ISTEP+
Grade 8 Writing

The Face on Mars

Practice Set 1
Prompt

Directions
Read the article “Unmasking the Face on Mars.” Then answer the questions.

Unmasking the Face on Mars


New high-resolution images and 3D altimetry from NASA’s Mars Global Survey spacecraft reveal the Face on Mars for what it really is: A mesa.

1 May 24, 2001—Twenty five years ago something funny happened around Mars. NASA’s Viking 1 spacecraft was circling the planet, snapping photos of possible landing sites for its sister ship Viking 2, when it spotted the shadowy likeness of a human face. An enormous head nearly two miles from end to end seemed to be staring back at the cameras from a region of the Red Planet called Cydonia.

2 There must have been a degree of surprise among mission controllers back at the Jet Propulsion Lab when the face appeared on their monitors. But the sensation was short lived. Scientists figured it was just another Martian mesa, common enough around Cydonia, only this one had unusual shadows that made it look like an Egyptian Pharaoh.
3 A few days later NASA unveiled the image for all to see. The caption noted a “huge rock formation . . . which resembles a human head . . . formed by shadows giving the illusion of eyes, nose, and mouth.” The authors reasoned it would be a good way to engage the public and attract attention to Mars.

4 It certainly did!

5 The “Face on Mars” has since become a pop icon. It has starred in a Hollywood film, appeared in books, magazines, radio talk shows—even haunted grocery store checkout lines for 25 years! Some people think the Face is *bona fide* evidence of life on Mars—evidence that NASA would rather hide, say conspiracy theorists. Meanwhile, defenders of the NASA budget wish there was an ancient civilization on Mars.

![A 1976 Viking 1 photograph of the Face on Mars](image)

6 Although few scientists believed the Face was an alien artifact, photographing Cydonia became a priority for NASA when Mars Global Surveyor (MGS) arrived at the Red Planet in Sept. 1997, eighteen long years after the Viking missions ended. “We felt this was important to taxpayers,” explained Jim Garvin, chief scientist for NASA’s Mars Exploration Program. “We photographed the Face as soon as we could get a good shot at it.”
7 And so on April 5, 1998, when Mars Global Surveyor flew over Cydonia for the first time, Michael Malin and his Mars Orbiter Camera (MOC) team snapped a picture ten times sharper than the original Viking photos. Thousands of anxious web surfers were waiting when the image first appeared on a JPL website, revealing . . . a natural landform. There was no alien monument after all.

8 But not everyone was satisfied. The Face on Mars is located at 41 degrees north martian latitude where it was winter in April ’98—a cloudy time of year on the Red Planet. The camera on board MGS had to peer through wispy clouds to see the Face. Perhaps, said skeptics, alien markings were hidden by haze.

9 Mission controllers prepared to look again. “It’s not easy to target Cydonia,” says Garvin. “In fact, it’s hard work.” Mars Global Surveyor is a mapping spacecraft that normally looks straight down and scans the planet like a fax machine in narrow 2.5 km-wide strips. “We just don’t pass over the Face very often,” he noted.

10 Nevertheless, on April 8, 2001—a cloudless summer day in Cydonia—Mars Global Surveyor drew close enough for a second look. “We had to roll the spacecraft 25 degrees to center the Face in the field of view,” said Garvin. “Malin’s team captured an extraordinary photo using the camera’s absolute maximum resolution.” Each pixel in the 2001 image spans 1.56 meters, compared to 43 meters per pixel in the best 1976 Viking photo.

11 “As a rule of thumb, you can discern things in a digital image 3 times bigger than the pixel size,” he added. “So, if there were objects in this picture like airplanes on the ground or Egyptian-style pyramids or even small shacks, you could see what they were!”

12 What the picture actually shows is the Martian equivalent of a butte or mesa—landforms common around the American West. “It reminds me most of Middle Butte in the Snake River Plain of Idaho,” says Garvin. “That’s a lava dome that takes the form of an isolated mesa about the same height as the Face on Mars.”
You have read the article “Unmasking the Face on Mars.” Imagine you are a scientist at NASA discussing the Face with someone who thinks it was created by aliens. Using information in the article, write an argumentative essay to convince someone that the Face is just a natural landform.

Be sure to include

- claims to support your argument that the Face is a natural landform
- evidence from the article to support your claims
- an introduction, a body, and a conclusion to your argumentative essay
"3...2...1... Ready for take off." These are the things I hear constantly where I work! I work at NASA which if you don’t already know is a U.S. Space agency which is also known as National Aeronautics Space Administration. I am a Scientist at NASA my partner’s name is Addison, we have gotten pictures from our Mars Orbiter Camera (MOC) of something that looks rather extraordinary... a face! Although we think it appeared in very different ways. I think it’s just something that formed like a natural landform while my partner Addison believes it was created by aliens! But I strongly believe it’s just a natural land form.

It’s a natural landform these kind of things are discovered all over the world! But Addison insists it’s an alien creation which some other individuals may agree with her. But if you think about it something like this happened in the Snake River Plain of Idaho! That’s where a lava dome takes form of an isolated mesa about the same heights as the Face found on Mars. But that’s lava not aliens. Still not convinced? Let’s dig a little deeper!!

The Face. It’s been talked about everywhere, a pop icon. From Hollywood films, magazines, books, even radio talk shows! Is everything in magazines always true? No! Some may argue that the things in magazines and movies are always true, but we all know that’s not true. Things are over exaggerated, rumors are started, people are blamed for thing that they didn’t do. Now think about it. Now you have two reasons why to believe that this landform found on the planet Mars is NOT Alien made! It’s just a land made thing! But if your still not persuaded I’ve got more reasons for you to believe me!
April 5, 1998. Michael Malin proved that a picture taken in 1976 was not an alien monument, but a natural landform! In an article called “Unmaking the Face on Mars,” is where I found this. Michael went back with a better, sharper camera, the Mars Orbiter Camera (MOC), which proved it was a natural landform. So what if the Face is gotten a better picture taken in 5-10 years with a better and sharper camera to prove it is a natural monument just like the Viking photo taken in 1976? I believe it is! Although some may argue well what if its not a landform and is an alien monument like my partner Addison believe? Well we will just cross that bridge when we get there.

So... Alien monument of a natural landform? Maybe we'll never know. But I strongly believe it is just a natural landform. We have plenty of proof. The Snake River plain in Idaho, the shadows that make it look like a face, but it was just a bad image, and even that it could be just a misunderstanding. But in conclusion IKenzie a NASA scientist believe its a natural landform. Addison still believes that its an alien monument but she's been questioning herself. I think I've got her convinced! Do I have you convinced? Maybe, maybe not. But hey we all have our differences... But I'm right on this one!!
The Mascarade on Mars

Mars is an almost completely unknown planet, just like the others of course. Mars, though has something very interesting just sitting on its surface. This very found about thing is something very simple though. The face on Mars is simply a natural landform and is similar to some we even have here on Earth, but with an interesting set up.

In the beginning, NASA's Viking 1 was just snapping photos for a possible landing site for Viking 2 when it got the first glimpses of the fact on Mars. When that first accidental picture gained some fame, Mars Global Surveyor had another photo taken and the passage says this photo caught by the Mars Orbiter Camera, was ten times sharper than the original Viking's photo. Many people were anxiously waiting for this photo. Once revealed the passage says, "when the image first appeared
on a JPL website, revealing... a natural landform. There was no alien monument after all. Even that though wasn’t good enough for some.

When the first picture was released, there was a lot of interest in it. The passage says the face was everywhere. The face appeared in Hollywood film, books, magazines, talk shows—even haunted grocery store checkout lines for 25 years. Everyone had heard about the face on Mars. Some people thought those things were bona fide evidence. It was an incredible alien monument. The passage even says, "Some people think the Face is bona fide evidence of life on Mars—evidence that NASA would rather hide, say conspiracy theorists." That’s the thing though, life on Mars is only conspiracy.

Later, NASA has another photo taken of the odd land form. Jim Garvin, chief scientist for NASA’s Mars Exploration Program, has a lot to say about this topic.
He explains how it's hard work to take a picture of Cydonia, the area where the face is. In fact it's hard work. The passage says the photo was taken using the camera's absolute maximum resolution, causing for an extraordinary photo of Mars' extraordinary natural landform. Jim Garvin even says, "So, if there were objects in this picture like airplanes on the ground or Egyptian-style pyramids or even small shacks, you could see what they were!" The picture truly shows the incredible Martian equivalent of a butte which a landform commonly found around the American West. Garvin even says, "It reminds me of Madele Butte in the Snake River Plain of Idaho."

Even with some good evidence from conspiracy theorists, all it will ever be is conspiracy. Land can form in bizarre and beautiful ways, and that's exactly what happened with the Face on Mars.
The response develops the topic with multiple, relevant details. These details are developed well, and transitions are used to assist the reader; there remains, however, a slightly disjointed quality in the logic and order in which the facts are presented. Additionally, the response falters in style and voice at times (He explains how it’s hard work to take a picture of Cydonia…in fact it’s hard work). These redundancies display a lack of sophistication and keep the paper from the higher score point.

The response contains few errors in spelling, grammar, and language usage. It represents a good command of conventions.
The Face on Mars is an extremely fascinating feature in space on Mars. There was a picture taken of it in 1998, which left many to believe an ancient civilization on Mars was possible. However, there is no shadow of a doubt that the scientists were correct in seeing the Face as it really was, a landform. Some will always believe it may mean that there is life on Mars, but it is the facts they are missing. In fact, we do not even know what the conditions were when that 1998 photo was taken. There could have been clouds and dust that made the landform look like a face. It says that the “shadows (were) giving the illusion.” Scientists knew from the start that it was all an illusion, but they still went back to prove to the public. The pictures were very high quality, especially in 2001. It states that they “captured an extraordinary photo.” The Face on Mars may be fun to believe, but it is merely an illusion.

The public should trust the scientists in knowing it was a landform to begin with. They have a specialty, specialty in astronomy. They need to be given credit for their work, as it states, “it’s not easy to target a cydonia.” In the article it states that it was “just another Martian mesa.” In fact, it was only
the shadows casted that made it look any different. Later, which a camera that was "ten times sharper than the original" they were able to view what this really was. Some may argue that if the cydonia is so rare to look at, then scientists may have the wrong location when they took the picture. However, there is a specific latitude and longitude that the scientists were able to go off of. To prove that it was just a landform, scientists went back two different times. The first on April 5, 1998. The second on May 24, 2001. Each time they knew exactly what to do, how to do it, and where to go. The scientists went back each time knowing they had to prove something, even if it was difficult. Mars was able to become more popular with the false discovery. In fact, the article states that it was "a pop icon." It was displayed in a "Hollywood film, appeared in books, magazines, radio talk shows" and more. Maybe some people were just too quick to believe what the media was telling them. They did not even consider that there were shadows on Mars tricking them. It is almost like a little child at night. They are easily afraid of all the illusions shadows can
create. Unlike everyday citizens would believe the Face was hinting to a civilization, scientists have actual proof that it was a landform. Their high-tec pictures do not lie! The picture “actually shows is the Martian equivalent of a butte or mesa.” Scientists also described it as reminding them of “Middle Butte in the Snake River Plain of Idaho.” This would mean, again, that the Face on Mars is a landform.

The Face on Mars may have been exciting and fun for people to believe in, but we know the shadows and frame were really just an illusion. However, we cannot be like small children and fail to see the facts. Scientists brought their evidence, and we know that their is actually no Face on Mars.

**Writing - 5 pts** Holistically, this is a solid performance and fully accomplishes the task by developing the topic and using multiple, relevant details in support. The student offers different points of view (a pop icon, there were shadows on Mars tricking them), with additional support. An introduction and conclusion strengthen the organization and logical progression; however, the extended flow of ideas in the body are not as effectively grouped as a more sophisticated response might contain. Conversational phrases (there is no shadow of doubt) add voice to the essay, but awkward phrasing detracts (they still went back to prove to the public [to prove what?!]).

**Language Conventions - 4 pts** The response contains a few errors (casted), but these do not impede communication, nor are they frequent enough to outweigh the control that is otherwise demonstrated.
The face on Mars is just a natural landform. Some people think the face was made by aliens, but that can't be true. There is too much evidence against it, and not enough evidence supporting it. Something very similar happened on Earth and if there was an alien civilization there, you could have seen it.

In the American West, there are landforms very similar to the face on Mars that are just natural landforms. It especially looks like the Middle Butte in the Snake River Plain of Idaho. It's a lava dome that takes the form of an isolated mesa about the same height as the face on Mars. The same thing probably happened on Mars, which is why the face is there.

Some people think that there are aliens living in an ancient civilization on Mars, and the aliens were the ones that made the face. If there was an ancient civilization on Mars, or anything like that, you would have been able to see it. It is hard work for the people at NASA to get close enough to take the picture. They got close enough to where you would have been able to see the civilization, if such a thing was actually there.

In conclusion, the face had to be naturally formed. Those are some examples why it had to be naturally formed. There is too much evidence for it and not enough evidence against it. That is why the face had to be naturally formed.
Writing - 4 pts: The response begins by laying out the argument in the introductory paragraph and develops it adequately in the subsequent two body paragraphs using information gleaned from the text, then summarizes briefly, if repetitively. This is a basic, workman-like response that addresses the task in an adequate expository style and with appropriate authority.

Language Conventions - 4 pts: While no advanced sentence patterns are attempted, the language usage in this response is good. Few errors exist, none impede communication. This is a good example of this score point.
In the article "Unmasking the Face of Mars," a landform is described as having "face-like" features. Is this just a landform or was it made by aliens? I believe that this is a landform.

The "Face on Mars," was discovered by NASA's Viking 1 spacecraft. While taking pictures of possible landing sites for its sister ship Viking 2, it spotted the odd shadowy figure of a human face. At first exciting NASA, but then making them realize it was just another Martian Mesa.

Staring in Hollywood films might have made the "Face on Mars" famous, but scientists still believe it is just a natural landform. Scientist Michael Malin also took a picture that spanned each pixel 1.56 meters and still said that the shadowy face was a natural landform.

Scientists started to compare the face with some natural landforms on Earth. Jim Garvin says "It reminds
The response remains focused on the main argument and provides adequate development of supporting ideas in an adequate academic style that cites the text. The organizational pattern includes an introduction, body, and conclusion, but the logical progression would be easier to follow with more transitions, especially between paragraphs, although an attempt to provide topic sentences aids this.

There are a few first-draft-type errors (Scientist started, showy), but they do neither distract from nor negatively impact the flow of communication. Good control of conventions throughout is rewarded with this score point.
Well I'm going to argue that the face is just a natural landform. I'm going to talk about why it is a natural landform. Personally I think it is a natural landform but everyone has their own opinion, so here we go.

Now in this paragraph I am going to tell you why it's a natural landform and why I think it is a natural landform. So the reason why it is a natural landform is because of science. The reason it is because of science is because over time the ground starts to move around but it doesn't all happen over time it can take years before you can tell it moved. The reason it moves is because everyday we walk on the ground, we dig into the ground, earthquakes, build stuff, planting trees, flowers, etc. So who's not to say that the few
times a human has been on mars
that over a few years the face
formed. Now I am going to tell you
why I think it is a natural landform.
So I think it is a natural landform
because like I said over years
stuff can form because of our
everyday performances we perform
now for my last paragraph so see
all the stuff we do every such as
walking, planting flowers etc make
stuff move over time so thats
why it is natural landform.

Writing - 3 pts
This response minimally develops the main idea by exploring
a few reasons why the face is a natural landform. While ideas do progress
in a logical order, there is little attempt at making them fluent; transitions
rudimentary. While an introduction, body, and conclusion can be
identified, they are not effectively employed. The digressive discussion of
geological movement is not based on the text and this reliance on
personal knowledge, coupled with the first person voice make this essay’s
style only somewhat effective.

Language Conventions - 3 pts
The response contains occasional errors,
but they do not obscure the meaning; there is no need to reread for
comprehension. The response includes several errors in multiple
categories. Contractions are constantly lacking apostrophes. There
are spelling (Personly), grammar, and usage (there own opinion, it
dont all happen), missing words (so thats wht it is natural landform),
as well as missing punctuation.
It is not a alien built structure because if you look at the picture it is not a face it looks like a lump on the planet. It looks like a face because of the shadows and get a closer look at the newer photos it doesn't look like an alien built structure. It does look suspicious but there is no evidence to support that alien's built that thing on mars. In the real picture the pixies are 1.56 meters compared to the 1976 4.38 meters so the pixies are smaller and have a more Hand look so you can tell it is not alien made. Plus on the other hand the lump can't change in about 30 years to look from a face to a random lump.
on the planet. You have no supporting evidence to prove it is alien built. The little lamp could be a forming volcano for all we know. I could explode we don’t really know what it is theirs my story.

The response minimally accomplishes the task by developing the topic of evolving photographic quality. This development is helped by internal transitions and a logical progression, and hindered by a redundant, almost rambling style. Holistically, this depth of development belongs at this score point; don’t let scorer bias against the poor handwriting and conventions affect your scoring.

The response demonstrates minimal control of language usage. Errors cause the reader to pause and reread portions of the text. Frequent errors in multiple categories, including basic grammar (a alien), spelling (evedance, pixles, expolde), and usage (thiers [there is], alien’s built that thing on mars) slow the flow of communication.
I'm scientist Danni. I understand you think Aliens made the face on Mars? There no proven fact that Aliens made it and when you guy took the picture you had to take it in a special way just for it to look like that it is most likely a landform every time you find something "weird" on Mars or a different planet you guys always think it's Aliens.

In Idaho in the middle of Snake River there's a butte or a mesa which is a landform there's no proven fact that there is such a thing as Alien life form anywhere on Mars or anywhere else. Until you can prove the fact that there is Alien life there it's going to stay the fact that it is a landform on Mars.

Writing - 2 pts
The response demonstrates partial development of a central theme. An argumentative tone can be discerned (Until you can prove the fact that there is Alien life there it's going to stay the fact that it is a landform on Mars), but the details provided (In Idaho in the middle of Snake River there's a butte or a mesa which is a landform) are not effectively used to support this. The student assumes the voice and role of a scientist to introduce the essay, but without frequent reference to the text, it is difficult to follow any logical progression of ideas and this possibly useful beginning is not fulfilled.

Language Conventions - 2 pts
Errors are frequent, given the brevity of the response, and include multiple run-on sentences and flexible sentence boundaries.
I think that it is a natural occurring space form. Because, the Aliens that people talk about do not exist. So it could be storm anomalies but Aliens do not exist we would have found them by now. So every one might as well gave up. But the face on mar’s is just a quinsidince

But the chance of that being the Because of ETL Slim to none like 1%. So that is one reason I think that.

The second reason meteoids can hit any where in space. the Could even not hit any where. So I think it is made primarily by a meteoids.

**Writing - 2 pts** The response partially accomplishes the task by addressing the topic in an argumentative style (But the face on mar’s is just a quinsidince). Support for this argument is tenuous and not based on the text. Although transitions exist, very little logical progression is made, with little purpose or direction demonstrated.

**Language Conventions - 2 pts** The response demonstrates minimal control of conventions. Sentence boundaries are observed, as is most capitalization. Within the brevity of the response; however, the errors in capitalization (Aliens, mar’s, ETL), grammar, and usage (the Because of, the Could even), spelling (excist, any where), as well as the frequent sentence fragments impede the flow of communication to the extent that the reader must pause and reread portions.
Why is the land form a cone the eyes and ears there shadows the holes are craters
the shape like heart is just a hill

Mind the scientist thought

it was aliens but they were wrong.
The nose was a shadow the mouth was a shadow. All IS is a big rock. He say they thought it was aliens.

they want to go with lots there but
it was not right.

**Writing - 1 pt**
The response demonstrates less-than-minimal accomplishment of the task. While some details from the text might be discernable, no main idea or argument is evident, and the writing approaches incoherency, with no progression of ideas or organization. It is difficult to distinguish a beginning or end to the flow of communication.

**Language Conventions - 1 pt**
The errors are serious, frequent, and cause the reader to struggle to construct meaning. They include spelling (wante, alies) and capitalization errors, as well as missing words.