

English 79:
Preparatory English

Mastery Essay Information

Packet

Fall 2011

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English 79 Mastery Essay Information

Composition Level II

Fall 2011

The essay by Heather Someville entitled "Limit Set on Repeating College Courses" originally appeared in the *Fresno Bee* July 21, 2011, and will be the basis of the topic for the Fall 2011 Mastery Essay (see pages two and three). Before coming to write your Mastery Essay, you may read, annotate, and discuss the essay by yourself, with others, and in your English class. Your teacher may want to include other readings or materials on this topic to discuss as well. You are strongly encouraged to bring your annotated essay with you on the date you write your Mastery Essay. This will be solely your responsibility, not the responsibility of your teacher.

The actual questions to be used on the Mastery Essay will not be announced before the writing day. On the day of the Mastery Essay, you will be given two questions from which to choose. You will not be expected to summarize the essay or to extract text from the essay, but being able to do this may help you to answer the essay question more thoroughly.

The Directions for your Mastery Essay will look something like this:

On the line in the upper right hand corner, insert the three course code digits that your instructor gives you. If English is your second language, check the line marked ESL. Put your Delta student identification number on the face page and the upper right hand corners of each lined page. In the space provided, put the number of the question that you have chosen to answer (either #1 or #2).

You will have eighty minutes in which to plan, write, and proofread an essay in response to the following topic. Take some time to make a plan of what you want to say before you start writing. Leave some time at the end of the period to proofread. Your essay should introduce the subject and answer the question with specifics and examples.

You may cross out and add information as necessary. Although what you say is more important than how much you say, you will want to write a complete essay rather than a few short paragraphs. **Use ink**, and write as legibly as possible.

Following these directions will be two essay prompts from which to choose.

Limit Set On Repeating College Courses

Chronic flunkers take up room, resources.

Posted at 10:12 PM on Thursday, July 21, 2011

By Heather Somerville / The Fresno Bee

Community college students no longer have the luxury of repeating courses four, five and even six times on the state's dime.

Education leaders decided last week to limit the number of times students can repeat classes using state money. The state pays 90% of the cost of community college classes to keep tuition affordable — but low costs also encourage students to drop classes more frequently.

With demand for classes at an all-time high and course selections diminishing, competition for spot in community colleges is fierce. Students who repeatedly enroll in classes and withdraw or flunk make the problem worse: They take seats away from new students and strain the system's scant resources by delaying their graduation.

"We have too many students waiting in the wings for their first crack at a class," said Brent Calvin, interim president at College of the Sequoias in Visalia.

Pushing students to be more serious

The stricter rules may push students to be more serious about completing classes, Calvin said. But they don't address the bigger issue — students who are unprepared for college-level classes and repeatedly flunk out.

With dwindling resources, community colleges struggle to serve a diverse pool of students. Limiting students' chances to repeat classes doesn't solve their academic challenges, but it does free up money for services such as tutoring and counseling, and sends the message that completing classes is crucial, officials say.

The Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges approved the change for the spring, trying to weed out chronic flunkers, make room for new students and save money. The new rules will allow students to take required classes three times, and they can petition for a fourth if they can prove a hardship such as illness kept them out of class.

Students who can't finish with a passing grade can keep enrolling — but only if the college agrees to pay for it. And at a time of absolute rationing, most community colleges would be hesitant to hand out any extra funding.

For a three-credit class, students pay \$108 and the state pays \$450. Colleges would have to pay the state's share from their reserves if they let students repeat a class more than three times because state law doesn't let students pay the full cost. Rules

that took effect in 2009 allowed students to take a course up to seven times and receive state funding. Prior to 2009, the state did not limit class repeats.

With lax rules about class scheduling, California's community colleges make it easy for students to enroll in courses they might not be prepared for or interested in, said Scott Lay, president of the nonprofit advocacy group Community College League of California. Students might make it halfway through before realizing that they're failing and drop the class.

"The community college system has said, 'We're going to let you keep trying over and over again,' "Lay said. "By the third time, maybe we need to find out why you're not succeeding in that course."

The new rules are popular among community college officials who are scrambling to make room for incoming students. But local leaders admit they are politically easy to support because few students repeat classes more than three times.

Some take same class up to seven times

Out of 2,436 students in the State Center Community College District who took intermediate algebra in the spring 2011 semester, 22 had enrolled at least three times before, and some were taking it for the seventh time. The district has five campuses across Fresno and Madera counties, including Fresno City College and Reedley College.

An average of 4% of West Hills Community College District students repeat courses three or more times, based on data from 2007 to 2011. The district includes colleges in Coalinga and Lemoore.

The real concern, some say, is the number of students who repeat courses and continue to fail. Of the 22 algebra repeaters at State Center, just half passed the class.

Community colleges have struggled for years to improve low completion rates. From 1992-2010, more than 82,000 students statewide repeated English courses more than three times. Despite multiple attempts, 40% withdrew from the class and 22% failed. The math numbers are just as dismal: out of 155,000 students, 38% withdrew and 27% failed — even after more than three tries.

"We have students that come out of high school with a 2.0 GPA and haven't had math," Calvin said. "For us to think that they'll be capable to come straight [to college-level classes] and have a different result than they had in high school ... that's a recipe for disaster."

Limiting enrollment isn't the cure for many struggling students, said Kevin Feliciano, president of the Student Senate for California Community Colleges. The senate recently retracted its support for the class repeat policy change. Feliciano said that he recognizes colleges have limited resources, but they should instead provide more intervention and counseling services.

More guidance needed

While some officials blame high schools for failing to adequately prepare students, they also recognize community colleges have to do a better job of motivating students to complete classes. Fresno City College Interim President Tony Cantu said some students need more guidance on choosing the right classes. But sometimes, he said, "life happens."

On diverse community college campuses such as City College, many students have full-time jobs and families. Some are returning students who might have been out of school for years and are unprepared, and many low-income students withdraw when they can't afford tuition.

"When life intervenes ... it's oftentimes easier for a student to quit a class rather than quit a job or relationship," said Daniel Gai, former Fresno City College student body president.

Gai, 34, would know — he dropped his spring semester classes to dedicate more time to student government and running his family's business. He then had to resign as student body president because he was no longer enrolled.

Each time "life happens," it drains a little more from the state coffers. The state spends about \$1.5 million on students who repeat classes more than four times, according to an analysis by the Community College League of California. The cost is a small portion of the system's \$6.2 billion annual budget, Lay said, but the savings would help colleges that now cover the state's share of enrollment costs. College of the Sequoias, for instance, did not receive state funding for 1,800 students last year.

Just once for state-funded courses?

The Board of Governors also is considering limiting repeat enrollments in physical activity and fine arts classes for 2012-13. Allowing students to take a state-funded activity class only once would save the state \$60 million, according to Paul Steenhausen, who evaluates community college policies at the California Legislative Analyst's Office.

Some students say limiting course repeats will force students to be more responsible.

"I think three times is plenty," said Vanessa Cabrera, a sophomore and social work major at Fresno City College. "I don't even know why a student would take a course more than two times."

Tony Capetillo said many students come to class "either for a financial aid check or their parents are making them," and they end up dropping or failing the course. Capetillo, a 34-year-old networking and computer technician major, said about seven out of the 50 or so students in his summer intermediate algebra class are repeats. The seats "could have gone to a student who was really serious," he said.

It's not just apathetic students dropping or flunking classes, though — some repeaters are among the most motivated students. Reedley College student Jaime

Andersen enrolled in a chemistry class in the summer of 2010, but decided to drop it when she realized she might get a C. She wanted an A. She said she re-enrolled in the course, required for her nursing major, for the fall — her last chance, since she plans to transfer to Fresno State next spring.

“Receiving a good grade is pretty much everything in certain majors,” she said. “It's important that you have the option to repeat classes.”

Scoring and Evaluation

Scoring

Two English 79 Instructors other than your own will read your essay and assign it a score between one and five; scores of three and above are passing (see “English 79 Scoring Guide”). If the two instructors disagree about whether your essay should pass, a third instructor will read your essay and decide whether it passes or fails.

The instructors will be paying special attention to the following:

1. Thesis responding accurately to the assigned task.
2. Structured and organized development of the subject.
3. Sufficient specific information to illustrate and/or support the thesis.
4. Correct use of grammar and mechanics.

Dictionaries will be allowed.

Evaluation

Because English 79 is a competency-based course, the course grade will reflect not only the work a student has completed throughout the semester but also the skill level the student has achieved by the end of the semester. Your teacher will determine the final course grade on the basis of the quality of the coursework and the final examination (worth 60%) and the Mastery Essay (worth 40% “pass” or 40% “fail”).

Answering Essay Questions and Taking Essay Examinations

Essay examinations are one of the practical but demanding applications of the basic principles of good composition under a rigid time limit. Additionally, essay questions test your thinking and writing ability, including your knowledge of Standard Written English.

Answering Essay Questions

1. Read through the examination questions carefully and thoughtfully before doing any writing. Try to decide exactly what the questions call for and what they do not call for. Choose the question which is easier for you to write about or the question for which you will have the most to say. Don't spend too much time deciding upon which question to answer.
2. Organize and plan your answer before writing. In a timed writing assignment, you will probably not have time to write several drafts or even two drafts. Therefore, it is important that you decide upon the important ideas you think should be covered before you begin to write. Jot down details for yourself if this helps. Writing down your thesis and your topic sentences is a good way to make a brief organizational plan for your essay.
3. Write in specific, concrete, and precise terms. Essay questions are usually phrased in fairly general terms, but you want to answer the question with examples, specifics, and details. Be sure each body paragraph is thoroughly developed.
4. Proofread your essay carefully before handing it in. Make sure you have answered the question thoroughly. Finally, check punctuation and spelling. Make sure you haven't left out any important words.
5. If you extract a quote from the professional essay from which the prompt has been drawn, be sure that you put quotes around any material that you extract verbatim. Also, be sure to refer to the author of the essay and the essay title. You must give credit where credit is due. Doing otherwise is known as plagiarism.

The following is a list of words that may appear in the prompt for the Mastery Essay:

Analyze	Separate the main ideas in order to examine them in detail.
Compare	Look for qualities or characteristics that resemble each other. Emphasize similarities.
Contrast	Stress the dissimilarities, differences, or unlikeness of things.
Define	Give concise, clear, and authoritative meanings. Don't give details, but make sure to give the limits of the definition.
Describe	Recount, characterize, sketch, or relate in sequence or story form.
Discuss	Examine, analyze carefully, and give reasons and details.
Evaluate	Carefully appraise the problem, citing both advantages and limitations.
Explain or Show How	Clarify and interpret the material you present. Give specific reasons.
Identify	Briefly state dates, people, places or events which set this fact or figure apart or make it outstanding.
Illustrate	Use one or more concrete examples to explain.
Interpret	Translate, give examples of, or comment on, a subject, giving your judgment about it.
Justify	Prove or give reasons for decisions or conclusions, trying to be convincing.
Relate	Show how things are related to or connected with each other or how one causes another, correlates with another, or is like another.
Review	Examine a subject critically, analyzing and commenting on the important statements to be made about it.
State	Present the main point in a brief, clear sequence, usually omitting details.
Summarize	Give the main points in condensed form, like the summary of a chapter.

English 79 Scoring Guide

- 5** A 5 essay *clearly demonstrates competence* in writing in both form and content, although it may have occasional errors. A 5 essay
- effectively addresses the writing task;
 - is well-organized;
 - develops the thesis with details and examples;
 - displays competence with English grammar;
 - demonstrates sentence variety.
- 4** A 4 essay *demonstrates competence* in writing in both form and content, though it will have occasional errors. A 4 essay
- may address some parts of the writing task more effectively than others;
 - is generally well-organized, though it may be more formulaic than a 5 essay;
 - develops the thesis with a sufficient number of details and/or examples;
 - displays competence with English grammar, although errors will occur;
 - demonstrates some sentence variety.
- 3** A 3 essay shows *beginning competence in writing in both form and content*. A 3 essay
- addresses the writing task but may address it in a partial or incomplete way;
 - is adequately organized (and may not contain five paragraphs);
 - uses some details and/or examples to support the thesis;
 - demonstrates adequate but inconsistent or undistinguished facility with grammar and syntax.
- 2** A 2 essay *contains problems in either form or content*, although it may demonstrate some competence. A 2 essay
- responds inadequately to the writing task;
 - fails to organize ideas in a logical way;
 - fails to support the thesis with specific examples;
 - accumulates errors in grammar and/or syntax to a distracting degree.
- 1** A 1 essay *contains problems in either form or content or in both form and content*. A 1 essay
- fails to respond to the writing task;
 - shows no control of organization;
 - fails to develop the thesis with specific details or examples;
 - demonstrates serious and persistent errors with grammar and syntax.

Options for English 79 Students

English 79 students who fail the Mastery Essay have several options for achieving Level III. They are:

1. Repeating English 79. Students who earn a “D” or “F” in a course may repeat that course. The new grade will replace the old grade in the students’ overall GPA, but the old grade will remain on the students’ transcript. (Note: Students’ financial aid packages may be affected by their choosing to repeat a course in which they have previously earned a “D” or “F.”)
2. Retake: challenging Level II. Students who do not earn a “C” or better in English 79 may challenge Level II by going to the Assessment Center, DeRicco Student Services Building, Room 110, and requesting a Level II Composition Retake. Students will be given the COMPASS test again (this is the assessment test taken upon entering the college). The COMPASS test may be retaken 30 days after the first time, and once a year thereafter. To reach Composition Level III, students must retake both the reading skills test and writing skills test. Reaching Level III does not alter the students’ standing or change the grade in their English 79 class, but should they pass the retake, they become eligible to enroll English 1A.
3. Filing a portfolio. **With the instructor's endorsement only**, a student may file a portfolio in lieu of a passing score on the Mastery Essay. See the portfolio guidelines for information on this process.

Note: Students **must** earn a “C” or better in English 79 in order to meet the composition requirements for the AA or AS degree.

English 79 Mastery Essay: Portfolio Criteria

Function

The portfolio process gives individual instructors the opportunity to endorse the work of students who deserve a second assessment of their writing skills. These are usually students who have done well in class and have had excellent attendance, although they failed the Mastery. The portfolio process should be made available only to those students who meet the criteria below. It is **not** intended to be an alternative vehicle for the placement of borderline students. *Students cannot submit portfolios without their instructor's endorsement; it is entirely the instructor's decision whether or not to file an individual portfolio.*

Format

1. The portfolio must include a minimum of three complete essays written prior to the Mastery Essay. The student's failing Mastery Essay must be included as well.
2. The essays should demonstrate mastery of analytical and/or expository prose. They should not be purely descriptive or narrative.
3. Two of the essays must be demand in-class writing samples; one of them should be representative of the student's out-of-class work, accompanied by rough drafts if possible.
4. Each essay must demonstrate minimum competence in writing as delineated on the "English 79 Scoring Guide" by a score of 3.
5. The student must write a brief letter (two or three paragraphs) to the Portfolio Committee telling why his or her portfolio is deserving of a passing score. This letter should be written in class.

Portfolio submissions should be clearly identified by:
Instructor Name and Course Code Number,
Student Name and Delta Identification Number

Assignment descriptions or handouts should accompany each paper submitted in the portfolio.

Portfolios must be submitted to the English 79 Administrator one week from the Reading Day.

Sequence of English Composition Courses at Delta College

Placement in English composition courses is determined by appropriate test scores or course prerequisites.

Level I

English 70
English 85 (ESL)
English 87

Level II

English 79

Level III

English 1A

Level I Writing Programs

English 70 and English 85 (ESL)

English 87

English 70 and 85 are parallel basic writing courses, designed to build reading comprehension as a context for writing in personal, college, and work settings. Each student compiles a portfolio to display examples of her/his writing, including a summary of a short article; a short essay with revision; a letter for the real world; and an in-class timed writing responding to a selection from *The Final Draft* student magazine.

Working in collaboration, English 70 and English 85 faculty evaluate student portfolios to gauge readiness for English 87 or English 79. Students may earn Credit grades with recommendation to English 79 or to English 87.

English 87 is an intermediate writing course, specifically designed to prepare basic writers for English 79. Each student practices writing short essays, demonstrating growth of organization and development skills, in addition to strengthening sentence level skills.

The English 79 Program

Level II

Program History

English 79 is a pivotal composition course in the sequence of writing classes at Delta College. In 1986, Delta College recognized that many of its "college-level" students enrolling in English 1A, the freshman composition transfer course, were in fact not prepared to achieve success with college-level writing tasks. As a result of this recognition, the English faculty designed English 79, a preparatory composition class whose instruction bridged the gap between level 1 writing courses (English 70, 85, and 87) and college-level composition courses (English 1A, English 1B and English 1D). Between 800 and 1,000 students complete English 79 each semester, giving it one of the largest enrollments of any English program on the campus.

Program Philosophy

There is a remarkable consensus among English 79 instructors about the purpose and success of the course. Designed as a developmental course, English 79 is premised on the notion that students from widely varying backgrounds with a diverse range of literacy skills can master a basic essay format and the rules of Standard Written English. Most instructors in the English 79 program structure their courses on the revision model, including prewriting, rough draft review, editing, and final reading days. The curriculum includes instruction in the grammar, syntax, and punctuation rules of Standard Written English; repeated practice with the writing process; the reading and analysis of model essays; and practice with "on-demand" essays.

The English 79 Mastery Essay

During the fifteenth week of the semester, all students enrolled in this course undertake a mastery essay that determines whether or not they advance to Level III and become eligible for English 1A. This essay is expository in nature, and students are asked to compose an essay on a topic generated from an essay they have read beforehand. Students write the mastery essay during an eighty-minute class period. The essays are marked with class code and student identification number, and the English 79 faculty holistically score them one week after the administration. The scoring process is a blind one, with discrepancies (pass/fail disagreements in the awarded scores) resolved by an experienced third reader. Students must pass the mastery essay in order to be eligible for English 1A, and the score on the mastery essay also contributes to 40% of their course grade.

The English 1A Program

Level III

Program History

English 1A is a college-level composition class that is a requirement for graduation from all four-year degree programs in the UC and CSU systems. Students who score Level III on the assessment-placement test at Delta are eligible to take English 1A, although they may take a lower level composition class if they wish. The course presupposes that students have mastered the basic rules of Standard Written English as they apply to syntax, grammar, and punctuation and are ready to experiment with style and structure in order to fulfill a particular purpose and/or accommodate a specific audience.

Program Philosophy

Instructors in the English Department are in agreement as to the writing standards that English 1A students must meet, but they may choose to present the material in different modes. Some instructors prefer to teach to the rhetorical pattern of the essay, others prefer material that is thematically linked, and yet others may combine the two methods. Most instructors use some form of the revision model that emphasizes prewriting, writing, revision, and peer reaction. Textbooks for the course range from those that focus solely on the essay format to those that include poetry and short story selections thematically related to the essays. Close reading of the literature for an understanding of structure, tone, and authorial purpose as well as for content is an integral part of the course.

The English 1A Mastery Essay

The English 1A Mastery Essay is administered at the end of the semester. Similar to the English 79 Mastery Essay, the 1A Mastery Essay requires that a student adopt an argumentative stance on an issue or problem. Students are presented with a quotation that they must summarize and analyze. They have fifty minutes in which to formulate a thesis and support it. Not all instructors require their students to write the Mastery Essay, but those who do then participate in the holistic reading of the essays. Some instructors choose to use the essay as an ungraded assignment for which the student earns participation points; others assign it as a graded essay; still others use it as an indicator to the student of his relative success on a demand writing assignment. Since virtually all colleges and universities require that matriculating students produce an entrance writing sample of a similar nature, many instructors feel that the Mastery Essay provides the student with valuable practice. To prepare the student for the Mastery Essay, many instructors have timed writing assignments built into their curricula.

Five Sample Passing Essays

The following five passing student essays (pages 21 - 29), which follow Oskar's essay, "America the Promised Land," were written in response to the Mastery Prompt on page 20. The writers had read and discussed Oskar's essay before they wrote their Mastery Essay. However, they had not seen the topic beforehand, and they had only 80 minutes to write their essay in class. The sample essays have been word-processed; however, nothing else has been changed.

Sample essay #1 was written in response to topic #1 on page 20. Sample essays #2, 3, 4, and 5 were written in response to topic #2 on page 20.

Refer back to page 6 of this packet to see what the readers will be looking for in a passing essay. If you were a reader, what score would you give each of these essays? Why? Read these essays and discuss the scores with your teacher. Remember that all of these essays passed, meaning they received a score of 3 or above. The 79 Scoring Criteria for passing essays is listed below.

- 5 A 5 essay *clearly demonstrates competence* in writing in both form and content, although it may have occasional errors. A 5 essay
 - effectively addresses the writing task;
 - is well-organized;
 - develops the thesis with details and examples;
 - displays competence with English grammar;
 - demonstrates sentence variety.

- 4 A 4 essay demonstrates competence in writing in both form and content, though it will have occasional errors. A 4 essay
 - may address some parts of the writing task more effectively than others;
 - is generally well-organized, though it may be more formulaic than a 5 essay;
 - develops the thesis with a sufficient number of details and/or examples;
 - displays competence with English grammar, although errors will occur;
 - demonstrates some sentence variety.

- 3 A 3 essay shows beginning competence in writing in both form and content. A 3 essay
 - addresses the writing task but may address it in a partial or incomplete way;
 - is adequately organized (and may not contain five paragraphs);
 - uses some details and/or examples to support the thesis;
 - demonstrates adequate but inconsistent or undistinguished facility with grammar and syntax.

America the Promised Land

by Oskar

“America lives in the heart of every man everywhere who wishes to find a region where he will be free to work out his destiny as he chooses.” This profound quote from Woodrow Wilson captures the thinking of many of us who at some time desired to come to this country. Americans and non-Americans hear of the grandeur of this country where opportunities and dreams are made real. America is a mosaic—diverse in people, hopes, and dreams. People from the eastern and western hemispheres, from equatorial regions, and from south and north dream about emigrating to the United States of America. To those who live in tyranny, America is the land of perfect democracy. To those who are hungry, America is the land of abundance. To those who suffer abuse and persecution for political reasons, America is the land of hope, peace and tranquility. To those who carry the yoke of injustice, exploitation and poverty, America is the land of fairness and solace. To children and young people who aspire to obtain excellent degrees, America is the land of education. To immigrants of all ages and cultures, including myself, America is the Promised Land, which is supposed to offer us a prosperous life. But upon arriving, do we feel accepted and welcomed? Are all our problems solved? Do we find the new Eden here? Perhaps some things turn out to be as we were expecting. But, for the most part, we find a sizzling cauldron where our identity is lost, where a non-defined culture confuses us, and where an egocentric and materialistic society absorbs us.

When we come to America seeking to fulfill a dream, we come fragile, vulnerable, and needy. We lose our identity because the influence of American civilization exerts powerful pressure over our former and personal cultural principles. Like newborns, we find ourselves submerged in a strange, vast, and immense world. At the beginning we focus on accomplishing our goal; then we realize that among the many dreams we are looking for, the most important one is to understand who we are and to whom we are relating.

But that quest is quite difficult to comprehend. We begin our adaptation process turning in all directions, trying to find models or patterns to follow. To our disappointment, the road goes in many directions. At home, our parents try to keep our own customs alive. In the streets we get different messages from our peers. In school we share with people from different backgrounds and cultures. The consumerist society flashes us with announcements everywhere, telling us to be somebody other than ourselves. We end up believing we need to adopt those false appearances to be accepted and to finally feel as if we belong. The younger generations anxiously begin to look for assurance, perhaps in what they wear, in drugs, and in gangs, among others. And then the moment comes when we wake up in darkness to find ourselves lost in that ocean of choices without knowledge of

ourselves. We are neither from here, the new country, nor from there, the former one.

The question of who we are is closely related with the issue of culture. In America we do not find a culture that helps us to shape our social, ethical, and sacred values. It is easy to think that in the melting pot of American society all the cultures harmoniously relate and associate. We imagine that each of the ingredients for the special recipe mixes in the pot without losing its proper characteristics, contributing flavor, smell, color, spice and texture to the whole dish, but the struggle for survival and dominance does not permit such compatible relationships. We come to America marked by our own traditions and customs. We come from homogenous countries, where one culture prevails. However, here, in the United States, there is no one tradition that can unite all of us. When we celebrate New Year's Holiday in Colombia, for example, all business and activities in the nation come to a halt, because we all focus our attention on that particular holiday. The holiday involves at least three days of celebration. We grow up celebrating different feasts and recalling different traditions that shape our cultural identity. In the sizzling cauldron of America, all that beautiful sacredness of our former traditions dies to give way to celebrations that merely emphasize material aspects.

Christmas is a season when the shopping malls are beautifully decorated to attract people to spend money. Halloween is a time to buy expensive costumes. Valentine's Day is a particular occasion to buy a gift for our significant other. Mother's Day is an opportunity to give things to our mothers. And, of course, there are birthdays. I have a friend who always gives more than one present to his son for his birthday. Last year, because of some economic crisis at his home, the best he could do was to accompany his son to his soccer game and to take him to his favorite restaurant. After the event, my friend shared with me his disillusion. He told me his son did not feel happy because he was expecting to receive some material presents. When the culture in which we live does not instill in us the appreciation of our traditions and our families as a central nucleus in society, we get confused and disoriented.

Another aspect that makes America a sizzling cauldron is the egocentrism and materialism so evident in the philosophy of life in this country. Success is measured merely by material achievements. Most of us come from countries with more economic limitations, where access to material things is more difficult. Consequently, we develop a deeper sense of community, and we focus more on simple ways to celebrate life. In America, the primary goal of many is to drive an expensive car and to buy a four-bedroom house with a big yard and a swimming pool. To have the most sophisticated cell phone and the most modern laptop is crucial to others. To wear the most fashionable clothes and coolest tennis shoes seems essential for young people.

To be able to compete and fill the demands created by this economic system, we became slaves of work; consequently, we do not have time to socialize and to strengthen our bonds with each other. The spacious house with a big yard and swimming pool becomes a hotel where we occasionally rest, many times ignoring others who live with us. We can live in a neighborhood for many years without knowing who is living next door. We desperately try to alleviate our lack of relationships by possessing things, even beautiful and exotic pets. Young people try

to find in gangs the support and the affection that should have been provided in their homes. We are captivated by the comforts of this society and become intoxicated faithful followers of capitalism.

The first longing we had for a better and more humane life becomes opaque or obscured. Slowly, we are absorbed by the gigantic system that praises material things over the person. The consequence of this is the immense loneliness in which people live today. When we feel that we do not belong, without any culture that reaffirms our aspirations, we are living in a society where chaos and confusion prevail. This type of civilization is not the one we dreamed about when we thought of coming to this country. Surely, many immigrants have found in America the Promised Land that has embraced them and that has offered them solace and a prosperous life. However, many other immigrants have not felt welcomed. For many, America is not the melting pot where identity and our culture are preserved, but the sizzling cauldron where aspirations and dreams are boiled away. Not only were our dreams not fulfilled in coming to America, but also, ironically, our identity and culture have vanished in the country of the Promises.

The Topic

Choose one. Circle the number of the topic you have chosen to write about on the **FIRST** page.

Essay Topic #1

More than any other society in the world, America is a land where people from all over come together to create a multi-ethnic society. The “melting pot” is an analogy for the way in which this kind of society develops, where the ingredients in the “pot” (people of different cultures, races and religions) are “melted together” so as to make something new. Another analogy for a multi-ethnic society is the “salad bowl,” where people of different cultures, races, and religions are all mixed together but preserve the uniqueness of their own original culture.

Write an essay in which you name your own cultural identity: for instance, Vietnamese-American, Mexican-American, Irish-American, etc., and discuss some aspects of your original culture that you and/or your family and/or community have preserved in America.

OR

If you feel you have mostly lost your original culture and cultural values, which Oskar believes will invariably happen in America, then write an essay in which you discuss some aspects of American culture that you regard as your own.

Essay Topic #2

Oskar writes: “Christmas is a season when the shopping malls are beautifully decorated to attract people to spend money. Halloween is a time to buy expensive costumes. Valentine’s Day is a particular occasion to buy a gift for our significant other. Mother’s Day is an opportunity to give things to our mothers. And, of course, there are birthdays. . . .” Aside from the material nature of American holidays, Oskar also stresses that emigrants’ cultural traditions are lost in America and not replaced with any one tradition that unites everyone. He says, “In the sizzling cauldron of America, all that beautiful sacredness of our former traditions dies to give way to celebrations that merely emphasize material aspects.”

Do you agree with Oskar that holidays celebrated in America focus primarily on buying things? Or do you believe that individuals and families in America make the holidays mean something more than an opportunity to spend money?

After thinking about how you, your family and/or your friends celebrate the holidays, write an essay in which you respond to one of the above two questions. Limit your discussion to no more than three holidays.

Sample Essay #1

Traditions

by Christopher Espanola

Everyone comes from somewhere. America was founded by pioneers wanting a dream that their own country could not offer them. This was a dream of freedom. Freedom to believe in whomever one wanted to believe in. To start fresh, build a new life and achieve happiness. Whether that happiness was to come from a new government, a new job or a new home, was the option to whomever wanted to come to America. America is the land of opportunity. However, through reaching this opportunity, individuals lose their cultures traditions and values, trying to realize the American dream. My family and I are not some of these individuals. We are of Mexican-American culture and have preserved our culture through our music, food and celebrations.

First, my family and I have preserved our culture through our music. My family is made up of many musically talented individuals. My grandfather for one, is very knowledgeable at the guitar. However, he knows the basics to most investments from the piano to the drums. Mexican-American culture can be remembered through its music. From the classical style of flamenco, to the ecstatic style of salsa, my grandfather had taught his kids, my uncles and aunts, to play instruments in order to play these styles of music. He personally has taught me to play the classical style of flamenco guitar playing that is very big among guitar players in Mexico and of Spain. Every so often, my family will get together and play some form of music from our Mexican culture. My family at one point even played in a Spanish-speaking, Mexican Christian church. There they played Mexican Christian music similar to the mariachi music style.

Second, our Mexican-American culture has been preserved with our food. A culture's food, besides their language, is probably the most kept tradition. My family is no different. Whenever we get together, we have a bountiful feast. These get togethers could consist of a member in the families birthday or just a spur of the moment family greeting. Usually the women in the family cook. This is very common in Mexican culture. My grandmother is very good at making enchiladas.

This is a type of meat such as chicken or beef that is wrapped in a tortilla with chilli sauce added and is baked. My mother makes chicken tacos regularly. Tacos are another common Mexican dish. My grandfather makes very good menudo. Menudo is a Mexican soup made with pork skin, tissue and other spices and flavors. My family and I enjoy these foods that we keep from our Mexican culture.

Last, my family and I have kept our culture alive through our family celebrations. Parties or fiestas as we like to call them are all family and friend oriented. Birthday parties are a big deal in my family's culture. All of our family members attend birthday parties. Birthday parties are a celebration of one's aging of a year. Presents and materialistics are not necessary for one to attend a member of my family's birthday parties. For us it is more important to show up with nothing than to not show up at all. In our culture we have piñatas at our birthday parties. These piñatas are decorated with ribbon and designs. We fill them with candy and let the kids hit the piñata with a bat in order to break the candy free. Holidays are a big part of my family's culture. Thanksgiving is a time for us to get together, share stories and food. Thanksgiving maybe an American holiday but the meaning comes from our Mexican culture. It is a time to get together as a family, spend time together, eat delicious food and conversate with one another. That is what celebrations mean to us. We keep our family bond close with celebrations.

My family comes from a Mexican culture. we have become Mexican Americans, however we still keep the roots of our culture through our traditions. We keep it through our music. We also preserve our culture through our food. Last, we keep it alive with our family celebrations. Many cultures lose their uniqueness when they come to America. My family and I have kept ours alive.

Holidays Celebrated in America

by Donia Lazkani

Holidays in America are a time to share with family members and friends. In America we celebrate many holidays in a year. It seems that Americans celebrate a holiday every month. As I purchase my yearly calender, I usually flip through it to see the holidays ahead of time. Sometimes we celebrate more than one holiday in a given month. New Years and Christmas are both holidays in December. Many Americans are excited for the holidays to come as a time to give and receive presents. Holidays may be a time to relax at home from the daily stress of work. Other Americans consider holidays as a time to spend more money. Holidays today focus primarily on buying gifts and spending money then ever before. Three major holidays that Americans celebrate and spend more money are Halloween, Valentines Day, and Christmas. These three holidays are considered to the retail departments as the money-making holidays in which they advertise and decorate the stores to wheel in more customers.

Halloween is a holiday that Americans focus on primarily on buying decorations and costumes. Many people decorate their homes with lights and add scary creatures so that they can enjoy the holiday. These decorations usually range in price. Some decorations can start at a couple of dollars while others can be a couple of hundreds. Some people go to the extreme with the decorations. In addition to decorating the house, costumes are also purchased. In a family of four a person can easily spend over three hundred dollars for costumes. Along with a costume, a mask may also be needed. Purchasing candy for Halloween is a must. My neighbor purchased her candy for Halloween and spent over two hundred dollars. She lives in Lincoln where many families trick or treat for Halloween because she lives only a block away from Spanos that hands out king size candy bars each year.

Valentines Day is a holiday to buy a gift for a significant other. Valentines Day is a holiday where Americans spend money. With this holiday flowers and roses are bought. My neighborhood grocery store allows its customers to pre order roses ahead for time. It is so amazing how much the prices double or even triple for

a dozen of roses. Exchanging jewelry with a significant other is done. Purchasing jewelry is very expensive especially if it is diamonds. I have received so much mail during Valentines Day that advertise the sales of jewelry. These stores try to bring in consumers with the coupons and advertisements. Cards and candy are also exchanged on Valentines Day. My two children want to also celebrate Valentines Day with their friends and teacher. I end up spending more money than I intended to.

Christmas is a holiday that is more expensive than any other holiday. Americans really go over board with Christmas. The Thanksgiving parade in which Santa ends the parade with, is declared the opening season to start Christmas shopping. Many Americans decorate their houses with lights. A Christmas tree is also purchased by many Americans to share the spirit of the season. Many people hire companies to decorate the exterior part of the house. I have seen these houses in Brookside, which is considered an upper scale neighborhood in Stockton. Children can't sleep because they are waiting for their presents. Presents are usually exchanged with the extended family. The malls are decorated with bright lights to draw in people. The malls are typically open longer to accommodate the customers, Booths are also set for families to take a picture with Santa Claus, Americans also focus on family portraits to take and mail out to families that live far away. Christmas today is considered a money-making Season rather than a time to enjoy with the loved ones.

Many Americans focus primarily on buying gifts then they did years ago. Our society is becoming more materialistic than it was twenty years ago. With technology changing people are spending more on the fancy games, phones, and gadgets than they ever did. These three holidays Halloween, Valentines Day, and Christmas are considered a money-making season for the department stores. Americans should be focused on being together and being healthy rather than spending so much money. Having a loved one beside is far more important than receiving or exchanging gifts.

Sample Essay #3

Mastery Essay

by Gena Lancaster

In America the main focus of most holidays is spending money and buying presents. Holidays are supposed to be special days celebrated with family, friends, and traditions. The importance of the holiday is lost when we Americans are overwhelmed by spending money and buying gifts. One holiday that focuses more on gift giving is Christmas, a day that is actually a religious holiday. The true meaning of Christmas is ruined by materialistic American traditions in many ways.

The main part of Christmas to most Americans is gifts. Americans spend the weeks before Christmas shopping at the stores that are all offering huge sales for the holiday. The days before Christmas and the ones right after are where the biggest sales of the year can be found. Children today focus on how many presents they will get, or which child got more. This is due to the materialistic traditions that they have been taught. Americans focus on gifts and money at Christmas time and that is not what Christmas is supposed to be about.

Another way that we Americans are materialistic during the Christmas season is decorations. People will deck out their homes with lights and decorations to celebrate Christmas. Neighbors compete to see who has the most extravagant decorations instead of focusing on what truly Christmas is about. Lights and decorations are just another way for Americans to spend money. Money spent on tons of decorations could actually be used in other ways, to give to others who are not able to have a Christmas. Huge Christmas trees are even purchased to spend more money to decorate. The Christmas tree serves no purpose rather than to put all of the expensive gifts under.

Many Americans use money to make up for the lack of culture or tradition by sending out money to their church. Church is where the tradition of the holiday, celebrating Jesus Christ's birth should be held but people are for the most part too busy. Sending money to the church does not make up for not going. Too many Americans are busy opening their expensive presents to make it to church on Christmas morning. Since Americans primary focus is money and gifts, a person might feel better about him or herself because they were able to send money rather

than attend mass. Children today don't even know that there is a religious reason behind the Christmas Holiday. The first thing a child thinks of when Christmas is mentioned is not Jesus Christ, but presents.

Oskar's view of American holidays and how materialistic Americans are was correct. We Americans take the true meaning of Christmas away and focus on gifts and spending money. Americans ruin the holiday and traditional culture by focusing on materialistic gifts and decorations rather than religion and family. The lack of tradition and culture will only continue if we keep allowing our children to see Christmas as a day to get gifts, or money. The importance of Christmas and other holidays is not money as Oskar points out. Tradition, culture, and family matter.

Sample Essay #4

Mastery Essay

by Danielle Mingua-Lopstain

Holidays are magical times that we can spend with our friends and family to have a good time. Halloween is that time of year when kids dress up in scary costumes and go trick-or-treating. On birthdays we celebrate becoming a year older. Christmas is perhaps the most wonderful time of year when families can sit around their Christmas trees eating ginger bread men or taking a walk around neighborhoods to look at Christmas lights. But are all these wonderful activities really what Holidays are all about these days? It seems we Americans have forgotten the true meaning of Holidays. The only parts of holidays Americans really care about are buying and receiving gifts. Americans have turned Halloween, birthdays, and Christmas into days centered around buying material items.

First, Halloween is a very expensive holiday. Parents must go out and buy bags of candy to give out to trick-or-treaters. They also have to buy their kids expensive costumes because their kids want to have the best costume. Whatever happened to making costumes? It's so much more fun to spend time with the ones we love making costumes. Parents spend a fortune on buying not only a costume, but all the other little pieces to a costume as well. If a kid wants to dress up as a vampire, his or her parents have to buy the costume which includes a black cloak and a black suit. Then they have to buy vampire teeth, make up, gloves, and maybe even a hat. By the time the parents buy all of the costume, they won't have enough money for candy! I feel sorry for the parents who have to buy more than one costume because they have more than one child.

In addition to Halloween being a materialistic day, birthdays are also days centered around buying items. On birthdays, kids expect to get a large amount of gifts. If they only get one gift for their birthday, kids will be depressed. I remember one year my sister only got a new basketball for her birthday. There are many kids who live in third world countries who would've done anything to have a basketball to play with, but not my sister. I later found her crying in her bedroom after we had eaten cake. I asked her why she was crying. She replied, "I only got a stupid

basketball for my birthday!" In addition to buying gifts on birthdays, people also have to buy a huge cake, they to pay to have a party someplace, and they have to buy food along with eating utensils and napkins. When kids have birthday parties, they invite all their friends. Those friends are expected to bring gifts to the party, which calls for spending more money.

Last but not least, probably the most materialistic holiday of the year is Christmas. Every year when I get home from vacationing somewhere for Christmas, the first question I am asked by my friends is, "what did you get for Christmas?" Then when I tell them that I got a couple of new books, they say, "That's it!?" They then proceed to tell me that they received items such as a new iPod, a flashy cell Phone, the latest gaming system, or even a new car. Why are we spending so much money during a time that's supposed to be spent making memories with the ones we love? Christmas is actually the day we're supposed to celebrate the birth of Jesus. I have no clue who came up with the idea that going out and buying expensive cars would be a way to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Not only do people have to buy gifts for their family, but their friends and coworkers as well. Every year, my dad brings home many boxes of candy, popcorn, and gift cards from the school he works at. Then my father feels obligated to buy gifts for his coworkers in return.

In conclusion, I think Halloween, birthdays, and Christmas have all become days that are centered around buying material items. I believe people all over America need to take a moment to realize the true meaning of holidays and appreciate what they have because there are people in the world who have absolutely nothing.

Sample Essay #5

Holidays

by Ariana Lovecchio

Holidays are an important part of America. To America holidays are a time to not have to go to work or to not have to go to school. Has America forgotten what holidays are really for? Have holidays become more about material things? I believe America has forgotten the meaning of holidays and made them all about material things. A few of the holidays that have become more materialistic are Valentine's Day, Birthdays, and Christmas.

First, Valentine's Day has become very materialistic. What is Valentine's Day supposed to be about? It is supposed to be about showing the person you love how much you really love them. But Valentine's Day has become more of an obligation and a way of buying your significant other's love. My Uncle Bobby always feels he has to buy my Aunt Becky an expensive gift for Valentine's Day. This last Valentine's Day I asked my Uncle Bobby what he got my Aunt Becky, and he told me he got her a two carat diamond ring. He said she has always nagged him about getting her a new diamond ring. He then proceeded to say, "That'll buy me her love at least until next Valentine's Day." My uncle Bobby has completely lost the meaning of Valentine's Day.

Second, Birthdays have become more and more materialistic. Birthdays are supposed to be about celebrating the life of a certain human being. Today birthdays are all about gifts. People care more about being able to say they got someone a gift than they do about the actual person they are getting the gift for. I myself am this way. Every time someone I know has a birthday, I think I have to get he or she a gift. About a month ago my friend Ashley had a birthday party. I knew I had to bring a gift but I just didn't have the money to get it. I thought that if I didn't bring a gift I would be looked at like I am not a good friend. I talked with my mom about it, and she told me I didn't need to get her a gift to show her I'm a good friend. She told me to just go to the party, tell Ashley "Happy Birthday," and let Ashley know how

much I enjoy her as my friend. I did what my mom told me, and Ashley didn't even care that I didn't give her a gift.

Last, Christmas has become one of the most materialistic holidays ever. Christmas is supposed to be about celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. Instead, Christmas has become all about receiving gifts. When Christmas comes around, all kids think about is what they want for Christmas. If for some reason kids don't get what they wanted, they cry and complain. Parents have forgotten to teach their children that Christmas is not about receiving gifts, but it's about Jesus' birth. When I was five years old, I really wanted a Barbie Dream house for Christmas. I told my parents that that's all I want for Christmas. When Christmas morning came I didn't get my Barbie Dream house. I started to cry, and my mom took me aside to talk to me. She explained to me that her and my Dad didn't get me what I wanted because they wanted me to realize that Christmas isn't about what I want. She then read Luke 2 from the Bible. That particular chapter talks about Jesus' birth. My mom then said, "This is what Christmas is all about, and don't you forget it."

The meanings of the holidays such as Valentine's Day, Birthdays, and Christmas have been lost. I believe America and I need to stop thinking of ourselves and start thinking about what these holidays are really supposed to be about.