

Sample Essay Exam Exercise

Directions: Read and evaluate the following sample essays, both of which respond to the essay assignment below. Give each a grade and defend it with three reasons why you gave it the grade.

Essay Topic:

Freedom of speech is a constitutional guarantee. Therefore, all citizens of the United States should be allowed to express their ideas freely, and they have a right to expect the government's help--including the providing of protection--as they do so.

Assignment:

Write an essay in which you agree or disagree with this position. Support your view with specific examples from your personal experiences, your observations of others, or your reading.

<p>Grade: _____</p> <p>Reasons:</p> <p>1. _____ _____</p> <p>2. _____ _____</p> <p>3. _____ _____</p>	<p>Sample Essay A</p> <p>When the Founders wrote the Bill of Rights, they put freedom of speech right at the beginning. They made it first, and I do too. I agree that each citizen of the United States, should be allowed to express their ideas freely.</p> <p>Freedom of speech means that you can express opinions without being afraid of jail, which is what some other countries like China don't have. It also means that we have the freedom to share differing ideas, coming to creative solutions of problems by our differences. Freedom of speech can go too far. It used to be in some countries that you couldn't say things that encouraged to overthrow the government or say bad things about God. Today in America, too, when the things some people say cause riots, that's too much.</p> <p>Some people worry if we don't allow for complete freedom of speech, it's hard to try to figure out what the limits are. I could be wrong, but that doesn't seem hard to me. Everybody should be able to say what they want, just as long as what they say doesn't hurt no one else, right?</p> <p>Freedom of speech certainly is our most important. We should all be thankful we have it, but also careful not to abuse it.</p>
<p>Grade: _____</p> <p>Reasons:</p> <p>1. _____ _____</p> <p>2. _____ _____</p> <p>3. _____ _____</p>	<p>Sample Essay B</p> <p>Does freedom of speech permit a person to arouse fear or hatred? It is true that freedom of speech can be abused. Nevertheless, I feel that this freedom is so important that every precaution should be taken to guard it and to protect those who call upon its guarantee.</p> <p>This freedom was important to the founders of the United States. Many of those who demanded independence were called traitors. Today, though we call them patriots. If the comments of the past were important to be heard, it is foolish to close our ears now. After all, the words that push the definition of "free speech" today may be considered the patriotic words of tomorrow!</p> <p>Freedom of speech continues to be problematic as well as important. For example, the Ku Klux Klan recently received permission to rally in our city and was given police protection; then it was sent a bill for the additional security. When the Klan protested, the court decided that the group did not have to pay. It's easy to say the Klan should be silenced because its message is objectionable. However, if one group with unpopular views can be silenced, it soon may become acceptable to silence another group, and then another group, and then <u>your</u> group.</p>

Sample Essay Analyses

Analysis of Sample Essay A

The essay question asks the writer to agree or disagree with the view that all American citizens have the right to completely free speech and to the government's protection of them as they voice their thoughts. The introduction to the essay attempts to set the mood and lead into a thesis statement; but the thesis statement itself parrots part of the wording of the question and does not go far enough to present a clear, supportable opinion.

The essay then goes on to address only half of the assignment. It first gives some examples to clarify the meaning of freedom of speech; then it gives some examples of situations in which complete freedom of speech could lead to trouble. It does not say anything specific about how far the government should go to support freedom of speech. Indeed, a lack of precision in both thought and wording is perhaps this essay's greatest weakness.

The writer does draw upon personal experience, observation, and reading (note the reference to two restrictions upon free speech in times past and to riots resulting from controversial free speech) but fails to develop those ideas clearly. The essay contains enough errors in spelling, sentence structure and mechanics to be distracting. The writer's tone and point of view shift a few times, as well.

Analysis of Sample Essay B

The writer tackles both aspects of the questions: (1) whether free speech has limits; and (2) whether everyone who wants to exercise free speech has a right to be protected. The introduction sets a tone and introduces a clear thesis statement (without repeating the essay question). The body offers two supports, arranged somewhat chronologically. The evidence doesn't come from the writer's personal experience, but it comes from his or her observations and reading--in this case, a knowledge of American history and an awareness of local current events. (Notice that the second support is much stronger than the first because it is more specific; still, given the limited time, the two supports work relatively well together.) Ideas flow easily because of the writer's logic and because of a wise use of transitions. The conclusion reminds readers of several points that the writer has covered and shows them why they have a personal stake in the issue.