

**Directions:**

Each of the topics below quotes a writer's position on some issue. Choose **one** of the two topics assigned by the exam proctor. In an organized essay of about 350 words, (1) explain **in your own words** what the writer is saying AND (2) take a position on the writer's argument. (Issues you **might** wish to address include: Do you agree or disagree totally with the writer's opinion or only to a certain extent? Is the evidence used to support the writer's argument convincing or weak? If weak, can you offer a better argument? Can you cite a personal experience that either supports or undermines what the writer has said?) As you write your essay, you should periodically refer to statements in the passage you are discussing. However, **everything** you write should be in your own words except, perhaps, for a phrase or two from the passage that you may wish to quote.

Choose **only one topic** from the two assigned by the exam proctor. Write on **every other line in your bluebook**. Underline any word whose spelling you are unsure of.

1. Modern society has created what might be called "the teasing gap." Today teasing has been all but banished from the lives of many children. In recent years, high-profile school shootings and teenage suicides have inspired a wave of "zero tolerance" movements in our schools. Accused teasers are now made to utter their teases in front of the class, under the stern eye of teachers. Children are given detention for sarcastic comments on the playground. Schools are decreed "teasing free." And we are phasing out teasing in many other corners of social life as well. Sexual-harassment courses advise work colleagues not to tease or joke. Marriage counselors encourage direct criticism over playful provocation. No-taunting rules have even arisen in the NBA and the NFL to discourage "trash talking." The reason teasing is viewed as inherently damaging is that it is too often confused with bullying. But bullying is something different; it's aggression, pure and simple. Bullies steal, punch, kick, harass and humiliate. Sexual harassers grope, leer and make crude, often threatening passes. By contrast, teasing is a mode of play, no doubt with a sharp edge, in which we provoke to negotiate life's ambiguities and conflicts. And it is essential to making us fully human. The centrality of teasing in our social evolution is suggested by just how pervasive teasing is when not artificially restricted by rules and punishments. In every corner of the world, human adults play peekaboo games to stir a sulking child, small children mimic nearby adults, and teenagers prod one another to gauge romantic interest. In rejecting teasing, we may be losing something vital and necessary to humanity.

Adapted from an article by Dacher Keltner

2. Something has gone terribly wrong when a 33-year-old single woman—with no home of her own, no job, and an apparent "obsession" with having children—winds up with 14 of them. The woman in question apparently used donated sperm and in vitro fertilization to create all the embryos that became her children, recently adding to her six children newborn octuplets. The most obvious question raised by this sad saga is how did this woman ever become a fertility patient? Some fertility doctors would answer that it's not their job to decide how many children a person can have, that individuals are entitled to define their families as they see fit, and that no one can "police" reproduction in the United States. But the idea that doctors should not set limits on who can use reproductive technology to make babies is ethically unacceptable. If someone comes to a clinic with a history of child abuse, active drug addiction, and a rap sheet with serious felonies, should the doctor simply grant her wish to have children because she can pay? With the cost of neonatal care for eight new children probably topping \$1 million, the other major ethical problem raised by this story is the hijacking of health-care dollars by someone acting irresponsibly. Doctors have an obligation to consider patients' requests for treatment, but they do not have to honor them, particularly if a doctor believes that what the patient wants would put people at risk. Putting eight babies into the family of a single mom already trying to cope with six other young kids, with no money and little help, is grossly unethical conduct that must be stopped. Society needs to discourage mega-multiple births, and if the medical profession is unwilling to act, then government needs to get involved. We already have rules governing who can get involved with adoption and foster care. These minimal requirements must be extended to fertility treatment and limits must be set on how many embryos can be implanted at one time, along with some rules about what to do with embryos that no one wants to use. Perhaps the only good that can come out of the octuplet case is society's realization that unregulated access to reproductive technology is fundamentally wrong.

Adapted from an article by Arthur Caplan

**BRING THIS SHEET WITH YOU ON THE DAY OF YOUR PLACEMENT TEST.**

3. As the new season of NBC's "The Biggest Loser" unfolds, ask yourself this: would I want to watch my loved one—who struggles daily with the physical, mental and emotional ramifications of a life-threatening illness—treated this way? The program, which capitalizes on one of the country's fastest-growing epidemics, is the latest example of the unethical and sensationalistic abuse of the country's obese population that goes unquestioned in American culture. Overweight and obesity now affects 65 percent of all Americans and is one of the most serious public health crises in modern history. Many people affected by this often debilitating medical condition suffer discrimination at school, work and other public settings. They frequently deal with a lifetime of blame, ridicule and shame. In addition to being the target of social stigma, people who struggle with excess weight also end up being victims of irresponsible business ventures devoted to selling all manner of ineffective, unsafe and unregulated weight loss products that contribute to a perpetual cycle of false hope, failure and desperation. Yet in our society the suffering of the obese has been transformed to entertainment, with reality television enticing people to watch and participate in a theatrical scenario reminiscent of a circus sideshow. Ostensibly staged to "help" the obese overcome their condition, "obesity TV" presents the overweight as acceptable only if they parade before us as objects of our curiosity, pity, and contempt. The methods these shows use to "inspire" the obese—humiliation, pain, and shame—clearly do more harm than good by contributing to the acceptance of discrimination against the obese. We would never accept the outright mockery of any other group in American culture, and we should stop tolerating the abuse of the overweight by television shows that tap into our collective prejudice against the obese.

Adapted from an article by Martin Binks

4. There was a time in American popular culture when teen stars didn't talk about their sex lives. For all fans knew, popular teen idols were sober and celibate, and film and music executives did everything in their power to perpetuate the "squeaky-clean" images teens—and their parents—adored. While some may point to the performers teens watch today as evidence that modesty has gone out the window, others point to specific teen idols as more fitting role models for young people, largely because these teenage celebrities have made public pledges of celibacy. For example, the Jonas Brothers all wear "purity rings," which brother Joe says symbolize "promises to ourselves and to God that we'll stay pure 'til marriage." Many applaud such public statements of chastity, with the president of the Christian abstinence organization Silver Ring Thing pointing out that stars like Miley Cyrus are role models to teens, who see their behavior, for better or worse, as an example of what to do in their own lives. Others counter that public abstinence pledges set young stars up for ridicule and present the very real possibility that when the teen stars fall, the kids who idolize them will become disappointed and confused. But both positions miss the real problem with teen idol purity pledges, and that is the public nature of the pledges themselves. Placing a teenage celebrity's decision about having sex—whether the "right" decision or not—in the tabloids actually directs teen fans' attention to sex, making it seem that talking about having sex is "normal" for the average thirteen-year old. In this sense, abstinence pledges not only make life harder for teen stars, but they draw young people into the adult world of sexuality long before they belong there. There's nothing wrong with making a pledge of abstinence, but it shouldn't be a public thing; teen stars, particularly when they're talking to the media, should keep it to themselves.

Adapted from an editorial by Susan Wagner

**BRING THIS SHEET WITH YOU ON THE DAY OF YOUR PLACEMENT TEST.**