

# Narrative Performance Task: Climbing Mount Everest

## Student Directions

Task:

Your class is studying exploration around the world throughout history. You are given three resources about exploring and climbing Mount Everest, the tallest mountain peak on Earth.

*Read the sources carefully so you can **write a story** about your own chance to climb Mount Everest. When writing your story, tell a story about something that happens as you climb the mountain.*

When writing your story, find ways to use information and details about Mount Everest and those who climbed the mountain from the sources to improve your story.

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## Sources for Performance Task:

### Source #1

This is an article about preparing to climb Mount Everest.

#### Preparing to Climb

The decision to climb Mount Everest is a big one. Not only is the climb difficult on your body, but the trip is also expensive and requires specialized equipment. There are many preparations that need to take place in the years preceding an attempt at such a climb.

#### The Training

People considering climbing Mount Everest need to train their bodies for two to three years in advance. The climbers need to be in optimal physical and mental condition. With so little oxygen available at such high altitudes, climbers need their bodies running as efficiently as possible. They need their veins and arteries in top condition so that blood can easily reach all areas of their bodies. They also need their heart and lungs as healthy as possible.

It is recommended that prospective climbers train by running seven or eight miles per day. Climbers should also work at strengthening their upper bodies. The backpacks that climbers carry can weigh 25 to 35 pounds!

Climbers need to gain weight prior to the climb. With the strenuous exercise of climbing the mountain, coupled with the harsh, cold conditions, climbers' bodies burn many calories in a day. It is estimated that climbers on Mount Everest burn around 6000 calories a day as opposed to the typical 2000 calories a day. It is important that climbers are prepared for this increase in calories burned.

People interested in climbing Mount Everest also need to prepare mentally. It is important that they spend time at high altitudes in very basic conditions in order to cope on the mountain. Climbers also need to learn to relax and be patient. Of the seven-week trek, only 21 days are actually spent climbing. The rest of the time is spent at camp resting and allowing climbers' bodies to get used to the conditions. This can be very difficult for

some people. Climbers also need to prepare themselves for some of the adverse effects that happen at high altitudes. A person's mental sharpness drops dramatically at high altitudes. Even basic math skills become very difficult or impossible near the top of the mountain.

## The Equipment

Climbing Mount Everest requires a great deal of specialized equipment. Oxygen canisters, a sack to collect ice and snow for melting, a satellite phone, a two-way radio, and some foot powder are all essential for survival.

The food that a climber carries needs to be lightweight and nonperishable. Most climbers carry boil-in-the-bag/boil-in-the-bag meals. Chocolate and cookies are also popular as they help climbers to ingest the additional calories that they need. In addition, climbers need cooking equipment.









Clothing is very important for climbers. Plastic frost-proof/frost-proof climbing boots help to protect climbers' feet from the harsh conditions. These boots need to be a perfect fit in order to avoid sore feet. Two pairs of warm, dry socks are essential. The socks worn during the day will absorb enough water to fill a juice glass. Climbers will wear the second pair of socks at night while their day socks dry.

Several fleece layers are necessary to keep climbers warm. The first layer will need to dry quickly so that it can be worn the next day. The second layer will consist of two fleece jackets and a pair of fleece pants. A down-filled/down-filled snowsuit is also necessary.

It is essential that climbers protect themselves from the sun while climbing Mount Everest. With all of the white snow, the reflection can cause severe sunburns. Climbers can be sunburned on the roof of the mouth or inside the nostrils due to the reflection, so extra precautions need to be taken. Bandanas need to be worn around the neck. A thin face mask needs to be worn to protect the face. Two fleece hats cover the head and ears to protect them from the cold and the sun. A big visor is also necessary to protect the head and face from the sun. Gloves worn inside huge, insulated mittens keep the hands warm and protected.

Climbers need specialized mountain gear. The list of necessary climbing equipment includes the following:

- Harness – used to attach climbers to ropes
- Jumar – a device climbers use with their hand to grab on to ropes
- Carabiner – a clip to connect ropes to the harness
- Ice Axe – a sharp pointy axe specifically designed for use in the ice
- Headlamp – a light attached to a climber's helmet
- Crampon – spikes that attach to a climber's boots
- Rappel Device – a special device to climb down steep areas
- Altimeter – a unique watch that measures the climber's altitude

<b>harness</b> —used to attach climbers to the rope, goes on like a pair of pants and sits on the hips	
<b>jumar</b> —a device that is held in the hand of a climber that slides up and grabs the rope as the climber goes higher	
<b>carabiner</b> —a clip through which a climbing rope can be threaded and attached to a harness or the climbing surface	
<b>ice axe</b> —an axe with a sharp point at the bottom of the handle that is used to climb on ice	
<b>headlamp</b> —worn on the head for protection and to help climbers see in dark conditions	
<b>crampon</b> —worn on the bottom of a climber's boots, this piece of metal has sharp points that make it easier to walk on ice or snow	
<b>rappel device</b> —used to help climbers rappel safely down the steep parts of what they are climbing	
<b>altimeter</b> —used to measure the altitude and help verify a climber's location	

## The Extras

In addition to the mountain-climbing equipment, climbers wishing to attempt to reach the top of Mount Everest need to purchase permits from the government of Nepal. These permits can take up to six months to get and are very expensive. Climbers also need to hire Sherpas, or people that help to carry necessary gear. It is also essential to hire a climbing guide that is experienced and can lead the climbers to the top and deal with any situations that may arise.

The preparations that are necessary to attempt to climb Mount Everest are significant. It is an expensive adventure that requires careful and concise planning. However, if all of the proper planning is done, and the weather conditions are just right, the trek to the top of Mount Everest can be a very rewarding adventure!

## References

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## Source #2

This is an excerpt from the book *Together on Top of the World: The Remarkable Story of the First Couple to Climb the Fabled Seven Summits* by Phil and Susan Ershler. In this excerpt, Susan and Phil are about to reach the top of Mount Everest. They are accompanied by two guides who help lead them to the top: Dorjee Lama and Danuru Sherpa.

### Reaching the Top

by Phil and Susan Ershler

The Hillary Step made me very nervous. It is a 60-degree slope, half rock, half snow, that demands as much courage and rock-climbing skill as it does strength and stamina. I am not a proficient rock climber in the best of conditions, and now I was at 29,000 feet, in a down suit, holding an ice axe and jumar, wearing an oxygen mask and goggles that obscured my vision. The rope was so tight against the rock I could barely slide my jumar, and in places there were four or five ropes and I didn't know which to use. I could barely see my feet, much less know where to put them, and with every third or fourth step, my crampons slid backwards down the rock, leaving me hanging by my arms. Each time I looked up, I saw Danuru getting farther and farther ahead, turning occasionally to motion to me with his arm.

After half an hour of climbing there was only a single rock outcrop between me and the top. The rock was taller than I was, and to get over it I had to hoist my whole body up and over. I tried to inch up slowly, but I got

nowhere. There were no cracks into which I could put a hand or foot. I could feel the pressure of the people on the rope behind me. *Just go, Sue! Just do it!* I reached up with the jumar and planted my ice axe into a snowy spot above my head, then jumped and pulled at the same time. My chest came to rest draped over the rock, my head facing downhill on the other side. Below me a serrated ridge of knife-edged rocks sloped away. I couldn't move. Suddenly I felt myself being hoisted through the air. A second later I was flat on my stomach on the uphill side. Danuru had grabbed my pack and pulled me over. Inching forward on my belly I unclipped the jumar and clipped it to the next rope, then I crawled away from the edge. Danuru was already moving forward up the gentler slope that led toward the summit.

"Danuru! Wait!" I didn't want to go farther without Phil. But Danuru was marching briskly along, eager to reach the top, and didn't hear me. I hiked as fast as I could behind him, stopping every now and then to holler. Finally he turned around. "Wait for Phil!" I shouted.

"He catch up," Danuru hollered back.

I shook my head. "I'm stopping!"

Dutifully, Danuru came back and we sat down in the snow and waited. Other climbers moved past us. I listened to the crunch of their crampons in the snow and the rhythm of their heavy breathing, and as I sat there a feeling of intense joy came over me.

A few minutes later Phil and Dorjee came up over the top of the Step. I leaped to my feet. I felt like shouting, "We're going to make it! We're going to make it!" Instead, I just grinned at Phil from inside my oxygen mask. Behind his mask I knew that he was grinning too.

We let Danuru and Dorjee go ahead, and Phil walked right behind me. It was much less exposed here: The ridge was wide and covered with snow, and instead of peaks below us there was a sea of clouds. What would the summit look like? I had built it up so in my mind. Fifteen minutes later Phil inched up beside me. Ahead of us the sky met the ground in a smooth arc.

*"We're going to make it! We're going to stand on top of the world together!"* I screamed inside like a child.

## References

Ershler, P., Ershler, S., & Simons, R. (2007). *Together on top of the world: The remarkable story of the first couple to climb the fabled seven summits*. New York, NY: Warner Books.

### Source #3

This is an article about Mount Everest climbers.

## The First to Conquer Mount Everest

The first recorded attempt to reach the summit of Mount Everest was in 1921. Between 1921 and 1952, seven major expeditions set out but failed to reach the peak of this breathtaking mountain. On May 29, 1953, Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay achieved the unthinkable. They reached the summit of the highest mountain in the world—Mount Everest.

### Edmund Hillary

Edmund Hillary was born in Auckland, New Zealand. He became interested in mountain climbing at the age of sixteen. A class trip to Mount Ruapehu, located in New Zealand, piqued his interest. It wasn't until the age of 20 that Hillary was able to act on his desire to climb mountains. His first climb was to the top of Mount Ollivier in New Zealand.

After attending university, Hillary decided to become a beekeeper. It was the perfect job for him. Since caring for bees is a seasonal job, he was able to use his free time to climb. He climbed several mountains in New Zealand, the Alps, and the Himalayas. After successfully completing these climbs, he decided he wanted to climb Mount Everest. When he finally got his chance to climb Everest, the conditions were harsh. Many people who were part of the expedition had to turn back. Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay pushed on together. Their perseverance paid off, and they achieved a goal that many people had thought was impossible. They reached the summit of Mount Everest. Instantly Hillary became famous.

Following Hillary's achievements on Mount Everest, he continued to climb mountains. He also became interested in exploring Antarctica. In 1958, Hillary was part of a team that went to the South Pole. In 1985, Hillary flew over the North Pole. This made him the first person to get to both poles and the top of Mount Everest.

Hillary really cared about the people of Nepal. He returned in 1960 to help with building clinics, hospitals, and schools. He encouraged the government to protect the land around Everest. He did not want to see it destroyed by the many tourists who were going there.

### Tenzing Norgay

There is some mystery surrounding the childhood of Tenzing Norgay. It is known that at the age of 18 he moved to India. He was hired as a high-altitude porter for several expeditions before the one in 1953. On his seventh attempt to climb Everest, Norgay was successful.

Tenzing Norgay received a British Empire Medal for his achievements. Norgay decided to use his new fame to try to help young boys in South Asia. He founded a school for mountaineering, called the Indian Mountaineering Federation. He taught young sherpas mountaineering skills and provided scholarships for their studies.

Eventually, Norgay went on to create Tenzing Norgay Adventures. He wanted to provide other adventurers with safe and enjoyable trips through the Himalayas.

Tenzing Norgay was able to help many other South Asian people to make a career out of mountaineering. He was able to guide many people in the Himalayas and help some of them to follow in his footsteps and achieve the ultimate climber's goal—to reach the summit of Mount Everest.

In honor of Hillary and Norgay, and their achievements on Mount Everest, the country of Nepal plans to name a Himalayan peak after each of these men.

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