SAGE Writing Scoring Sample: 8th Grade
These writing scoring sample essays were produced by grade-level students. Annotations follow each essay explaining the score in reference to the rubric. The essays were written in response to the SAGE Training Test prompts, and were completed within the time recommendations in the test directions (Argument/Opinion ≈ 60 minutes; Informative/Explanatory ≈ 30 minutes). While SAGE is not a timed test, time estimates are provided as guidance for student writers.

Training Test Argument Prompt: 6-8 Grade Band

It’s no secret that sometimes great discoveries come as a result of really big mistakes. But are they always worth the problems they cause? Sometimes the mistakes lead to greatness, and sometimes they lead to disaster. Are mistakes key to making discoveries?
Write an essay in which you take a position on whether or not mistakes are a key part of discovery. Use the information presented in the passages to support your points. Make sure to include information from all the passages in your essay.

Manage your time carefully so that you can
• Plan your essay
• Write your essay
• Revise and edit your essay

Be sure to
• Include a claim
• Address counterclaims
• Use evidence from multiple sources

Do not over rely on one source.
Your written response should be in the form of a multiparagraph essay. Spend about 60 minutes on this essay, including the time you spend reading, planning, writing, revising, and editing.

See the Training Test to view the passage set associated with this prompt:

http://sageportal.org/
Thomas Edison once said that inventing was “1 percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration.” Inventing is hard work and takes a lot of preparation. Some people, from Sir Isaac Newton and Percy Spencer, seemed lucky to be inspired by mistakes: apples dropped on their heads or chocolate melted in their pockets. Mistakes seem to have led to discoveries. However, to say that mistakes like these are key in making discoveries would not be true. Real discoveries come from careful experiments and study, and those take time and work.

The text “In Praise of Careful Science” says “Most of the time, scientists work for decades and make very few mistakes.” While doing an experiment, in order to make it accurate, multiple trials should be performed to gather the correct data. Each trial isn’t a mistake. It’s simply a further study of the experiment. Many scientists have to research for months or even years on end to conduct accurate experiments. Discoveries aren’t always made in a day. John Denker, a famous scientist, once compared slow discovery to popular music. He said, “I am reminded of the rock star who said it took him 15 years to become an overnight sensation.” This rock star worked hard for a long time before he became famous. That’s the same as with discoveries in science. A lot of work makes the discovery important, not the mistake that may have led to it.

One example of a discovery that was only important because of hard work was the discovery of radium. It took Pierre and Marie Curie almost five years to study the chemical before they received their Nobel peace prize for Science in 1903. It was not a simple mistake that made the discovery mean something, but the study they did afterwards. In this case, research was key to making the discovery important.

Not all cases are as clear, though. In the 1940s, Percy Spencer, an electrical engineer in his twenties, was about to discover the beginnings one of today’s most useful kitchen appliances—the microwave. His company’s newest project was the Magnetron, a machine that uses electric and magnetic currents. One day, while testing the Magnetron, Spencer had a chocolate bar in his pocket. He stood too close to the Magnetron, and the chocolate melted. He was the first person to put together the idea of using electric and magnetic currents to cook food. However, it took twenty more years before his company made a functional microwave oven. While Percy’s mistake of having a chocolate bar in his pocket eventually led to the invention of the microwave, 20 years researching and perfecting the invention are truly to thank.

At the end of the day, to say “Without mistakes, no discoveries can be made” does not do humankind justice. Every invention or discovery ever made comes with years of work. While the ideas behind some inventions sometimes come from a mistake, the mistake is only a measly part of the process. In the words of Carl Sagan, a space scientist, “Science is a self-correcting process,” and the mistake is not as important as the corrections.
Total Essay Score: 4 – Highly Proficient

Explanation of Scoring:

Statement of Purpose/Focus and Organization: Highly Proficient

The student clearly and effectively introduces the argument that mistakes are not the key to discovery. The essay presents ideas in a logical progression, without distracting or misplaced ideas. The student maintains the focus throughout the essay and effectively communicates the purpose to the audience. The student also acknowledges and effectively argues against the counterargument. Finally, the student uses transitions to connect ideas and develops a conclusion that, while related to the introduction, is not an exact mirror of it.

Evidence/Elaboration: Proficient

The essay makes effective use of the source materials. However, the student is inconsistent in citing the sources of evidence used. All evidence is specific and directly relevant to the points it supports. The student integrates evidence from the sources well, limiting quotations to the most salient phrases or words. The student elaborates in creative, yet effective ways, and expresses ideas precisely and accurately.

Editing/Conventions: Highly Proficient

Although the writing includes a few minor errors, the student consistently applies grade-appropriate grammar and usage, demonstrating adequate command of language conventions.