



# CURRENT ISSUES & EVENTS

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## ESSAY PROMPTS 2022-2024

### THE ESSAY

**NOTE:** *Contestants who do not write an essay will be disqualified.* Essay length is not a major grading factor as long as the essay is substantial and demonstrates a sincere effort to discuss the assigned topic. Cover as many corners of the issue as practical, including historical, political, economic, social and cultural, when relevant. Avoid including your personal opinions, as more than enough information on the subject has been published.

A focused, concise and specific essay beats a vague and rambling essay.

### STATE 2024

Climate change is “the most important story, probably, on Earth,” according to Claudia Dreifus, an instructor in Columbia University’s master’s in sustainability management program, “and yet very difficult to report on.” Still, there has been plenty of news regarding climate change in the last year.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, most of Texas has warmed between one-half and one degree Fahrenheit in the past century. In the eastern two-thirds of the state, average annual rainfall is increasing, yet the soil is becoming drier. Rainstorms are becoming more intense, and floods are becoming more severe. Texas leads the nation in both the most frequent severe weather events and the most expensive weather events, accounting for 15% of all U.S. billion-dollar disasters, according to NOAA. From 1980 to 2024, Texas experienced 171 billion-dollar climate disaster events. As Houston meteorologist Daji Aswad wrote, “[Climate change] can be seen and felt across our community.”®

Discuss some impacts of climate change in 2024 on the United States generally and some on Texas specifically, including, but not limited to, impacts on the environment, economy, agriculture, energy, political system and/or society.

## **REGION 2024**

Every month, the polling service Gallup asks a random sample of people, “What do you think is the most important problem facing the country today?” In February 2024, the top five responses were

- Immigration (28%)
- The government / poor leadership (20%)
- The economy in general (12%)
- High cost of living / inflation (11%)
- Poverty / hunger / homelessness (6%)

All of these responses have become issues on the campaign trail, particularly after the Super Tuesday primaries headed into the fall election, but immigration continues to top the list.

Discuss (1) the facts surrounding immigration; (2) how the presumptive nominees at the top of the Republican and Democratic parties stand on immigration; and (3) how the legislative branch has dealt with immigration.

## **DISTRICT 2024**

On May 14, 1948, the State of Israel was created, sparking the first Arab-Israeli War. The war ended in 1949 with Israel’s victory. On Oct. 7, 2023, the Palestinian Sunni Islamist group Hamas (a U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization) led surprise attacks against Israel from the Gaza Strip by land, sea and air. The assault came on a Jewish holiday, 50 years after the Egypt-Syria surprise attack that sparked the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

The scope and lethal nature of last year’s attacks against Israel had no precedent in the 16 years Hamas has controlled Gaza, and the nature of the violence stunned Israelis.

Discuss the political and economic issues of the Israel-Hamas War on the United States since Oct. 7, 2023.

## **INVITATIONAL B 2024**

The Texas Legislature meets in regular session for no more than 140 days every other year. In 2023, however, the Texas Legislature continued meeting for the trial of the attorney general and in four special sessions by year’s end totaling almost as many days as the regular session. Discuss the actions legislators took — or didn’t take — during the third and fourth special sessions as well as the trial of the attorney general.

## **INVITATIONAL A 2024**

Technology has been all over the news this academic year. Lawsuits. Political action. Advancements. Monetary decisions. Discuss public perception and understanding of technological changes and technological advancements in the news recently from political, scientific and economic angles.

## **STATE 2023**

Public education advocates created a wish list of issues they wanted Texas legislators to prioritize. Topping that list was increasing state funding for public schools. But funding isn’t the only education-related issue on the agenda of the Texas Legislature or the U.S. Legislature. While the establishment of education is one of the powers reserved to the states, members of both the executive and legislative branches at the national level have tried to make changes in various aspects of the educational system. In addition to funding, pick two issues at the state and/or federal level that relate to K-12 education in Texas. Discuss the political, economic, social and cultural aspects of all three issues (funding and two others of your choice) in a well-organized and informative essay.

## **REGION 2023**

Russia's war against Ukraine is causing a humanitarian, social and economic crisis for the Ukrainian people. Further, this full-scale military invasion is also having an impact outside Ukraine. Discuss some of the political, economic, scientific, social and cultural consequences of the war, particularly consequences on the United States. District 2023

The Texas Legislature opened on Jan. 10 and will run for 140 days until May 29. But already, much of the agenda of the 181 members is set. Discuss some of the people leading the legislature, the issues they have on their agenda and the challenges they face.

## **DISTRICT 2023**

The Texas Legislature opened on Jan. 10 and will run for 140 days until May 29. But already, much of the agenda of the 181 members is set. Discuss some of the people leading the legislature, the issues they have on their agenda and the challenges they face.

## **INVITATIONAL B 2023**

During the last six months of 2022 and the first few months of 2023, citizens of countries all over the world saw smooth transitions in top public officials while others saw riots as new leaders took office. Pick three. Discuss the implications of the change, in personnel if not political party, on the leader's country and on the United States.

## **INVITATIONAL A 2023**

Pre-election polls had many expecting a nationwide "red wave" of Republican victories, with voters blaming President Biden and the Democrats for the economic pain brought by surging inflation. But that "red wave" didn't happen.

Discuss some specific issues leading up to the November midterm election as well as outcomes and surprises of the elections in Texas and other states.

## **STATE 2022**

The Russian war in Ukraine has proven itself to be one of the most consequential political events of our time — and one of the most confusing. In a televised speech announcing Russia's "special military operation" in Ukraine on Feb. 24, Russian President Vladimir Putin said the invasion was designed to stop a "genocide" perpetrated by "the Kyiv regime" — and ultimately to achieve "the demilitarization and de-Nazification of Ukraine." Russian rule ended in 1991 when 92% of Ukrainians voted to secede from the Soviet Union. Now it appears that Putin wants control of Ukraine back.

Discuss how members of the world community — not including the United States — have responded to the conflict.

## **REGION 2022**

As Reid Epstein said in his March 2, 2022 article in The New York Times, "For nearly a decade, the refrain from Texas Democrats has been that they are on the verge of making their state competitive, even though no Democrat has won a statewide race since 1994. [As the first primary contest of 2022, the Texas] primary results illustrated that Democrats still have a long way to go."

What does he mean? Using specific examples related to this election in Texas, the first since the Census, discuss the outcome of the primary and the factors that influenced the outcome of the primary.

## **DISTRICT 2022**

In setting foreign policy, the guiding principle is to serve the national interest. Whether it's political, economic, military or cultural, America's interest has to be considered when presidents make decisions regarding foreign policy. Ronald Reagan was seen as anti-Communist and his policies reflected that. "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall," he challenged the general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in West Berlin in 1987. George H.W. Bush dealt with Iraq. And Dwight Eisenhower effectively ended the Korean War and kept China out of Taiwan. But not all presidents are evaluated so positively when it comes to foreign policy.

If the report card on the Biden administration's foreign policy were set in stone after his first year (or so), what grade would Biden get?

Pick three issues or events related to foreign policy during Biden's term in office and support the grade by evaluating those issues or events on political, social, cultural and/or economic grounds.

## **INVITATIONAL B 2022**

As children all over the country were opening their holiday presents, parents were showing frustration at being unable to get the gifts their children wanted due to problems with the supply chain. Despite the supply chain issues, at least up through the holidays, the economy showed both signs of strength and signs of concern.

What is the supply chain (define and provide an example)? What issues was the supply chain facing and why? Along the way, discuss one sign of weakness in the U.S. economy and one sign of strength in the U.S. economy that might be impacting these supply chain problems.

## **INVITATIONAL A 2022**

The courts, from the local courts to the United States Supreme Court, have been busy so far this academic year discussing and deciding up on issues of societal importance. Pick any two cases and discuss the specifics of the case and their societal significance, how they reflect society as it exists now and how the cases might change society in the future — or not.