

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. During the last Christmas season, a 34-year-old man was trampled to death by a mob rushing into a Wal-Mart. At five minutes before the store was set to open on "Black Friday," the crowd of about 2,000 pounded and pressed their weight against the doors, shattering the glass and allowing the mob to storm in. The worker was killed as people stomped over him, looking for good prices on DVDs, winter coats, and PlayStations. Apparently the mob was not sobered by his death; as authorities sought to clear the store, some defiantly kept shopping, while others complained that they had been on line since the night before. It is tempting to heap scorn upon the Wal-Mart mob and to view these people as freaks or aberrations whose callous madness would never be seen in "normal" people. That would be false comfort. Certainly mob psychology played a role in the Wal-Mart tragedy, since human beings have always had a tendency to lose individual identity and accountability when gathered in groups. But it's not just our common vulnerability to mob psychology that ties the rest of America to the tragedy. It is also our cultural addiction to "stuff." Americans pay lip service to other things. We say children are a priority, but when did people ever press against the door for Parents' Night at school? We say education is a priority, but when did people ever bang against the windows of the library? We say faith is a priority, but when did people ever surge into a temple of worship as eagerly as they do a temple of commerce? The Wal-Mart tragedy paints clearly that Americans have bought, heart and soul, into the great lie of American consumerism: acquiring stuff will make you whole. It would be nice to think that the young man's trampling death will lead Americans to change our cultural priorities and values. But with so much of the economy riding on American materialism, selfishness, and shallowness, we can only wait for the next consumption-driven tragedy to occur.

Adapted from an editorial by Leonard Pitts

2. Recently Major League Baseball suspended a pitcher for taking a health supplement that contained trace amounts of a banned substance, even though that pitcher had purchased the supplement at a popular health store and had checked with his coaches before taking the product. When the story hit the news, several commentators defended the League's decision to suspend the player, stating that his attempt to gain a competitive edge with the supplement—even though it was legal—presented a "bad example" to kids in general and kid athletes in particular. Of all the arguments in this—and, in fact, just about any—case, the "what will the children think" argument has the least merit. Put plainly, the type of "example" that public figures such as baseball players, movie actors, and politicians might set for children should have no place in any discussion of their actions. The whole idea that adults should be judged based on how children might think simply lacks logic. Children will think like children; they will jump to conclusions, over-simplify, exaggerate, and misunderstand adult behaviors in ways that are perfectly normal for children but are in no way the responsibility of the adults they observe. What's more, the idea that public figures must always act in ways that set a good example for children reduces acceptable adult behavior to that which can be easily understood and emulated by children. But adults are not children, and sometimes adult behavior is much too complicated, nuanced, and ambiguous to be forever measured using the sacred "role model" yardstick. At most, children are the responsibility of their parents and guardians. All the rest of society—teachers, rock stars, and even baseball players—cannot be held responsible for how children might interpret their actions.

Adapted from an editorial by Kathy Tito

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

3. A controversy erupted in a small New Jersey town when a local supermarket refused a father's request to have his son's name written on a birthday cake. The 3-year-old's first name is "Adolph Hitler," and the supermarket manager stated that they had the right to deny the family's order because of the offensive nature of the little boy's name. The press quickly picked up on the story, interviewing the parents who stated flatly that as American citizens they have the right to name their child whatever they like without either the interference or the harsh judgment of anyone else. When celebrities give their children unusual, sometimes even outlandish names, the public tends to shake their heads and wonder what these Hollywood parents are thinking. But few Americans seem to feel that names such as "Apple" or "Rumer" should be illegal. While the idea of outlawing baby names may seem odd to Americans, it isn't anything new in many countries around the world. For instance, Denmark is quite strict when it comes to baby names, providing a list of about 7,000 pre-approved names from which parents may choose. If a parent wants to deviate from the list, they need special permission which is not easily obtained. Many other countries create guidelines regarding the types of names that are prohibited, including prohibitions against excessively long names, androgynous names, or brand names. At the heart of such laws is the desire to protect children from a lifetime of ridicule and abuse because of their parents' lapses in judgment or their misguided attempts to be "unique." The New Jersey incident makes clear that the potential danger in allowing American parents unregulated freedom when naming their children can truly harm innocent children who may be cruelly burdened with preposterous or offensive names for a lifetime. The United States government should follow the example of other nations and establish guidelines to regulate baby names in America.

Adapted from an article by Beatrice Colanzi

4. As the sports world struggles to rid itself of performance-enhancing drugs, people in a range of other fields are reaching for a variety of prescription pills to enhance what counts most in modern life. Despite the potential side effects, average citizens—from academics and classical musicians to corporate executives and college students—have embraced so-called cognitive enhancers such as Ritalin to improve concentration and control emotions. These drugs have been commonly marketed to treat debilitating conditions like attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in children, but the new trend is for otherwise healthy individuals to request cognitive enhancing drugs to allow them to operate at peak mental performance. Some critics of prescribing cognitive enhancers to healthy people argue that these "brain drugs" give these individuals an unfair advantage and their use should be banned in competitive situations, such as taking the SAT. They also claim that brain-boosting drugs undermine the value of hard work and contribute to the high-stress, aggressive environment that has actually led people in so many diverse occupations to turn to pharmaceuticals to stay ahead. But such criticism ignores the reality of survival in the modern world. There are no laws to prevent overachievers from using legally prescribed drugs to operate at their best and, if the individual is willing to accept the risks that come with taking any medication, there is no legitimate reason to prohibit the use of cognitive enhancers by healthy people. In fact, people such as emergency medical personnel, air-traffic controllers, and combat soldiers should probably be encouraged to take brain-boosting drugs. After all, what patient wouldn't want their surgeon to be completely focused during a life-or-death procedure?

Adapted from an editorial by Denise Gellene

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