

Honors Entrance Exam Writing Samples

This PDF document contains the rubric used to score the honors entrance exam essay, a past writing prompt, and 5 baseline essays written from the prompt in order of 5-1 scoring.

RUBRIC FOR SCORING ESSAYS

5 Excellent Achievement

Essays showing excellent achievement will include the following:

- A thesis statement expressing the position taken in the essay
- Topic sentences expressing the topics of the paragraphs
- Thorough development of each paragraph using specific details/examples from the passage
- Thorough explanation of the details and/or examples
- Good unity and coherence
- Good transitions
- Good sentence variety in type, structure, and length
- Good language usage and mechanics with no more than a few errors which do not interfere with the reader's understanding of the essay

4 Commendable Achievement

Essays will include the following:

- A thesis statement expressing the position taken in the essay
- Topic sentences expressing the topics of the paragraphs
- Good development using specific details/examples from the passage
- Good explanation of the details/examples
- General unity and coherence with some use of transitions
- Some sentence variety
- Good language usage and mechanics although there may be a few more errors in a 4 response than in a 5 response

3 Adequate Achievement

Essays will include the following:

- A thesis statement expressing the position taken in the essay or an implied thesis
- Topic sentences expressing the topics of the paragraphs
- Some development using specific details/examples from the passage
- Some explanation of the details/examples
- General unity and coherence as above although not as strong as in a 4 response
- Adequate language and mechanics although errors may slightly interfere with the reader's understanding of the essay

2 Limited Achievement

Essays will be characterized by one or more of the following:

- Inadequate thesis, topic sentences, development, or explanation
- Lack of unity and/or coherence
- Language usage and/or mechanical errors which interfere with the reader's understanding of the essay

1 Inadequate Achievement

Essays will be characterized by a clear lack of content, organization, style, or development

Sunny Hills High School

Honors Entrance Exam Essay

Student Name _____

Jr. High School Name _____

Directions: Read the following selection carefully and then write a well-organized multi paragraph response to the writing task given below. Be thorough in your response, use specifics from the passage to support your ideas, and do not merely give a summary of the passage. Write neatly and clearly, use standard academic English, and use both front and back sides of the paper when writing your response. **All essays must be written in blue or black ink. Essays not written in ink will not be scored.** Essays will be scored according to the rubric that is attached. Do your best. Good luck!

Writing Situation: The following passage begins the novel Life of Pi by Yann Martel. The narrator, Pi, has recently survived a ship wreck that has killed his whole family. In the following passage Pi states that he turns to academics and religion in order to come “back to life.”

Writing Prompt: Discuss how Martel characterizes the narrator, Pi, through the story of Pi’s study of the three-toed sloth. What is Martel’s purpose of using this story to introduce the reader to Pi?

From Life of Pi by Yann Martel

My suffering left me sad and gloomy.

Academic study and the steady, mindful practice of religion slowly brought me back to life. I have kept up what some people would consider my strange religious practices. After one year of high school, I attended the University of Toronto and took a double-major Bachelor's degree. My majors were religious studies and zoology. My fourth-year thesis for religious studies concerned certain aspects of the cosmogony theory of Isaac Luria, the great sixteenth-century Kabbalist¹ from Safed. My zoology thesis was a functional analysis of the thyroid gland of the three-toed sloth. I chose the sloth because its demeanour--calm, quiet and introspective--did something to soothe my shattered self.

There are two-toed sloths and there are three-toed sloths, the case being determined by the forepaws of the animals, since all sloths have three claws on their hind paws. I had the great luck one summer of studying the three-toed sloth in *situ* in the equatorial jungles of Brazil. It is a highly intriguing creature. Its only real habit is indolence. It sleeps or rests on average twenty hours a day. Our team tested the sleep habits of five wild three-toed sloths by placing on their heads, in the early evening after they had fallen asleep, bright red plastic dishes filled with water. We found them still in place late the next morning, the water of the dishes swarming with insects. The sloth is at its busiest at sunset, using the word *busy* here in the most relaxed sense. It moves along the bough of a tree in its characteristic upside-down position at the speed of roughly 400 metres an hour. On the ground, it crawls to its next tree at the rate of 250 metres an hour, when motivated, which is 440 times slower than a motivated cheetah. Unmotivated, it covers four to five metres in an hour.

The three-toed sloth is not well informed about the outside world. On a scale of 2 to 10, where 2 represents unusual dullness and 10 extreme acuity, Beebe (1926) gave the sloth's senses of taste, touch, and its sense of smell a rating of 3. If you come upon a sleeping three-toed sloth in the wild, two or three nudges should suffice to awaken it; it will then look sleepily in every direction but yours. Why it should look about is uncertain since the sloth sees everything in a Magoo-like blur². Beebe reported that firing guns next to sleeping or feeding sloths elicited little reaction. And the sloth's slightly better sense of smell should not be overestimated. They are said to be able to sniff and avoid decayed branches, but Bullock (1968) reported that sloths fall to the ground clinging to decayed branches "often".

How does it survive you might ask.

Precisely by being so slow. Sleepiness and slothfulness keep it out of harm's way, away from the notice of jaguars, ocelots, harpy eagles and anacondas. A sloth's hairs shelter an

¹ A mystical branch of Judaism

² An allusion to Mr. Magoo, a cartoon character with comically poor eyesight

algae that is brown during the dry season and green during the wet season, so the animal blends in with the surrounding moss and foliage and looks like a nest of white ants or of squirrels, or like nothing at all but part of a tree.

The three-toed sloth lives a peaceful, vegetarian life in perfect harmony with its environment. "A good-natured smile is forever on its own lips," reported Tirlor (1966). I have seen that smile with my own eyes. I am not one given to projecting human traits and emotions onto animals, but many a time during that month in Brazil, up at sloths in repose, I felt I was in the presence of upside-down yogis deep in meditation or hermits deep in prayer, wise beings whose intense imaginative lives were beyond the reach of my scientific probing.

Sometimes I got my majors mixed up. A number of my fellow religious-studies students-muddled agnostics³ who didn't know which way was up, who were in the thrall of reason, that fool's gold for the bright -- reminded me of the three-toed sloth; and the three-toed sloth, such a beautiful example of the miracle of life, reminded me of God.

³ People who believe that knowledge of God is unattainable

One of the slowest computing animals in the animal kingdom is statistically considered a sloth. In Maktel's story, "The Life of Pi", Maktel characterizes his character with a journal log type entry. His writing gives access to the readers to venture in on Pi's internal thoughts and opinions. His observations on the animal reflect more observation on Pi himself. Pi's point of view on the lazy creature is neither pitiful nor troubled but rather jealous of its simple lifestyle. Pi expresses his feelings and his emotions thoroughly throughout the observations made on the three-toed sloth. Through this, readers clearly grasp the concept that he is a lost, envious and a patient man.

First through the passage, Pi expresses his inner emotions in a suicidal way. Readers can assume that Pi is still struggling with his internal character. "My suffering left me sad and gloomy" proves at this point that Pi is feeling downcast and unsure of his identity. He can easily be characterized as lost when he refers to himself as his "shattered self." He finds motivation and a new light observing the sloths and uses them as personal therapists to "soothe" his troubled soul. Pi can also be characterized as a misguided man without a sense of direction. Readers can easily tell that Pi finds encouragement through the sloths through his studies.

Secondly, Pi is considered patient and calming. Maktel uses a parallel characterization towards the sloth and the narrator. The author uses a differing character as a sloth. Even with the lethargically moving creature, Pi finds interest in the inactive animal. He refers to the animal as "God," substituting it as an animal with a hidden wisdom. He speaks of an infamously slow animal in the perspective of a holy being in comparison to his shattered self. Maktel adds patience into his character, making him give a second impression of a man seeking inspiration in the most unlikely places. Physically, he is devoted and observant to his test subject, even adding additional commentaries on the slow beast. Dealing with anything slow in a matter would surely take the patience of a god to deal with.

Lastly, Maktel characterizes Pi to have a passionate jealousy towards the sloth. Readers can assume by the perspective in which Pi personalizes a sloth. While the sloth is infamous for its lazy behavior and slow logic, Pi judges the animal as a beast filled with infinite wisdom. He compares the irrational ratio between his life and the simple life of a sloth, taking envy towards the idolized creature. He envies the sloth's simple and unwary outlook towards life. Pi also notes that

→ the sloth is a "... beautiful example of the miracle of life." through his optimistic notes and the Pi's opinion towards the sloth, one can assume that he is ~~comparing~~ balancing the sloth's life to be greater in percentage than his. through the passage, Martel delivers a note that expresses Pi's passionate jealousy towards the lazy animal; the sloth.

Martel characterizes Pi on his perspective towards the sloths. He uses a diversity of tools ranging from comparison to directly giving access to the character's internal feelings. Martel organizes Pi through revealing internal feelings, exposing one thought after another. "... to soothe my shattered self" is an example of how Martel had revealed one trait about Pi in the open like a snatched test answer. Also, he had hidden multiple personalities around the passage, hiding and sneaking them underneath his opinions. Pi's opinions on the lazy animal gives an impression of how he feels about his own life in comparison to the sloth's.

In conclusion, Martel had used parallel structure to define and expose Pi's personality. using the sloth, Martel gave readers a chance to decipher Pi's emotions through his opinions. ~~comparing two lives consider which he finds much more acceptable.~~ through the sloth, readers explore more about the animal along with Pi's individual personality that falls along with it. even though the perspective is clearly forwarded towards the observation of the sloths, they also plot Pi's personality along the entries. with Pi's optimistic judgement, readers have now coded out his personality and even shifted the sloth in a brighter spotlight.

"Life of Pi" by Yann Martel, uses the story of Pi's research of the three-toed sloth to explain what Pi does not desire to become. He uses symbolism in this story to effectively depict his reason for relating the story to Pi. Pi's experience gave him further insight on the world.

In the first paragraph, ~~Pi~~ he explains how his study of the sloth soothed him and his "shattered self". He relates the sloth to himself because later he says "It crawls... at the rate of 250 metres an hour, when motivated... Unmotivated, it covers four to five metres an hour." The author uses symbolism by relating Pi to an unmotivated sloth. By doing nothing, Pi would have gone nowhere. However, he stayed motivated even after what happened to him, and so he got somewhere in his life. He realized he was not alone in the world when he observed the sloths. Later, he talks about how he put bright red plastic dishes on the sloths' heads after they fell asleep. Bright red often symbolizes an emergency or something urgent. The plates ~~represent~~ were swarming with insects the next morning. This represents more problems approaching as ~~the~~ you sit and do nothing. Instead of dwelling on the tragic incident that occurred, Pi strived to get somewhere in his life. He made a new start for himself instead of worrying and mourning.

~~Furthermore~~ Later, he states, "They - are said to be able to sniff and avoid decayed branches, but Bullock reported that sloths fall to the ground clinging to decayed branches..." ~~Pi~~ This shows Pi's current life situation. ~~He~~ If he clinged on to the tragedy that struck him, he would soon fall; the author effectively portrays this throughout the story. Furthermore, he discusses how being slow is the only reason it survives. Pi discovered a new purpose in life unlike the sloths who are lazy and calm. Also, another survival technique they used was hiding.

This relates to Pi because he did not hide from the truth, but he accepted his situation and moved on. ~~Pi~~ In the concluding paragraph, Pi explains how his fellow colleagues are confused and do not know their purpose in life. ~~However, Pi finally~~ ~~is~~ Pi finally understands his purpose in life and has turned to religion and studies. He refers to the sloth as a miracle because even though it is a lazy, unuseful creature, God still takes care of it and lets it survive. This is like what happened to Pi.

"Wise beings whose intense imaginative lives were beyond the reach of my scientific probing." ~~Pi~~ This illustrates the reason Pi has turned to religion, and his understanding of the world.

Pi is described by the story effectively and it is used carefully to explain exactly what he went through. "How does it survive you might ask."

People in the world go through struggles. No one is exception and we often face same struggles we went through again. The novel Life of Pi by Yann Martel is one of literature work that shows how the character go through struggles. The character named Pi was used by author, Martel, in order to show that there were few ways to go through struggles. ~~The~~ For Pi, he studied and believed his religion stronger ~~than~~ in order to face ~~struggles~~ the pain of losing families. The character Pi clearly showed that people can face struggles by studying, stronger religion, and time of healing.

The author of Life of Pi, Martel strongly emphasizes that Pi is passionate about his religion. His practice of religion was one of his ways to go through struggles. Pi always has a strong belief that comes out from his religion practice. In the last paragraph of the story, Pi says, "And the three-toed sloth, such a beautiful example of the miracle of life, reminded me of God." This phrase shows that he is thankful for his life. Despite the fact that he is facing struggles, he is still thinking and trying to understand more of his belief, God. God meant a lot to him since his belief, God, was one of the supports that kept him from giving up.

The ~~passage that~~ portion of passage of Life of Pi talks so much about ~~sloth~~ sloths that readers may even think it might be about animals. Martel clearly tells readers that sloths mean something else than just a subject that Pi studied. For Pi, he chose three-toed sloth as

a subject for his study because of its calm, quiet, and introspective personality. I believe that his study ~~was~~ was not only to get an A on his University of Toronto. His intention was to learn from other people, or three-toed sloth. Pi has learned that three-toed sloth seems like having a boring life. However, Pi started to respect and think deeply about three-toed sloth because this creature had its own lifestyle and Pi felt that he should learn from it.

Pi studied and believed strongly in order to go through his struggles. From both studies, Pi learned that true meaning or valuable lessons are obtained after slow progression. Pi was fortunate enough to study both three-toed sloth and God in order to obtain the true lesson. ~~He real~~ Just like sloth ~~lives~~ ^a lives ~~is~~ a good life even though it ~~has~~ seems like having a bad lifestyle, a slow progression is ~~what~~ sometimes what is needed to earn the lesson of going through struggles.

There is two main types of sloth but they ^{are} calm, quiet and introspective. Not only that, they are highly intriguing creatures. There are two-toed sloths and three-toed sloth. The number of toes are determined by their forepaws. Because they soothe Martel, he chose sloth as his number one target for his investigation and research. He described sloths as God.

Sloth's habits are sleeping or resting. They sleeps or rests for about turently hours a day. Their busiest time in a whole day is at sunset. Although, they are busy, they don't do anything special. Martel tested on sloth's habits figured out their speed. They can only move 400 metres an hour when they are upside-down position and 250 metres ^{an hour} when they are crawling to next tree. When they are ~~motivated~~ motivated, they ~~move~~ move a little faster than not motivated.

World doesn't know much about sloths. When he researched, their sense of ~~taste~~ taste, touch, and smell are great. Although, they don't have good eyesight, they can smell things that are hard to smell. Although, they are known to ~~shiff~~ shiff and avoid decayed branches, they ~~often fall off the branches~~ often fall clinging to decayed branches often. Because they can smell but can't see, when you go closer, they look sleeply around them but at you.

Their sleepiness and slothfulness kept them out of harms. Not only that, but also ~~they can~~ their hairs turn brown ~~when~~ during dry season ~~at~~ and green

during the wet season. They simply blend into
to surroundings and look part of the nature.
Their ability kept away from the eyes of the
predators. ^{them}

He came back from his ~~research~~ research. Wherever
he see his religious-studies students, they remind
him of three-toed sloths, beautiful as God. Three
toed sloths, ^{who} lives a peaceful, vegetarian life among
with ~~environment~~ environment. They have a peaceful,
good-natured smile forever on their face.

Hi, my name is Pi, I attend the University of Toronto. I have a double major in religious studies and zoology. I study the function of the thyroid gland of the three-toed sloth. The sloth is a calm, quiet and introspective. There are two kinds of toed sloth, two-toed sloth and three-toed sloths. All sloths have ~~three~~ three claws on there hind paws. One summer studying the three-toed sloth in situ in the jungles of Brazil. The sloth sleeps for about twenty hours a day. The sloths fall asleep early in the ~~morning~~ ^{evening} and still there next sunset.

The sloths are awake around sunset. They go around and when they go up and down trees, they go about 400 metres an hour. When crawling ~~on~~ the ground, the speed is around 250 metres an hour when motivated. If the sloth is not motivated at all then it travels at a speed of four or ~~five~~ five metres in an hour.

The sloth has very bad senses. If you were next to a sleeping sloth, you will have to touch it a couple time before it wakes up. The sloth will appear sleepy except when it is facing you. When the sloth looks around, it has a Margo-like blur. The Sloth have a better sense of smelling than seeing. The sloth sniff to avoid branches and other dangers. If you were to shoot gun fires next to a sloth, the sloth would not ~~be~~ affect it. Sloth often falls of there branches and hitting the floor.

It survives because the sloth is so slow and so sleepy, that it is out of harms way. ~~Other~~ Other animals are ~~easy~~ easier to notice like: jaguars, ocelot, harpy

~~and~~ eagles, and ~~around~~ anacondas. The sloth's hair is ~~brown~~ brown during the dry season and green during the wet seasons. ~~So~~ so the sloth can blend in and not be bothered. The three-toed sloth ~~is~~ is vegetarian and lives in its perfect environment. A reporter ~~said~~ said that it has a smile on its face. The sloths are so beautiful and so peaceful animals that reminds of miracle of life. ~~around~~

~~There~~ There are many kinds of sloth, two-toed sloth and ~~the~~ three-toed sloth. They are very slow animals, but peaceful too. They are not dangerous and they are out of harm. They change color ~~and~~ during different seasons from brown to green. They can climb trees and they fall on the ground from branches. ~~These~~ These animals are very unique and they very slow.