

Department of English
Application for Teaching Assistantship

1. What experiences as a student or teacher have shaped your views on effective writing instruction?
2. What do you anticipate will be your strengths as a writing teacher? Your weaknesses?
3. Please describe, more fully than your *curriculum vitae* or the application permits, any teaching, counseling or writing experience you have had.

Sample Essay

Those who are selected for a Teaching Assistantship will have the benefit of a great deal of support in their approach to English 401, our first-year writing course. We will send you materials over the summer to familiarize you with the program and to help you prepare for the course; we will provide you with an intensive (but still enjoyable) week-long orientation to the course; you will have an assigned teaching mentor who will help you with the everyday challenges of the course; and, finally, we will place you in a graduate-level "practicum" course, in which you will have regular opportunities, throughout your first semester of teaching, to develop your approach to the challenges and opportunities of the course by working with your peer teaching group and with some of the best composition faculty in the country .

In other words, we do not expect you to be an accomplished teacher upon entering the program, and accordingly you should not view the following exercise as a "test" of your teaching skills. Instead, we hope, through this exercise, to get a sense of your potential in the classroom so as to determine how we can best help you develop that potential.

We are presenting you with an exercise that might well seem rather confusing at first. Enclosed with this application are portions of a ten-page essay written by a male student of English 401. We have not reprinted the entire essay; instead, we have provided you with introductory paragraphs, subtitles, topic sentences for paragraphs that appear in the body of the, essay, and the concluding paragraphs. We offer these portions of the essay so as give you some indication of the general direction of the argument the student is trying to present. In other words, we are asking that you comment on an essay that you cannot read in its entirety.

We ask this in part because you will often be in the position of commenting on papers that you have only skimmed through (in instructor-student conferences; for example), but we ask this also to emphasize that we would like you to focus on larger issues of structure, research, general approach, academic preparation, and the like. Certainly, we'd like to hear any comments you might have about other strengths or weaknesses in the essay as well--for example, grammar or style--for you should get a sense of what instruction this student might need later in the course. But, while noting such concerns, your main focus should be on larger conceptual or structural issues--and on the kind of advice that might help this student get to the next level of achievement.

Please feel free to comment on the difficulty of assessing a work that you have read only in parts--including the kinds of questions you might ask the student concerning his plans for developing and revising this essay. We know that this is an unusual challenge, though we hope you enjoy thinking through the complexity of this task.

1. Based on what you have here, what would you say is the essay's greatest strength?
2. Based on what you have here, what would you say is the essay's greatest weakness?
3. Given that you are only skimming parts of this essay, what questions would you like to ask the student--for example, in an instructor-student conference--about his approach to the argument about his research?
4. Describe the strategy or strategies that you would use in attempting to help the student improve in the area you have identified as "greatest weakness."

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Sample Student Essay

"This is the End of the Innocence"

Part One: The Media's Influence on the American Child

Introduction

Everyone remembers the phrase trademarked by Desi Arnez, "Lucy! I'm home!" That was back when television was clean and harmless. "I Love Lucy" aired during an era when the word "pregnant" was banned from television and when husband and wife had to sleep in separate beds. Nowadays, anyone can flip on the TV and practically watch two people engage in sexual intercourse, or hear vulgar language. The media has certainly evolved over the past fifty years or so, but does this drastic evolution have any effect on the children whom are the primary audience? The answer is yes. The free enterprise system is robbing children of their childhood through the remorse of the media that is produced. In this essay, I am going to explore and discuss how the media today is taking a very negative toll on the youth of America. In the first part of the essay, I will examine the different forms of the media, and the negative impact it has on its child consumers. The second part of the essay will focus on the source of this problem and how we, as corporations, parents, and members of society, can fix it.

I grew up in the transitional era. We still had our fare share of fun and make believe, but at the same time, we were being rapidly introduced to adulthood through the TV shows we watched, and the music we heard on the radio. Today, kids are fully immersed in a world of harsh images, and confusing perspectives. In his television special on May 26, 2002 entitled, "The Corruption of the American Child," Bill O'Reilly said, "American children are being corrupted at a rate never before seen in the world. We are polluting their minds with a massive borage of media images that no American child can avoid." Their exposure to today's risqué pop culture is out of control. What is most alarming is the behavioral effects that this has on so many of our society's children today. Schools are flooded with 12-year-old boys who are joining gangs, 10-year-old girls with belly-button rings, '-' and 16-year-olds who are having their second child. For many people, it is easy to turn a blind eye to this growing problem. In an interview with Bill O'Reilly, radio personality Anthony Cumia (of the "Opie and Anthony Show") stated, "Is this really entertainment's problem? It turns out to be our problem, but it's not our job to fix it. We're entertainers, we're not psychologists, we aren't doctors and we're not daycare workers." Well, if this isn't "their problem" than whose problem is it? In the interest of keeping the welfare of our country's future at heart, everyone should be concerned with the increasing severity of this issue. No longer are we, as a society, producing future doctors, lawyers, politicians, and astronauts with firm values. We are producing kids who have been so brainwashed by the media that they don't even know the difference between simple rights and wrongs. We want to trust this generation to lead our country into the new millennium? The mentality of the new generation will almost certainly lead to the demise of the morals and principals that we, as Americans, are founded upon. For these reasons it truly is everyone's problem.

Violence and Aggressive Behavior [just the first sentence of each paragraph]

1. The average American child spends forty hours a week consuming all forms of media.
2. Twelve-year-old Lionel Tate has been on trial for the last couple years, after the unintentional murder of his younger cousin.
3. Another twelve-year-old named Tom Hitz has been undergoing endless series of painful operations for the past two years after he accidentally lit himself on fire trying to mimic stunts that he had seen on the show "Jackass."

Poverty, Sex, and Identity Confusion [the first sentence of each paragraph]

1. The most lucrative form of music today is rap.
2. Another popular type of music today, is what is know as the "pop rock" genre.
- 3 .Another industry that contributes greatly to the sexual behavior of adolescence is the motion picture industry.

Health, Learning, and Social Skills [the first sentence of each paragraph]

1. One of the major concerns surrounding children's exposure to the media is the detriment to their learning and social skills.
2. Aside from the psychological corruption of American children, the media also has a heavy impact on physical health.

Part Two: The Solution

[We reprint here the entire introductory paragraph for Part Two 1

It would be easy to blame either the media or parents as the source of the problem. The fact is, it is a combination of both irresponsible parenting and corporate greed that has created this issue. Although I do not foresee a solution in the near future, certain actions are being taken to help us move toward a better position. Television ratings, and restraints on the music industry are currently being put to the test, however these are only baby steps in a giant leap that needs to-- occur. Responsible media and responsible parenting are the two key elements in getting our children back on the right track.

Parents [the first sentence of each paragraph]

1. Children today spend an average of forty hours a week consuming all types of media, while parents spend an average of seventeen hours a week with their children (Steyer 44).
2. Parents are understandably working excessively in order to support their family, however, there are other actions that can be taken.

Corporate Greed [the first sentence of each paragraph]

1. There is no doubt that the driving force behind most of the media today is money.
2. The largest problem with media industries backing down is the incredibly high demand for the filth that is being produced.

Conclusion [reprinted in its entirety]

This paper is designed to help you, the reader, better understand the severity of the problem as well as possible solutions. Kids are undoubtedly affected negatively by the media, and change needs to occur soon. It is important that parents step back and examine their own moral and those that they would like to instill upon their son or daughter. They may realize that the television is acting as another parent in their house, and sooner or later, a child may turn to the TV for advice and role model behavior.

Until the industries realize the detriment they are causing these children, and until they care about the detriment they are causing these children, the kids remain stuck in a rut with no push forward. Likewise, until parents began to take more responsible parenting action, kids will never learn the basic differences between right and wrong.

It is sad to realize the direction that the future leaders of our country are headed in. However, if enough concerned citizens voice their opinions, we, as a society, may find the mean to a solution.