

Study Guide

Field 202: Academic Literacy Skills Test (ALST)

Sample Constructed-Response Items

Competency 0002
Writing to Sources

Passage A

Bob Dinneen

from "Should Congress Reassess the Renewable Fuel Standard in the Energy Independence and Security Act? Con: Renewable Fuels Association (RFA)"

Promoting the U.S. Economy and Energy Independence

1 Expansion of the domestic biofuels industry will provide significant economic benefits in terms of a larger and more robust economy, increased income, new job creation in all sectors of the economy, and enhanced tax revenues at both the Federal and State levels. Increased biofuels production and use stimulated by the RFS¹ will also enhance America's energy security by displacing imported crude oil. Specifically, expansion of the U.S. biofuels industry will:

Add more than \$1.7 trillion (2008 dollars) to the U.S. economy between 2008 and 2022.

Generate an additional \$366 billion (2008 dollars) of household income for all Americans over the next 15 years.

Support the creation of as many as 987,000 new jobs in all sectors of the economy by 2022.

Generate \$353 billion (2008 dollars) in new Federal tax receipts.

Improve America's energy security by displacing 11.2 billion barrels of crude oil over the next 15 years and reduce the outflow of dollars to foreign oil producers by \$1.1 trillion (2008 dollars).

Benefits to the Consumer

2 With the ever-increasing price of oil, ethanol is helping to give consumers some relief. Using ethanol in the U.S. transportation fuel market helps lower gasoline prices by expanding gasoline supplies and reducing the need for importing expensive, high-octane, petroleum-based gasoline components or more crude oil from unstable parts of the world.

3 Recently, ethanol has received harsh criticism for allegedly driving up the price of corn and contributing to a rise in food prices. However, the evidence does not support that conclusion. A host of reasons play a role in driving food prices higher, including, for example, record oil prices, soaring global demand for commodities from oil to grains, poor weather conditions, a collapsing dollar, and restrictive agricultural policies around the world.

4 In fact, energy prices are a large component of the retail food dollar. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service estimates direct energy and transportation costs account

for 7.5 percent of the overall average retail food dollar. "This suggests that for every 10 percent increase in energy costs, the retail food prices could increase by 0.75 percent if fully passed on to consumers." In fact, oil prices have twice the impact on rising consumer food prices than does the price of corn.

5 Ethanol production also provides highly valuable feed coproducts, keeping food production costs down. A modern dry-mill ethanol refinery produces approximately 2.8 gallons of ethanol and 17 pounds of distillers grains from one bushel of corn. The distillers grains are a protein-rich animal feed that can be supplemented by low-cost bulk foods like alfalfa, keeping the farmer's costs down.

¹**RFS:** Renewable Fuel Standard

Dinneen, Bob. "Should Congress Reassess the Renewable Fuel Standard in the Energy Independence and Security Act?" *Congressional Digest*. June 2008. Vol. 87. No. 6.

Passage B

Gawain Kripke from "Should Congress Reassess the Renewable Fuel Standard in the Energy Independence and Security Act? Pro: Oxfam America"

1 Diversion of corn to ethanol is playing a significant role in reducing corn supplies for food and feed. In 2008, the USDA estimates that 3.1 million bushels of U.S. corn will be used to produce biofuels. That's an increase of nearly 50 percent over 2.1 million bushels last year and close to twice the 1.6 million bushels of 2006. What do these figures mean? It means that in 2008 the United States will convert approximately one-quarter (23.7 percent) of our corn production into biofuels. That's an increase from 20 percent last year and 14 percent the year before. In short, we're rapidly diverting larger portions of our corn supply to fuel, leaving less for food.

2 This conversion of corn to fuel appears to be having an impact, not just in the United States, but globally. For about 1.2 billion people around the world, corn is the preferred staple cereal. Consider that the United States produces more than 40 percent of the world's corn supply. Dedicating 3.1 million bushels of corn for ethanol this year will take more than one-tenth of the global corn supply off the market for food and feed.

3 It's important to recognize that the United States is a massive exporter of corn, the largest supplier in the world. We export nearly twice as much corn as all the other exporters combined. So, reduced supply and/or higher prices in the U.S. corn market have significant implications for the rest of the world.

4 Although ethanol mandates and subsidies directly impact on corn prices, they also have cascading impacts on other agricultural commodities. This is because higher corn prices are encouraging farmers to commit more acreage and agricultural inputs to corn production. This leaves less acreage and agricultural inputs available for other crops, especially soybeans, which are often planted in alternate years with corn. As a result, production for other commodities like soybeans is lower and prices are higher.

5 Higher corn prices also lead consumers to choose other, cheaper cereals to substitute for food or feed. Over time, this increased demand increases the prices for other commodities.

6 While the current situation around corn-based ethanol raises concerns about the impact on food

prices and poor people, there are more ominous clouds on the horizon. The 2005 Energy Policy Act mandated 7.5 billion gallons of renewable fuels to be mixed into gasoline by 2012. Actual ethanol production is at least four years ahead of that schedule, with expected production of more than 7 billion gallons this year. But this is just the beginning of the planned expansion of corn ethanol.

7 The 2007 Energy Independence and Security Act mandates 36 billion gallons of biofuels by 2022. While the majority of this amount is meant to be "advanced biofuels," 15 billion gallons would be corn ethanol. This would double current corn ethanol production and implies a much larger diversion of corn from food and feed. The potential for truly disastrous shortages in food supply with accompanying price inflation is very real.

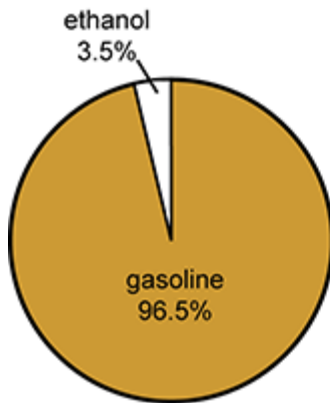
Kripke, Gawain. "Should Congress Reassess the Renewable Fuel Standard in the Energy Independence and Security Act?" *Congressional Digest*. June 2008. Vol. 87. No. 6.

Graphic

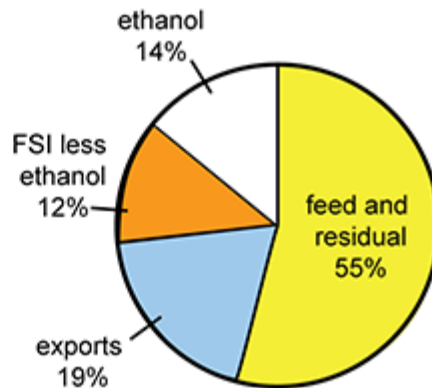
United States Department of Agriculture Ethanol's Role in Gasoline and Corn Markets

2005/2006 Relationships

Ethanol use is small relative to overall gasoline use.

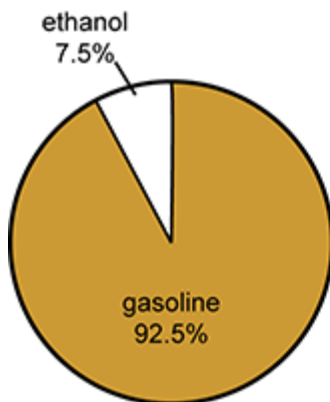


Ethanol accounts for a large and growing share of corn use.

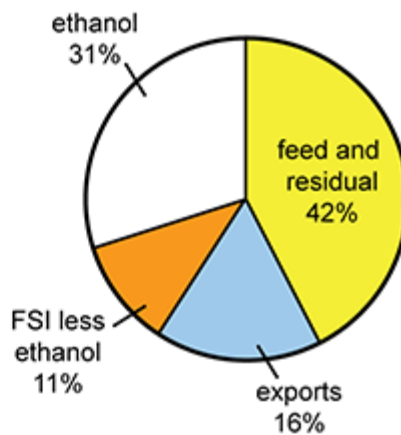


2016/2017 Relationships (projected)

Ethanol use is still small relative to overall gasoline use.



Ethanol accounts for over 30 percent of corn use.



Note: FSI = food, seed, and industrial

Westcott, P. C. (2007). *Ethanol expansion in the United States: How will the agricultural sector adjust?* (USDA Outlook No. FDS-07D01). Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Assignment 1: Use Passages A and B to respond to the following assignment.

In a response of approximately 100–200 words, identify which author presents a more compelling argument. Your response must:

- outline the specific claims made in each passage;
- evaluate the validity, relevance, and sufficiency of evidence used to support each claim; and

include examples from both passages to support your evaluation.

Your response should be written for an audience of educated adults. With the exception of appropriately identified quotations and paraphrases from the sources provided, your writing must be your own. The final version of your response should conform to the conventions of edited American English.

Sample Response to Assignment 1 (200 words)

The author of Passage A contends that increased ethanol production promotes economic growth and makes the United States more energy independent. He projects the likely effects of increased biofuels production on the economy and oil imports but does not furnish any information to support these estimates. The claim that increased ethanol production will lower fuel prices is more persuasive, but the contention that diverting corn to ethanol production will have little effect on the price of corn is not persuasive. Although the author lists other factors that influence corn prices and shows how reduced fuel prices lower production costs for corn growers, this evidence is not sufficient.

The main argument in Passage B is that increased diversion of corn to ethanol production will drive up the price of corn. The author contends that the diversion of corn to fuel has already reduced corn supplies for food and fuel with a corresponding increase in corn prices. Also, because the United States is the world's largest corn supplier, these developments are having a negative global impact. To support these claims, the author provides analysis and relevant data from authoritative government sources. Although one might question the author's fears, the argument appears sound.

Assignment 2: Use Passage B and the Graphic to respond to the following assignment.

In a response of approximately 100–200 words, explain how the information presented in the pie charts can be integrated with the author's central argument about the impact of converting corn to ethanol in Passage B. Your response must:

- explain how specific information presented in the pie charts either supports or counters the author's claims, reasoning, and evidence with regard to the conversion of corn to ethanol; and
- include examples from the passage and the pie charts to support your explanation.

Your response should be written for an audience of educated adults. With the exception of appropriately identified quotations and paraphrases from the sources provided, your writing must be your own. The final version of your response should conform to the conventions of edited American English.

Sample Response to Assignment 2 (150 words)

Information presented in the pie charts provides strong support for the argument presented in Passage B. It shows that, in 2005/2006, about one-seventh of the corn grown in the United States was already being devoted to ethanol production; it further estimates that the amount of corn diverted

to fuel will more than double by 2016/2017, at which time nearly a third of all U.S. corn will be turned into ethanol. Should this projection prove accurate, and the amount of corn devoted to food, seed, industrial, and residual purposes decline from 67% to 53% of the total crop, corn prices will, as the author argues, almost certainly rise. Although the charts show that the decline in corn exports is not likely to be as great as the author suggests in the passage, it will nevertheless have a negative impact on countries dependent on the United States for this widely consumed commodity.

Assignment 3: Use Passages A and B and the Graphic to respond to the following assignment.

Should the production of corn ethanol in the United States be expanded or reduced?

In an essay in your own words of approximately 400–600 words, present a fully developed argument that introduces and supports a claim assessing the benefits and risks of U.S. corn ethanol production. Your argument must:

- include a knowledgeable claim that demonstrates an understanding of the topic;
- use valid reasoning that draws on and extends the arguments in the sources provided;
- support your claim with relevant and sufficient evidence from all three sources; and
- anticipate and address at least one counterclaim.

Your essay should be written for an audience of educated adults. You must maintain an appropriate style and tone and use clear and precise language throughout. With the exception of appropriately identified quotations and paraphrases from the sources provided, your writing must be your own. The final version of your essay should conform to the conventions of edited American English.

Sample Response to Assignment 3 (566 words)

Devoting an ever larger percentage of our nation's corn harvest to the production of ethanol will do very little to address our long-term needs for energy security. The effects of such a decision on food prices, however, could be nothing short of disastrous.

As enthusiastic as many supporters are about the development of ethanol as a gasoline additive, the projected benefits of increased ethanol production are minimal. In 2007, the U.S. Department of Agriculture estimated that the amount of ethanol use relative to overall gasoline use would increase from its 2006 level of 3.5% to only 7.5% by 2017, despite what the study expected to be a massive diversion of corn from food to fuel production. This slight increase in ethanol use is unlikely to have a significant effect on gasoline prices. It will, however, result in a rise in the price of corn, due to increased demand.

This elevation of the price of corn would have a negative impact on consumers, who would find themselves paying more for corn. As Garwain Kripke explains in a 2008 article, however, higher prices for corn are only the beginning. Kripke points out that increases in ethanol production "have cascading impacts on other agricultural commodities" as well. With more farm acreage devoted to corn for ethanol, for example, less will be available for

other food crops. In addition, the diversion of corn to fuel production leaves less available for animal feed, raising the cost of livestock production, and, subsequently, the cost to consumers of meat.

The effect on those who depend on U.S. exports could be even more dire. Kripke notes that corn is a crucial staple food for some 1.2 billion people worldwide. Furthermore, the United States accounts for over 40 percent of global corn production. A rise in price would painfully stretch budgets of people all over the planet. Energy companies are likely to be able to pay more per bushel for corn than people who need corn simply to eat.

Proponents of increased corn ethanol production minimize the impact it would have on the cost of food. In a 2008 article, for example, Bob Dinneen acknowledges climbing food prices but argues that higher fuel prices are the primary cause. Furthermore, Dinneen predicts that production of ethanol and other biofuels will yield benefits including "a larger and more robust economy, increased income, new job creation in all sectors of the economy, and enhanced tax revenues at both the Federal and State levels."

If Dinneen's predictions are accurate, the benefits of ethanol production would outweigh any increase in the prices consumers pay for food. Because he offers no evidence to support these claims, however, they remain merely optimistic predictions. Meanwhile, food costs are climbing in the United States and abroad. The certainty of higher prices for staple foods on which people rely is not an acceptable trade-off for economic advantages that might never materialize.

Energy security is a worthy goal, especially given U.S. reliance on petroleum imports. The costs that increased ethanol production would impose on consumers, however, is unacceptably high. Instead of diverting needed food to fuel production, scientists and energy companies should focus on seeking out alternatives to petroleum and other fossil fuels for meeting the nation's energy needs. New, as yet undiscovered, energy technologies could have economic and environmental benefits far greater than those of ethanol. No such alternative technologies are available for food production.

Performance Characteristics for Extended-Response Item

The following characteristics guide the scoring of responses to the extended-response assignment.

CONTENT AND ANALYSIS	The extent to which the response conveys complex ideas and information clearly and accurately in order to support claims in an analysis of topics and sources
COMMAND OF EVIDENCE	The extent to which the response presents evidence from the provided sources to support analysis and synthesis
COHERENCE, ORGANIZATION, AND STYLE	The extent to which the response logically organizes complex ideas, concepts, and information using formal style and precise language
CONTROL OF CONVENTIONS	The extent to which the response demonstrates command of the conventions of standard written English grammar, usage, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling

Score Scale for Extended-Response Item

Scores will be assigned to the response to the extended-response item according to the following score scale.

Score Point	Score Point Description
4	The "4" response demonstrates a strong command of argumentative writing skills.
3	The "3" response demonstrates a satisfactory command of argumentative writing skills.
2	The "2" response demonstrates limited argumentative writing skills.
1	The "1" response demonstrates a lack of argumentative writing skills.
U	The response is unscorable because it is unrelated to the assigned topic or off-task, unreadable, written in a language other than English, or contains an insufficient amount of original work to score.
B	No response.

Performance Characteristics for Focused-Response Items

The following characteristics guide the scoring of responses to each focused-response assignment.

CONTENT	The extent to which the response meets the requirements of the assignment
ANALYSIS, EVALUATION, AND INTEGRATION	The extent to which the response demonstrates understanding of and engagement with the provided sources
COMMAND OF EVIDENCE	The extent to which the response presents evidence from the provided sources to support analysis and synthesis
COHERENCE AND CLARITY	The extent to which the response is focused and clear

Score Scale for Focused-Response Items

Scores will be assigned to each response to the focused-response items according to the following score scale.

Score Point	Score Point Description
4	The "4" response demonstrates a strong command of relevant skills.
3	The "3" response demonstrates a satisfactory command of relevant skills.
2	The "2" response demonstrates limited relevant skills.
1	The "1" response demonstrates a lack of relevant skills.
U	The response is unscorable because it is unrelated to the assigned topic or off-task, unreadable, written in a language other than English, or contains an insufficient amount of original work to score.
B	No response.

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