How to Rock the New ACT Essay

First take a look at the prompt and essay instructions:
(Source: http://www.actstudent.org/writing/sample/)

Many of the goods and services we depend on daily are now supplied by intelligent, automated machines rather than human beings. Robots build cars and other goods on assembly lines, where once there were human workers. Many of our phone conversations are now conducted not with people but with sophisticated technologies. We can now buy goods at a variety of stores without the help of a human cashier. Automation is generally seen as a sign of progress, but what is lost when we replace humans with machines? Given the accelerating variety and prevalence of intelligent machines, it is worth examining the implications and meaning of their presence in our lives.

Perspective #1: What we lose with the replacement of people by machines is some part of our own humanity. Even our mundane daily encounters no longer require from us basic courtesy, respect, and tolerance for other people.

Perspective #2: Machines are good at low-skill, repetitive jobs, and at high-speed, extremely precise jobs. In both cases they work better than humans. This efficiency leads to a more prosperous and progressive world for everyone.

Perspective #3: Intelligent machines challenge our long-standing ideas about what humans are or can be. This is good because it pushes both humans and machines toward new, unimagined possibilities.

Essay Task
Write a unified, coherent essay in which you evaluate multiple perspectives on the increasing presence of intelligent machines. In your essay, be sure to:
- analyze and evaluate the perspectives given
- state and develop your own perspective on the issue
- explain the relationship between your perspective and those given
  Your perspective may be in full agreement with any of the others, in partial agreement, or wholly different. Whatever the case, support your ideas with logical reasoning and detailed, persuasive examples.

Planning Your Essay
Your work on these prewriting pages will not be scored.
Use the space below and on the back cover to generate ideas and plan your essay. You may wish to consider the following as you think critically about the task:
Strengths and weaknesses of the three given perspectives
- What insights do they offer, and what do they fail to consider?
- Why might they be persuasive to others, or why might they fail to persuade?
  Your own knowledge experience and values
- What is your perspective on this issue, and what are its strengths and weaknesses?
- How will you support your perspective in your essay?

The Process
This should be your process. Take five minutes (at the most) and do the following:

1. Summarize the potential sides of the debate. Make this as simple as possible. The question will always lead to a binary (good/bad, positive/negative, either/or, helpful/unhelpful, etc.)

Example: Intelligent machines are either *good* or *bad*.

2. Summarize the perspectives. Again, make this as simple as possible.

Example:
     Perspective #1: Machines bad. We lose our humanity.
     Perspective #2: Machines good. Better at some jobs.
     Perspective #3: Machines good. Change what it means to be human.

3. Pick your position. Either machines are good, or machines are bad. Pick the position that's going to be the easiest for you to argue and for which you can generate at least three examples.

Example: Intelligent machines are good: Robots that dispense prescriptions, smartphones, online education.

4. Note whether you'll have to agree or disagree with each perspective. (I like to use a + and – to indicate whether I agree or disagree with the position.

Example:
     - (I disagree with) Perspective #1: Machines bad. We lose our humanity.

     + (I agree with) Perspective #2: Machines good. Better at some jobs.

     + (I agree with) Perspective #3: Machines good. Change what it means to be human.

5. Start writing! Your paragraph structure should be:
     In each paragraph, you should either agree or disagree with a perspective and restate your position.
     1. Introduction. Big picture view of the issue in a few sentences and then your argument or position ("machines are good")
     2. Body Paragraph: Address one perspective. Use a specific example.
     3. Body Paragraph: Address another perspective. Use a specific example.
     4. Body Paragraph: Address the last perspective. Use a specific example.
     5. Conclusion. Talk briefly about the broader implications. Restate your position.