- 3) change hear to here
- 4) change there to their
- 5) sentence is correct as it stands

4. **He ran down to the street and got the co-workers who, together with the fire department, managed to haul the men in through a window with a rope.**

- 1) change who to whom
- 2) sentence is correct as it stands
- 3) put a comma after street
- 4) capitalize fire department
- 5) break into two sentences with a period after co-workers

5. **But if it hadn't been for Boogey baby, those workers might not be around today to sing the glories of a canine hero!**

- 1) remove capitals from Boogey baby
- 2) capitalize baby
- 3) remove comma after baby
- 4) change exclamation point to question mark
- 5) capitalize hero

Dear Mom:

How are you I've been really busy this past week. I haven't had a day off in a month, so right when you can and send money.

Love,  
Your son

6. **Dear Mom:**

- 1) correct as it stands
- 2) remove capital on Mom
- 3) remove capital on Dear
- 4) change colon to comma
- 5) Dear Mom should be combined into one word

7. **How are you I've been really busy this past week.**

- 1) change period to question mark
- 2) change I've to I'm
- 3) run-on sentence
- 4) put comma after you
- 5) sentence is correct as it stands

8. **I haven't had a day off in a month, so right when you can and send money.**

- 1) remove comma after month
- 2) put comma after can
- 3) change right to write
- 4) change off to of
- 5) sentence is correct as it stands

9. Love,  
Your son

- 1) capitalize son
- 2) remove capital from Love
- 3) change comma to colon
- 4) put comma after son
- 5) sentence is correct as it stands

## ANSWERS AND EXPLANATIONS

### Page 1: Word You Need to Know

1. b
2. d
3. e
4. c
5. a

### Page 5: Try This!

- Who? Gary Gordon
- What? was elected chairman of the board
- When? Sunday night
- Where? at the annual board meeting in San Francisco
- Why? spent many years developing toy programs and playing with toys
- How? rose through the ranks by working hard

- Who? the mouse
- What? ran up and down
- When? at one
- Where? the clock
- Why? unknown
- How? unknown

- ❖ Who is in this picture? man and his child
- ❖ What are they doing? sledding on a hill
- ❖ When is this happening? winter
- ❖ Where is this? up in mountains
- ❖ Why are they there? to have fun
- ❖ How do the people seem to feel about it? seem to be happy

This is a one sample. Your writing may be different as there are many possibilities.

Bob and his son, Tommy, went up to Snowdrift Mountain last winter for an afternoon of fun. After playing in the snow, they went sledding. They had a great time!

### Page 9: Sample Essay

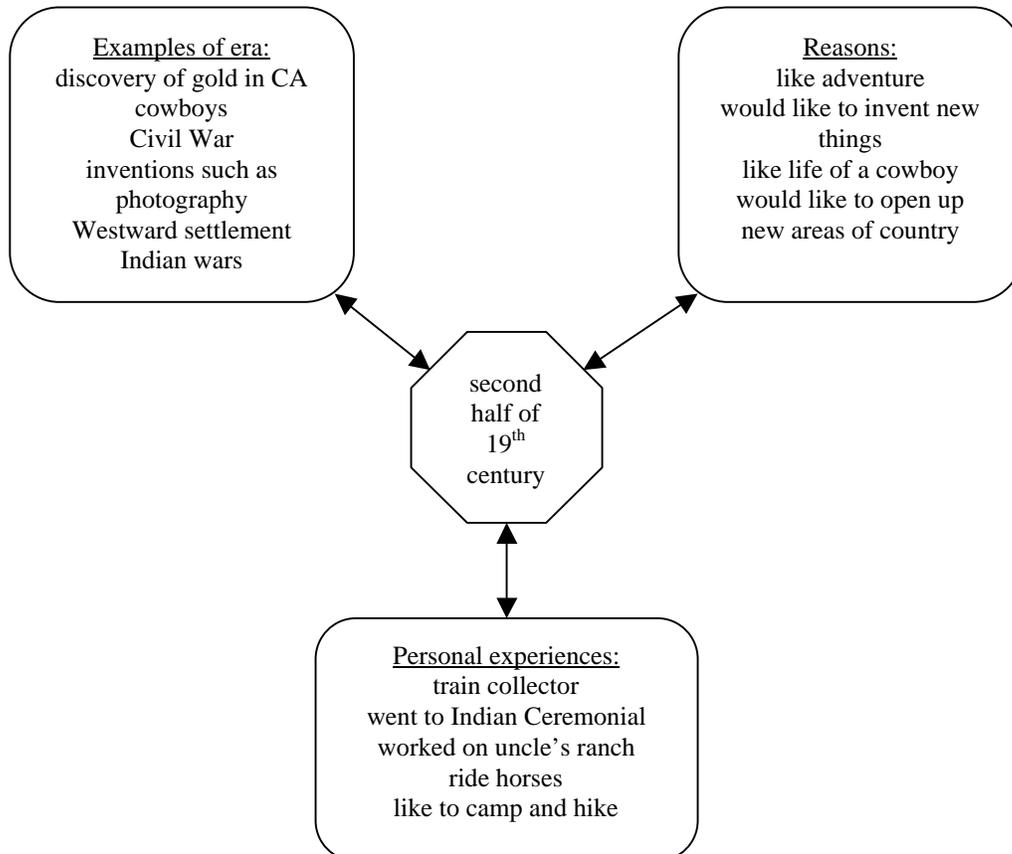
Here is ONE WAY you could have prepared the sample topic for the essay:

## BRAINSTORMING

~~Crusades~~  
cowboys  
~~World War II~~  
went to Indian Ceremonial  
~~Columbus~~  
gold rush  
Indian wars  
railroad  
like adventure  
like opening up new areas  
Civil War  
~~Revolution~~  
train collector

invention of photography  
like to camp and hike  
~~16<sup>th</sup> century~~  
~~Roman empire~~  
westward movement  
space  
~~Egyptian pyramids~~  
~~Invention of printing press~~  
~~Renaissance~~  
~~Vikings~~  
worked on uncle's ranch  
19<sup>th</sup> century

Thesis Statement: "If I could go back in time and choose another time to live, I would like to live in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century."



Examples of topic statements you might use for each of the three supporting paragraphs could be:

- ❑ “There were many interesting events in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.”
- ❑ “There are several reasons I would like to live back in that era.”
- ❑ “My personal experiences show that I would fit right in that time.”

Then, of course, you would use the information you’ve gathered through brainstorming and mind-mapping to support the topic statements in each paragraph.

Page 10-11: GED EXERCISE 1

1. 4) There are several nouns here, but the paragraph is really about Roxanne.
2. 5) This is a run-on sentence that can be corrected in any of the three ways.
3. 2) has modifies one, therefore, it needs to be singular.
4. 2) new is the correct spelling.
5. 3) This doesn’t tell when? the introduction of the hammer or all-star event will be.
6. 5) This is a fragment because it has no subject.
7. 3) It’s stands for It is, the subject and verb of the sentence.
8. 2) This is a run-on sentence that is corrected with the addition of the conjunction because.
9. 4) Children is the plural form and does not need the s.
10. 2) This needs to have a helping verb to show the future.

Page 12-13: GED EXERCISE 2

1. 5) None of them is missing.
2. 3) Street is not part of the name, and, as a common noun, it should not be capitalized.
3. 4) There is used for place, not possessive. Use the possessive Their.
4. 2) This sentence is correct as it stands.
5. 2) baby is part of a name (proper noun) and needs to be capitalized.
6. 4) Punctuation after the greeting in a personal letter is a comma.
7. 3) This really should be two sentences: **How are you? I’ve been really busy this past week.**
8. 3) To pen a letter is to write. This right means correct.
9. 5) This is correct because the first word of the closing is always capitalized, the first word of the “signature” is capitalized (or a person’s name is capitalized), but son is not used as a name here—you can tell because it is after a possessive pronoun—so it is not capitalized.