

Miami-Dade County Public Schools  
Department of Secondary English Language Arts

**DISTRICT WRITING PRE-TEST  
ASSESSMENT**

**SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL  
10<sup>TH</sup> GRADE  
ARGUMENTATIVE PROMPT**

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**TEACHER:** \_\_\_\_\_ **PER:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Read the “Are Video Games a Sport?” Passage Set

**Source 1: What Makes a Sport a Sport?**

By Neel Burton

- 1 Wittgenstein<sup>1</sup> famously claimed that games could not be defined. But in 1978, Bernard Suits<sup>2</sup> more or less successfully defined a game as ‘a voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles’.
- 2 In that much, sports resemble games. They also resemble games in that they take place outside of ‘real life’, and in that they have no tangible product: when they do have a tangible product, such as fish in angling, then this is largely incidental.
- 3 There are games like scrabble or monopoly that are clearly not sports. But are all sports games? While many sports like football and golf are also games, some sports like running, skiing, and rock climbing are not so obviously games other than in that they are voluntary and unnecessary. In ordinary language, we speak of ‘playing football’ or ‘playing a round of golf’, but not of ‘playing running’ or ‘playing skiing’. But if we are running from a lion, our running is neither a game nor a sport.
- 4 What is it that makes a sport a sport? If scrabble and monopoly are not sports, then this is surely because they do not involve any physical activity, or because any physical activity incurred is merely secondary or incidental.
- 5 But physical activity on its own is not enough. The primary purpose of working out on a cross-trainer is physical activity, but this is classed as exercise rather than sport. What is needed for sport is not physical activity per se, but skill in the exercise of physical activity, with some athletes going so far as to test the limits of human performance.
- 6 In 2005, Sport England recognized darts as a sport, presumably because darts involves skill as well as physical activity. By that account, video gaming, although targeted at a representational world rather than the real world, might also make the cut. Chess on the other hand is probably not a sport because, although it involves some physical activity, this physical activity is not particularly skilled, and is not the primary purpose of chess. The physical activity associated with playing chess is merely incidental.
- 7 If I, as an amateur, decide to go skiing for a couple of days, is my skiing exercise or sport? The answer depends on my own attitude, whether I am skiing primarily to keep fit, or for the sheer thrill of pushing myself; and that this potential for thrill, for exaltation, for a certain kind of joy—rather than just panting and sweating—is an important part of what makes a sport a sport.

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<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Josef Johann Wittgenstein: Austrian philosopher

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Suits: Philosopher who wrote a book about the nature of games.

8 Well what if I meet a friend and we race each other down the mountainside? Does this competitive dimension make my skiing more of a game and therefore more of a sport? A person who develops a certain skill, whether in skiing or in baking or in any field of human endeavor, naturally wishes to measure that skill in competition with others who also lay claim to that skill. It is this competitive aspect that makes many sports so compelling to watch, although competition is by no means essential to popular spectator sports such as gymnastics and figure skating. What's more, a sport need not make compelling watching to be counted as a sport: angling, cricket, golf, canoeing, and weightlifting are probably not the most exciting to watch but are nonetheless sports.

9 As any athlete will attest, cognition is an important part of any sport: why create arbitrary distinctions between the primarily physical and the primarily mental, or between the musculoskeletal system and the specialized senses? Are the nose and the tongue and the brain not also part of the body? And are they not also trainable, fatigable, fallible, mortal? Chess, bridge, and maths have their associations, players, teams, training, rules, competitions, professionals, spectators, drama, and tears—everything, in fact, but a skilled, primary physical activity.

Excerpt from "What Makes a Sport a Sport?" by Neel Burton, from *Psychology Today*. Copyright © 2018 by Sussex Publishers.

## Source 2: What Defines A "Sport"?

By Leigh Steinberg

10 The emergence of E-Sports and ESPN's televising of Cornhole and Poker triggered a major argument in my office about what activities legitimately constitute a "sport". At a certain level there is no arbitrator or Commissioner of Sport to provide a definitive answer. Is any competition, which is on television and billed<sup>1</sup> as a sport, a sport? Does the entire body need to be involved, does it need physical exertion, does reliance on a machine to provide the locomotion disqualify it?

11 Dictionary.com defines sport as "an athletic activity requiring skill or physical prowess". It goes on to specifically mention "racing, baseball, tennis, golf, bowling, wrestling, hunting and fishing" as sports. Oxford Dictionary defines sport as "an activity involving physical exertion and skill in which an individual or a team competes against another or others for entertainment". By the latter definition, hunting does not qualify as a sport because it does not involve competition. But hunters bill themselves as "sportsmen". Does the ability to cast and reel in qualify fishing as a sport? There are televised fishing competitions.

12 What about E-Sports? It certainly claims to be a sport in its billing. It involves exertion of the brain, and there is certainly a need for fast reflexes and dexterity<sup>2</sup> in operating the controller. It is competitive and millions of people are entertained. The

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<sup>1</sup> Billed: Labeled

<sup>2</sup> Dexterity: Skill in performing tasks, especially with the hands.

players would maintain that they are as much athletes as race car drivers, because both activities involve skill and dexterity in operating a machine.

13 Is "Cornhole"<sup>1</sup> a sport? Yes, because it requires delivering a beanbag with hand-eye coordination and superior depth perception. That also applies to horseshoe, curling, darts and lawn bowling. ESPN presents poker as a sport. There is certainly significant brain power involved, but physical exertion, not very much. Shuffling and dealing does not take much physical dexterity.

14 "America Ninja Warrior" is a recently invented sport. It involves tremendous athletic skill and exertion and is competitive. Another sports event which was developed for television are Superstar-competitions. Every iteration of that concept would qualify. One of the keys to building the popularity of a sport event is the extent to which fans perceive the activity has athletic qualities which are displayed on an even field with competitors trying as hard as they can to win. This is the key to fantasy leagues and all athletic betting. Professional wrestling is scripted and choreographed. The athletic skill is certainly there, but fans would certainly not risk time or money guessing at the outcome.

Excerpt from "What Defines a Sport?" by Leigh Steinberg, from *Forbes Magazine*. Copyright © 2018 by Forbes Media LLC.

### Source 3: Sorry, nerds: Video games are not a sport

By Matthew Walther

15 As a columnist you hate to get a reputation for having anything negative to say about a large group of people. Nerd culture has given the world lots of wonderful things.

16 My biggest problem with nerd culture is that it has territorial ambitions. Two decades ago, comic books were still a fringe phenomenon; now they are the only things directors are allowed to make films about, notwithstanding mumblecore<sup>2</sup> and Oscar bait. But at sports I feel like it is necessary to draw a line and to act when my opponents cross it.

17 In 2016, the National Association of Collegiate Esports was established in order to regulate competitions between young adult gamers. Two years earlier, a private university in Illinois created the nation's first varsity gaming team and began awarding "athletic" scholarships to skilled players.

18 Video games are not a sport. A sport involves not only skill and competition but physical exertion and at least the possibility of injury. Even darts, pool and ping pong

<sup>1</sup> Cornhole: A lawn game in which players take turns throwing bags of plastic resin at a raised platform with a hole in the far end.

<sup>2</sup> Mumblecore: A subgenre of independent film characterized by naturalistic acting and dialogue, low-budget film production, an emphasis on dialogue over plot, and a focus on the personal relationships of people in their 20s and 30s

are, in the broadest sense, sports. Sitting on a couch interacting with your television set is not a sport, otherwise watching CNN with your grandfather would be one.

- 19 It's not difficult to understand why universities are getting into this business. Even for those not lucky enough to make first string on U.C. Berkeley's traveling *Overwatch*<sup>1</sup> team — which has an actual coach — there are plenty of opportunities on our nation's college campuses for people who want to pretend that there is no difference between *FIFA* and FIFA<sup>2</sup>. At Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, a mid-tier state school, it was recently announced that the administration is spending half a million dollars on "a new facility" for "multiplayer video games."
- 20 Hundreds of millions of dollars are being made streaming video games on the internet. The amount of revenue generated by advertising and sponsorships from "esports" is soon expected to reach \$1 billion annually.
- 21 Treating video games as sports is a civilizational problem. Enjoyed in moderation, they are probably a harmless pastime. But increasingly, the reality is not 10-year-olds leveling up their Pikachus or even high-school kids unwinding with a little *Goldeneye*, but adults playing games for hours every day. Gaming is not only a compulsion, but something far more sinister — what one game designer has called "a simulation of being an expert." In a country without meaningful or well-paying opportunities for work, young people disappear into their fantasies of competence in which they fly airplanes and score touchdowns and perform daring commando raids without having to go further than the refrigerator.

Adapted from "Sorry Nerds: Video Games are Not a Sport." by Matthew Walther, from *The Week*. Copyright © 2018 by The Week Publications Inc.

## Source 4: Video Games Are a Waste of Time? Not for Those With E-Sports Scholarships

By Arielle Dollinger

- 22 Behind a glass partition at the Microsoft store at the Roosevelt Field Mall on Long Island, 10 teenage boys settled into seats in a rectangular formation. Each sat behind a laptop computer, ears warmed by a bulky headset.
- 23 The room had the feel of a sporting event, and it was — a group of competitive video gamers on the Bay Shore High School e-sports team were competing in a scrimmage and playing their way toward college scholarships.
- 24 Multiplayer video games played competitively, often with spectators, are known as e-sports, and they have become a gateway to college scholarship money. Over the

<sup>1</sup> *Overwatch*: A team-based multiplayer first-person shooter game.

<sup>2</sup> *FIFA* refers to the game, while FIFA refers to the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (world cup soccer association).

past two years, the National Association of Collegiate Esports, which is engaged with 98 varsity programs across the United States and Canada, has helped facilitate \$16 million in scholarships, according to the executive director, Michael Brooks.

- 25 In higher education, e-sports live in various departments. Sometimes they are part of student affairs; some schools place them within an engineering or design program; and, more rarely, they have their place in athletics.
- 26 At Robert Morris University Illinois, e-sports is part of the athletics department. Team members have access to athletic trainers and are put through light fitness training. Players attend practice Monday through Thursday, from 4:30 to 9 p.m., with an hour break for dinner. They analyze film, participate in team-building activities, sit for communication sessions.
- 27 “The games that are competitively viable in the collegiate sphere have real depth, have deep levels of strategy, and require strategic teamwork and require real mastery to be successful — and not just by yourself, within a team environment and through using tactics,” said Kurt Melcher, who runs the program at Robert Morris.
- 28 “There’s discipline involved, there’s practice involved, there’s teamwork and collaboration involved, but also the physical aspect,” said Mark Candella, the director of strategic partnerships for the streaming platform Twitch<sup>1</sup>. “These young people can do up to 360 controlled precise actions per minute. Their fingers and hands and their eyes move so quickly in exact coordination.”
- 29 Organized competitive gaming on both the high school and university levels lives in purposeful defiance of the gamer stereotype: as Mr. Melcher said, “a kid locked in a basement, antisocial, angry, drinks 50 Mountain Dew’s and doesn’t become a valuable person in society.” In the educational sphere, game play often brings students out of basements and bedrooms.
- 30 Meanwhile, some schools offer e-sports scholarships not associated with teams or specific games. New York University awards an e-sports scholarship to one student per year who is active in the gaming community and interested in working in some part of the gaming industry.
- 31 The Silicon Valley school is offering “almost a full ride,” Ryan said, in the form of an athletics scholarship for e-sports and a leadership scholarship that would make him assistant director of the e-sports program. “The same scholarship if I was playing football or lacrosse,” he said.

Adapted from “Video Games Are a Waste of Time? Not for Those With E-Sports Scholarships.” by Arielle Dollinger, from *The New York Times*. Copyright © 2018 by The New York Times Company.

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<sup>1</sup> Twitch:

## Writing Prompt

Write an essay in which you argue whether or not video games are a sport. Your essay must be based on ideas and information that can be found in the passage set.

Manage your time carefully so that you can

- read the passages;
- plan your response;
- write your response; and
- revise and edit your response.

Be sure to

- include a claim;
- address counterclaims;
- use evidence from multiple sources; and
- avoid overly relying on one source.

Your response should be in the form of a multi-paragraph essay. Write your response in the space provided.