

C2 Proficient (CPE) Essay Topic 1

Shifting sands: behavioural change.

Nowadays, in some cultures there may often be confusion between generations about what is acceptable behaviour in certain situations. Older people sometimes complain, for example, about the real or imagined rudeness of others, such as in the use of electronic devices in public places. However, the younger generation do not regard electronic communication as intrusive, but rather as fundamental to their way of life. Only increased mutual understanding is likely to resolve potential conflict or confusion in any society. In this case, as in all others, it pays to be aware of other people's points of view.

Follow my leader?

Should we always aim to do what society expects of us? No, what society needs is individuality. Worrying about what other people think inhibits enthusiasm and creativity. Nothing new is ever achieved by conforming to expected social norms. This is not only true for society's innovators: everybody needs a strong sense of their own worth as an individual. This is essential for psychological well-being and the ability to function effectively in one's personal and professional life. Paying too much attention to society's conventions can be counter-productive in these and other ways.

C2 Proficient (CPE) Essay Topic 2

The Downside of Tourism

Despite the importance of the tourism industry to local economies there are significant costs to being a popular holiday destination. Local cultures can suffer as the needs of the tourist are given priority. For example, local shops can be demolished to make way for larger retail developments. In addition, the negative effects on the environment are well documented. Areas suffering from scarce water, food and energy resources can see the situation deteriorate with the extra demand caused by an influx of tourists. There will often be a physical impact as well, with increases in local pollution or the effect on the eco-system of large-scale construction. More significantly, the generation of income for the local economy is often lower than envisaged. The majority of income can often go to multi-nationals such as airline companies and hotel chains.

Eco-Tourism

Recent years have seen a growth in what is termed 'eco-tourism'. The aim of eco-tourism is to unite conservation and communities through sustainable travel. So what are the key elements of eco-tourism? In addition to minimizing the impact of tourism on the environment, successful eco-tourism should also raise the awareness of cultural and environmental issues amongst the local host destination and the visiting tourist. Eco-tourism should be a positive experience for the local community as well as the tourist. Finally, eco-tourism should offer clear financial benefits to local people and to local conservation issues.

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Raising the Bar on School Sports

The National Sports Academy is running a series of workshops aimed at encouraging more teenagers to get involved in sport. The workshops are for teachers and will look at how to promote the numerous benefits of physical exercise and team sports to school pupils. 'Exercise helps to maintain a stable weight, strengthen bones and reduces the risk of stress-related illnesses,' explained Tim Collins, the Academy Director. 'Aside from health benefits taking part in competitive sports gives teenagers a chance to experience the highs and lows of a competition, as well as instilling discipline, responsibility and commitment – all valuable life skills.'

Sport Seen as Uncool

teenagers are spending less time on physical exercise because they find it deeply 'uncool', according to a survey of teachers and pupils. The problem is most prevalent amongst older teenagers. Girls are uncomfortable about sharing sports classes with boys and avoid swimming lessons because of a fear that it will spoil their hairstyles. And both sexes were scathing in the survey about the unfashionable PE uniform that had to be worn. The choice of sports available was also too limited. Teachers said they would like to see codes for sports kits relaxed, single sex physical education classes and a wider range of activities to combat the decline in activity.

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Our Relationship with Food

The British relationship with food has undergone a fundamental change over the past 50 years, and in quite a contradictory fashion. Meals were once made up of simple, local ingredients using recipes that had been followed by previous generations. Now food has become a sensory and cultural phenomenon. Food production and catering is a multi-million pound industry. Top chefs show us how to cook the most delicious 3-course meals and supermarkets provide all the ingredients we need. Yet at the same time, we are less willing to spend time cooking than was once the case and instead spend huge amounts on take-aways and ready-meals.

The Ready-Meal Industry

Latest figures show that the UK ready-meal industry is experiencing continued growth despite the recent economic downturn. And the reason for this success? Time-poor consumers continue to want exotic, convenient, mealtime solutions whilst at the same time being cautious about over-spending on take-aways and trips to the restaurant. And the future looks even brighter for this industry with innovative and niche sectors opening up to cater for as wide a range of tastes as possible. And which meals are we eating? Italian remains the favourite cuisine closely followed by Indian and Chinese

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Tackling Traffic Congestion

Policy-makers employ a wide range of measures to tackle the problem of traffic congestion. Enforcement schemes such as setting strict speed limits on major roads and the use of congestion charges in city centres are two such examples as are vehicle exclusion zones or parking restrictions in busy pedestrian areas. However, it also makes sense to encourage motorists to become less reliant on their car. This can be achieved by making public transport more efficient and promoting the benefits of car-sharing with work colleagues, thus reducing weekly fuel bills. And the increasing number of cycle lanes on many roads is further evidence of how to win the hearts and minds of motorists in the fight against congestion.

The Joy of Motoring

Recent research into the attitudes of motorists shows we are still more than happy to get behind the wheel. Despite rising fuel costs, insurance premiums and frequent traffic jams, 9 out of 10 of us still enjoy driving. Whether it's visiting friends and relations, taking the family for a day out or even commuting to work, the car remains first choice for many people. Experts argue that unlike public transport, the car leaves us in charge of our own destiny, giving us the freedom to travel when and where we want. The car also gives us the opportunity to express ourselves. The kind of vehicle we drive tells the world something about who we are or what we aspire to be. Cars are not simply a means of transport but also something we wear.

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The Financial Costs of Stress

Research carried out by the Health and Safety Council estimates that stress and mental illness continues to be neglected by many businesses, both small and large. And the economic impact of this is huge, costing employers around £26bn a year. Stress at work can lead to a lack of concentration, fatigue and low motivation, all of which will cost the company in terms of low productivity, customer satisfaction and the very reputation of the company itself. Employers are being urged to become more “emotionally intelligent” and to improve the way they deal with stress and mental illness.

Speak up about Stress

Many people find it difficult to talk about their feelings, particularly if we're feeling weak or vulnerable. However, when suffering from stress it's vital you seek help. It's important to feel you can talk honestly with a close friend, a loved one, a work colleague or doctor about what's going on. Stress is easily diagnosed and there is plenty you can do to successfully treat and manage stress. One of the most effective of these is to share your feelings with those you trust. Remember that accepting help and support is not a sign of weakness. Close relationships are vital to helping you get through this tough time.

THE EXCITEMENT OF ADVERTISING

Outdoor advertising, which is undergoing a transformation, has to attract, engage and persuade potential customers because it is the most important way of grabbing their attention. At the core of this transformation is digital screen media, which encompasses everything from giant screens to digital billboards. The technology is cheap and advertising agencies rave about the creative possibilities for advertisements that entertain, amuse, inform, make the environment brighter and enrich our world.

AN UNDESIRABLE BUSINESS

Advertising used to be straightforward. Posters were stuck up on anything from a bus shelter to a motorway hoarding, and many people considered this kind of advertising to be fairly dull, a harmless blot on the landscape and chose to ignore it. These people now regard digital advertising as a form of unwanted, creeping commercialisation which is attracting a buzz simply because it is new, and moreover, damages the environment and is completely unnecessary.

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Does memory have a future?

A good memory is invaluable. The inability to make use of memory and past experience can be a severe limitation on how well we perform both mentally and physically. Nowadays, we rely on computers, mobiles and other electronic devices to store our most important information, which can be recalled at the touch of a button. However, some people are concerned that this reliance on electronic equipment may affect the development of our internal memory system in the future. It remains to be seen whether these concerns turn out to be true.

The role of memory

We like to think of our memory as our record of the past, but all too often memories are influenced by imagination. It is risky, therefore, to regard memory as a source of knowledge, because we will never be able to verify the accuracy of a memory fully. Although memory is an unreliable source of knowledge about the past, its importance in self-identity is unquestionable. When a person suffers memory loss as a result of accident or illness, one of the most distressing consequences is likely to be a loss of self. Indeed, it can be argued that a person's true identity resides in his or her collection of memories.

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Examinations are not fair.

Making judgments about the ability of students based on examinations that take place just once or perhaps twice a year is simply not fair. So many students fail to show their true ability due to anxiety, stress and a number of other factors. Many students who do well in exams do so simply by cramming facts into their heads the week before the exam, to be forgotten by the following weekend. Surely assessment of the work done in class and at home throughout the school year would be a fairer system?

Classroom assessment is idealistic.

It's all very well to talk about teachers judging their students work in the classroom, and students working alone at home on their projects, but everyone knows that continuous assessment doesn't work like that. Teachers are only human, and tend to be softer on their students than an examiner would be (or, in a worse scenario, harder on a student they don't like). Parents or older siblings help students with the projects they have to do at home, even if it's just coming up with ideas for them. Exams may not be fun, but at least we get to see what each individual student is capable of

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Killing for nothing

Under no circumstances should capital punishment be condoned. It is a barbaric form of punishment, which serves no useful purpose as it obviously does not act as a deterrent. In the USA, for example, the use of capital punishment increased greatly during the eighties and the nineties but with no corresponding effect on the crime rate. Another argument says that it effectively deals with people who are a danger to society. But in any case, they spend years, even decades, on death row while their appeals are used up, and might as well just be sentenced to life imprisonment with no possibility of parole.

Innocents die

The system by which people are convicted is simply not as foolproof as some people would have us believe, and the odds against an innocent person being killed are just too high. While the risk of this happening remains a very real possibility, the death sentence is unacceptable. In this age of DNA evidence, many people in American prisons awaiting execution have been found to be innocent. The other problem is prejudice. Even if a person is found guilty and convicted of a crime, they are likely to get a worse sentence if they are from an ethnic minority, and isproportionately large numbers of these people are executed every year in the States.

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Censorship – a necessary evil

We are constantly being exposed to dangerous opinions and need to be protected from these, just as we need to protect our children from bad influences on television. This is even more important in the age of the internet, when anyone can write whatever they want and upload it on a webpage. The voices of those who speak out against the establishment should also be silenced as they aim to undermine the stability of the state. Free speech should only be granted to those prepared to use it responsibly.

Freedom of speech is a human right

Free speech uses the word 'free' for a reason, and any limitation on it means censorship. Censorship infringes on our civil and human rights and cannot be allowed in any form in a democratic country. Many governments use censorship as a way of silencing their detractors, thus robbing the ordinary citizen of the right to be informed. Censorship begins with a few words here and there, and ends in newspapers being closed down and voices of protest imprisoned. Under no circumstances, therefore, can censorship be condoned.

C2 Proficient (CPE) Essay Topic 12

Buy, buy, buy!

The simple tragedy of waste is this: we are using up the earth's irreplaceable natural resources, creating unnecessary products and packaging, in a mad rush for instantly gratifying consumption.

Out-of-date mobile phones, sound systems, even cars are piling up in landfills all around the world. There was nothing wrong with the old model, except for its lack of flash,.Why can't we choose a product that meets our needs and use it until it wears out? We have been conditioned to have needs that change as frequently as the seasons and satisfying these needs comes at a very high price, and not just the one on the price tag!

You can do something

There are several simple ways in which you can act to halt the madness of needless consumption. As an individual, change our consumption habits to minimize your non-biodegradable waste and optimise your use of reusable packaging. This will require some sacrifices. As a member of a group, be active in drawing up a waste charter for your place of work or school. Educate others. As a consumer, punish companies that are wasteful and pollute by boycotting their products. This, above all, requires awareness, and the dedication to do your research.

C2 Proficient (CPE) Essay Topic 13

Taking advantage of freedom

The freedom of the press is one of our most precious social principles, but this freedom is given to reporters and editors to allow them to report on matters of general public interest and concern and not as a means of generating newsprint by harassing ordinary citizens and celebrities. The intrusion of the press into people's private lives is not legitimised by the fact that there are readers who want a certain kind of tabloid story, nor can it be justified by the simple argument that "the public has the right to know". The modern press should not be allowed to generate stories by taking outrageous photographs and certainly cannot be trusted to write its own rule of conduct.

How free is free?

A great deal is said about free press and the freedom of speech. They are both cherished in our western value system. Yet just how free is the press? We may find out a lot of scandals about public figures, real and imaginary, but do we hear about what is really going on in the world? Do the people with the money, the really big fish, shake in their boots at the thought of their illicit business dealings being revealed? Not usually; after all, they own the press. It's an important question to ask – who owns the press- because he is one who wields a great deal of power. We pity the citizens of backward countries that allow their rulers to own the press, but are we any better off really? Do we even know who is in control?

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Paying for a Privilege

Why couldn't those who benefit from the better job prospects that studying at university gives them not be asked to pay for the service? People who get a higher education invariably get better paid jobs, so I don't see why those who cannot or choose not to go to university should indirectly support those who do. A loan system whereby student loans would be gradually repaid after graduation not only seems a fairer system but might also encourage those that currently get to university not to take the opportunity for granted and make a bit more of their time there.

Who Should Pay for Valuable Skills

There are compelling reasons for offering free post-secondary education. Some of these reasons are ideological and spring from the concept that money should never be the deciding factor in a talented student's decision to pursue a further education. It is to the advantage of the society as a whole if the brightest and best become highly educated specialists with valuable skills. Everyone benefits from a scientific advancement, an artistic masterpiece, or the steady hand of a surgeon. A side effect could be more selectivity in admissions to institutions of higher education, and a closer link between supply and demand for various skill in the society. But provided there is a fair evaluation system for the association of places, is this necessarily a bad thing?

Throwing things away

Every week many of us throw away a huge amount of stuff, ranging from packaging for food and plastic bottles to old newspapers and junk mail. Fortunately some, though not all, of this can be recycled successfully and both governments and private citizens seem to be doing their best to ensure that this happens nowadays. We should be careful not to congratulate ourselves too soon, however, because whether enough is being done is highly debatable. For example, the vast numbers of plastic bags used, many of which are not biodegradable, damage the environment, most notably the oceans, where they endanger marine life.

Communications technology

It seems that nowadays we keep electronic products such as mobile phones for only a short time, because we are bombarded with highly effective advertising that persuades us that we need to discard our present model in favour of the latest, improved device. Our willingness to discard such products may also be a consequence of the dizzying pace of technological change. We can hardly be expected to be content to remain behind the times, and we naturally wish to keep up with the latest exciting features and developments in communications technologies.