

Michigan Merit Exam (MME) Social Studies Persuasive Essay Annotated Scoring Guide February 2007

Overall Purpose of Michigan Merit Exam (MME) Persuasive Civic Writing Essay

An important skill of responsible citizens is to effectively communicate ideas about policy issues, whether it is to a newspaper editor or a political leader. The Persuasive Civic Writing portion of the MME is intended to evaluate the ability of students to communicate their ideas about policy issues. The MME essay measures students' social studies skills by having them express their views on an issue of public policy.

Purpose of this Annotated Scoring Guide

This Guide is targeted for Michigan teachers, as a means to assist their students in writing effective persuasive civic essays. The Guide contains examples of student essays and explains how those essays would be scored.

MME Persuasive Essay Scoring

MME essays are scored by an outside contractor, according to a standard rubric (see below and page 3). Each essay is independently read by two scorers for Social Studies (and two for English Language Arts, see below). In order to ensure reliability and validity in the scoring process, standards are first set internally by the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) of the Michigan Department of Education. This is called "Range Finding." A committee of Michigan social studies educators serve as "Range Finders" in order to determine criteria for acceptable versus unacceptable responses.¹ As each MME essay has unique characteristics, Range Finding committees establish specific scoring rules for each item, consistent within the established guidelines. The MME is a large scale, on demand assessment that evaluates all students in the state, as opposed to classroom assessments. In the interest of fairness for all Michigan students, therefore, Range Finders determine the *absolute minimum* that will be accepted as demonstrating a required skill.

The Five MME Social Studies Rubric Categories

1. **Position:** Clear and supported statement of position;
2. **CDV:** Supporting information using **a core democratic value** of American constitutional democracy;
3. **Prior Knowledge:** Supporting knowledge from history, geography, civics and government, or economics;
4. **Refutation:** A reasonable argument someone with the opposite point of view could use and an explanation that reveals the flaw in his/her argument;
5. **Data:** Supporting information from the Data Section.

¹ For those interested in participating in the Range Finding process, please contact Ruth Isaia at isaiar@michigan.gov

The MME essay is worth 22 points: 10 points for Social Studies and 12 points for English Language Arts. The essay will be scored 4 times as reflected in the chart below.

	Social Studies	English
Scorer #1	5 point rubric	6 point rubric
Scorer #2	5 point rubric	6 point rubric
Total Possible	10 points	12 points

11th Grade

**Scoring of Civic Writing:
MME Social Studies Rubric Effective Spring 2007**

Points	Description
5	<p>The supporting prior knowledge, data, and core democratic value used by students must be explained in enough detail to show a clear connection to the position taken in order to receive credit.</p> <p>In order to receive a 5-point score, the response must:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Give a clearly stated position on the issue and support their position. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Do not accept those who do not take a stand, who say someone else (parents, school, or government) should decide 2. Provide at least one supporting point that is based on core democratic values of American constitutional democracy that is explained in enough detail to show a clear connection to the position taken. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Do not accept if this support contradicts stated position 3. Provide one (or more) piece(s) of accurate, valid, and relevant supporting social studies information that comes from the student’s prior knowledge (information other than that supplied by the Data Section or a Core Democratic Value) that is explained in enough detail to show a clear connection to the position taken. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Do not accept feelings or opinions. Support must be factual – Do not accept if this support contradicts stated position 4. Provide one reason that acknowledges an argument from the opposing viewpoint and refutes that argument. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Do not accept merely an acknowledgment that opposing viewpoints exist 5. Provide one (or more) piece(s) of accurate, valid, and relevant supporting information from the Data Section that is explained in enough detail to show a clear connection to the position taken. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Do not accept if this support contradicts stated position
4	<p>In order to receive a 4-point score, the response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • give a clearly stated position on the issue with support for their position, and • contain at least 3 of the remaining 4 elements listed above.
3	<p>In order to receive a 3-point score, the response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • give a clearly stated and supported position on the issue, and • contain at least 2 of the remaining 4 elements
2	<p>In order to receive a 2-point score, the response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • give a clearly stated and supported position on the issue, and • contain at least 1 of the remaining 4 elements.
1	<p>In order to receive a 1-point score, the response must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • give a clearly stated and supported position on the issue
0	<p>Response shows no evidence of a clear position or the position is not supported in any way.</p>

Prompt: Should the U.S. Constitution be amended to allow Congress to overturn Supreme Court decisions?²

Position (Thesis)	
Explanation of Required Characteristics	<i>Student Example with Commentary</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must clearly state <i>and</i> support a position <i>to receive any points</i>. • An essay that begins with one position, and then changes/contradicts that position without resolution will receive a zero. • Refusing to take a position will also receive a zero. • A clearly stated position must be supported. Essays that clearly state a position but <i>fail to support it will receive a zero</i>. • Personal opinion <i>is</i> acceptable for support of position. 	<p>Acceptable <i>“I believe that the Constitution should not be amended to allow Congress to overturn Supreme Court decisions. The President calls for the Supreme Court to help him with decision making, so the Congress should not be able to overturn the Supreme Court’s rights.”</i></p> <p>Unacceptable <i>“This is too hard to decide. We should let the President decide.”</i> No “pro” or “con” position is taken, therefore no point is earned.</p> <p><i>“Yes, I do think that we should allow Congress to overturn Supreme Court decisions.” [1-sentence essay].</i> While this essay clearly states a position, it does not support that position.</p>

² See 2001 Released Items for this Prompt and sample student papers: www.mi.gov/meap.

Relevant Issues that Affect how ‘Position’ is Scored

A Clear Slip of the Pen

A student who has written an organized and supported position may mistakenly add or skip a word that then changes his/her position completely. Scorers attribute this error to “test pressure/test anxiety” and ignore the mistake. This type of error is called “a clear slip of the pen.” Acceptance of this type of error is given if the paper *in its entirety clearly supports a single viewpoint.*

Example: *I believe that allowing Congress to overrule a case is an excellent idea. ... They’re just like the court backup. The Congress is just going to do what is right for the public or common good, and there needs to be a separation of power. Congress is here for the USA benefits, so they’re not going to do anything too stupid. I believe we should trust our court.* [end of essay] As written, this essay contradicts itself. However, the Range Finders’ judgment is that the student intended the last word to be “Congress,” and not “court.” Therefore, there is no contradiction.

Modified position

Occasionally students will modify the question, e.g.: “*I think that the President should be able to overturn a Supreme Court’s decision.*” The prompt, however, asks whether *Congress* should be able to overturn the Supreme Court, not whether the *President* should be able to overturn the Supreme Court.

For a modified position to receive a “position” point, there must be data in the Data section to support the position.

Core Democratic Value (CDV)

In order to earn a point, the CDV must be explained in enough detail to show a clear connection to the position taken. The following is provided to clarify how certain CDVs are scored.

CDV	Requirements
<p>The Common Good must include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A description of <i>who</i> benefits • An acknowledgment of <i>who</i> is negatively affected (or what is being given up/sacrificed for the good of all) • The sacrifice must be <i>explicitly</i> expressed 	<p>Common Good is defined as good for society as a whole. The 11th grade definition of “society” should be national in scope. It needs to be more than just “<i>everyone I know.</i>”</p> <p>The Common Good must benefit a group of people but must also recognize <i>that not everyone benefits</i>. There must be acknowledgment that someone is going to pay a price for the benefit of others.</p> <p>Scorers pay attention to the difference between rights held by <i>individuals and those held by groups</i>, e.g., the common good is applied to the whole citizenry, not a single individual.</p> <p>For Example: “The Common Good will help most people by doing _____, but some people will have to give up/sacrifice _____.”</p> <p>Common Good can be seen as a cost/benefit analysis.</p> <p>Acceptable If the question asked, “Should the state build a highway through that undeveloped land?”, an acceptable answer would be “<i>It is for the Common Good of the community that a highway is built, but the state should make sure that the displaced property owners are fairly compensated for their loss.</i>”</p> <p>Unacceptable “<i>It is for the Common Good of the community that a highway is built. Commuters would benefit because they could get to work more quickly.</i>” This doesn’t state who is negatively affected, or what is being sacrificed.</p>
<p>Individual Rights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speech • Assembly • Liberty • Religion • Petition • Press, etc. 	<p>“Individual rights” is a collective term. The “right” must be identified, explained, or an example of that right must be given.</p> <p>Acceptable “<i>People have individual rights, and the government should respect them. We all should be able to say what we want, as long as we aren’t lying about it or trying to tell people to hurt someone.</i>” The “individual right” is correctly applied in this situation, even though it is not explicitly identified as free speech.</p> <p>Unacceptable “<i>This violates my Individual Rights. [end of argument]</i>” There needs to be an example or explanation of <i>which right(s)</i> are relevant.</p>

<p>Pursuit of Happiness applies only to activities that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> do not infringe on the rights of others are legal are not dangerous to the public health and/or safety of the nation 	<p>The government should not unduly interfere with a citizen’s right to seek happiness in his/her own way. It is not the responsibility of the government to provide happiness for its citizens.</p> <p>Acceptable <i>“If the Supreme Court ruled that students could not skateboard on federal property, then I would be in favor of Congress’ ability to overturn this Supreme Court decision because it would increase my Pursuit of Happiness as a skateboarder, and it doesn’t hurt anyone else.”</i></p> <p>Unacceptable Arguments that state, <i>“It is the government’s responsibility to make the citizens happy,”</i> do not earn the CDV point for Pursuit of Happiness.</p>
<p>Life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is the prime responsibility of the government to protect the lives and safety of its citizens Acknowledged exceptions include serving in the military, and federal capital punishment 	<p>The CDV of Life is appropriately used when the lives of the citizens are at stake. <i>Quality of life</i> is not the same as the CDV of “Life.” Scorers look for concepts relating to: <i>“fatality, fatal, death”</i> to award a point for this CDV.</p> <p>Acceptable <i>“I encourage laws requiring the mandatory use of bicycle helmets because it will promote the CDV of Life by decreasing fatalities.”</i></p> <p>Unacceptable <i>“I support this proposal because it would make life better.”</i> is not an acceptable use of the CDV of Life.</p>
<p>Popular Sovereignty is related to voters.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Popular Sovereignty arguments must be supported by the data or prompt “Majority rule” is acceptable as an example if/when reflected in the data section 	<p>Acceptable <i>“Popular Sovereignty is shown when Michigan voters elect Congressional delegates who support the Separation of Powers.”</i></p> <p>Unacceptable <i>“Everyone I know agrees that the Supreme Court shouldn’t have that much power.”</i> This example does not show an understanding of this CDV.</p>

<p>Equality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• It is important to emphasize equality of opportunity, not equality of results or outcome	<p>If the question asked, “Should Congress adjust the minimum wage to match the inflation rate?”</p> <p>Acceptable “<i>Congress should be able to guarantee that poor people have the ability to earn a decent income if they make the effort to do so.</i>” The key word is “ability,” which shows the student understands that the result depends on the individual.</p> <p>Unacceptable “<i>Congress should guarantee that everyone has the same income.</i>”</p>
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Relevant Issues that Affect how ‘CDV’ is Scored

Students are asked to apply a CDV in their responses so as to enhance their understanding and appreciation for democratic values that are the basis of American public life. Social studies teachers are more concerned with students’ ability to explain and apply CDVs than in their ability to memorize names and definitions. The guidelines below reflect that philosophy.

Mislabeled CDV	A mislabeled CDV can earn a point if <i>all</i> of the following criterion are met <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The incorrect CDV is close or similar to the correct CDV: “Justice” for “Equality” is acceptable. “Common Good” for “Civilian Control of the Military” is not acceptable• The essay provides a clear definition/explanation of the (mislabeled) CDV• The mislabeled CDV is correctly applied to the essay’s position
Unnamed CDV	An essay can earn the CDV <i>point even if it does not name the specific CDV</i> , as long as it <ul style="list-style-type: none">• provides a clear definition/explanation of a (specific, unnamed) CDV• applies that CDV to the issue/question
Vagueness or “Name Dropping”	An essay will <i>not</i> earn a CDV point if the explanation of that CDV is grossly inaccurate, very vague, or just mentioned without any explanation or connection to the position.
CDV & Prior Knowledge	CDV and Prior Knowledge cannot be used for the same point (a “double-dip”). For example, “ <i>The reason Congress should not be allowed to overturn Supreme Court decisions is to maintain the separation of powers guaranteed by the Constitution,</i> ” would earn a CDV point but would <i>not</i> simultaneously earn a Prior Knowledge point.

Relevant Issues that Affect how ‘Data’ is Scored

<p>Preponderance of Appropriate and Relevant Data</p>	<p>When using multiple sources of data to support their arguments, students may include a piece of data that does not support their position, or is an inaccurate interpretation. Scorers use the “preponderance of appropriate data” rule: To earn a data point the citations of “good data” must outweigh the use of “bad data.” “Bad data” is defined as data that supports the opposing argument/point of view, or is an inaccurate interpretation of the data set(s).</p> <p>Preponderance of appropriate data rule: One good use of data, (+1) and one bad use (-1) = no credit for data (+1 -1 = 0); whereas two good, one bad is acceptable for awarding data point. Thus, if students misuse one data fact, they must correctly use 2 other data facts to earn the rubric point.</p>
<p>Appropriate Data</p>	<p>Occasionally students will use a piece of data that appears to contradict their position, but through explanation actually works. (e.g.: “... <i>the data shows that 3% of the students used drugs. I have zero tolerance for drugs. I think that 3% is too much drug use on school grounds. We should spend as much money as it takes to make it 0%. Our children are that important!</i>”)</p> <p>References to data not in the data sets provided do not add to or subtract from the score.</p>
<p>Relevance (“Data Dumps”)</p>	<p>“Use of Data” is a skill that requires students to interpret and select data, not just regurgitate it. Students should select only the data relevant to their position and use it to support their position. Random “data dumps,” where data is just thrown in without interpretation, earn no points: e.g.: “<i>You can see from the table that 42% say no and 58% say yes to question one, and on question two 15% say yes and 85% say no, and on question three 35% of the people say yes and 65% say no.</i>”</p>

Prior Knowledge	
Explanation of Required Characteristics	<i>Example with Commentary</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Current Events” can be used, but it should usually be of national importance; if a local event is used, the larger issue that the local example reflects must be identified. • May not be a strictly personal experience or “common knowledge.” <p>Prior Knowledge MUST be a fact that is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accurate • Relevant • Verifiable • Specific to subject (except current events) <p>Prior Knowledge CANNOT be</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal opinion or personal experience • a CDV • Data from data section • Contradictory to the Position 	<p>Prior Knowledge can reference the domains of history, civics, geography, or economics (the major strands of the Michigan social studies curriculum). Current events are acceptable, but only if it meets the criteria delineated below. In addition, specific references (e.g. to the amendment process, to Supreme Court decisions, to specific years) are helpful.</p> <p>Acceptable <i>“If Congress had the ability to overturn Supreme Court decisions, they might overturn the Brown vs. Board of the Education that guaranteed desegregated schools.”</i> The general rule is, ‘If it made the national news or is a common example in most textbooks, then it’s an acceptable example of Prior Knowledge.’</p> <p>Unacceptable <i>“My friend told me that ... [end of argument]”</i> Current events must be factual, not personal opinion or experience.</p> <p><i>“I learned in my history class that teenagers spend too much time playing video games ...”</i> This is common knowledge, and therefore too general to earn Prior Knowledge credit.</p> <p><i>“I think the United States Congress should propose an amendment allowing the U.S. Constitution to be rewritten without gender identifications. Equality, a core democratic value protected by the Constitution, supports my argument.”</i> This statement would earn the CDV point, but not the Prior Knowledge point. Essays will not earn points for Prior Knowledge when citing the Constitution, Bill of Rights or Declaration of Independence as the source of the CDV.</p>

Opposing Argument / Refutation of Opposing Argument	
Explanation of Required Characteristics	<i>Example with Commentary</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summation of Opposing Position • Reason why opposing position is “flawed” 	<p>Acceptable <i>“While I think Congress should be able to overturn Supreme Court decisions, someone might disagree because it would threaten the separation of powers. This argument is flawed because the branches are too separated. It would be good for the Supreme Court to feel the pressure of public opinion more frequently.”</i></p> <p>Unacceptable <i>“The general public may differ with me, but I don’t want anything to happen like what has happened during the course of our history.”</i> This is too vague to receive the Opposing Argument point: e.g., what “things” have happened that this student doesn’t want to happen again?</p>

If you have questions or comments, please contact Ruth Isaia at: isaiar@mi.gov, or call 517-335-0477.