

## English 101 Practice Holistic Essay Exam Prompt

Write an essay that offers a clear and debatable thesis in response to the viewpoint offered in the 1992 Newsweek article, "Come, Let Me Offend You." Your essay must:

- Include an introduction, at least two body paragraphs, and a conclusion.
- One of these body paragraphs should discuss a counterargument and reply to this opposing viewpoint.
- Include direct quotes from the article, as well as specific and concrete examples.
- Demonstrate complex vocabulary, varied syntax, correct usage, and few or no mechanical errors.

Tips for success:

1. Plan before you write.
2. Type in MLA format.
3. Proofread your work!

"Come, Let Me Offend You" by Newsweek Staff

9/27/1992

Can we talk? It is becoming increasingly difficult, because I never know when I'm inadvertently going to offend you. Here I go, raving about the divine **veal piccata**<sup>i</sup> I had at that hot new **trattoria**<sup>ii</sup>, and you're gritting your teeth and about to pop a blood vessel because you haven't had a chance to inform me that you are a raging vegetarian who spends weekends stuffing envelopes for People for Ethical Treatment of Animals.

I mean how can we ever talk if you've always got an agenda I have no way of knowing about? There we are at a party discussing censorship-at least, I think we're discussing censorship-when you bring everything to a grinding halt by announcing you're a Muslim who believes the **fatwa**<sup>iii</sup> against **Salman Rushdie**<sup>iv</sup> is entirely justified. Or, God forbid, I tell a good, old-fashioned heterosexual joke and you stare at me straight-faced and explain you are a lesbian female separatist.

Everywhere I turn, it seems that certain things are no longer deemed appropriate conversation. We are awash in earnestness, afraid to open our mouths because we never know when our words are going to hurt somebody's feelings.

I can understand-even applaud-the taboos on racist and sexist jokes (unless we've established a priori that we're both feminists, in which case, have you heard the one about the man who was so dumb that ... ). But is there anything left to have an opinion on these days besides the weather? Oh, but now you tell me you're an environmentalist, and I have no right to complain about the rain because the atmosphere has been raped by pollution, and if I've used so much as one squirt of hair spray in my life it's probably all my fault anyway. Pardon me.

You see, it has become simply impossible for us to speak to one another as long as you insist on wearing your special interests and sensitivities on your sleeve.

Now, wait a minute. There's a concept. Why don't you wear your agenda on your sleeve, literally? We could develop an entire **iconography**<sup>v</sup> of sensibilities. Pins, badges, what have you-I'm open to suggestions. Devout Christians wear crosses around their necks; some Jews display a Star of David or Hebrew letters on a chain. We could carry this idea further.

Let's start with a classic and work from there. Take a pink triangle (for gay) and add sequins if you're a drag queen. If you're a male bisexual, how about a pink triangle bisected by the biological symbol for female? Or, if you're a female bisexual, a pink triangle bisected by the biological symbol for male?

Are you sensitive about being a single mother? Let the world know by displaying **Dan Quayle's**<sup>vi</sup> face with a red slash through it.

We could issue broccoli stickpins to vegetarians, bunny heads in profile to animal-rights activists. A pentacle for practicing witches, a golden calf for ardent pagans. A baby basket in front of a door if you were adopted. A child with a suitcase if your parents were immigrants. An ear if someone in your family is deaf, an ear and a musical note if someone in your family is tone-deaf. The possibilities are endless: define your sore point and design an insignia. Wear it proudly, if not defiantly.

And let's not stop with badges. How about making little stamps or stickers to affix to anything you write? Let's say you write a letter to the editor protesting the fatuousness of this article. **Append**<sup>vii</sup> your offended affiliation visually to the letter, thereby ensuring that your opinion will be judged not on the merit of your argument but on the merit of your minority-group adherence.

This sort of symbolic shorthand would certainly have helped get a fellow I know out of a fix he recently found himself in. A major publishing house asked him to select some poems to include in an anthology. Silly liberal-minded fool that he is, he simply chose poems he thought were good. His selections were returned to him for further clarification. Could he please let the publisher know which poems were written by gays, third generation Americans, Native Americans, refugees, Young Republicans and those who use wheelchairs? When he had supplied the appropriate designation for each entry, then-and only then-could the publisher know that the editor had made the demographically representative choices.

Now, I realize I am probably dating myself, or setting myself up as a total **Pollyanna**<sup>viii</sup>, but wasn't there a time when the goal was not to notice the things that set us apart? Weren't we once working toward a perfect world, where we would see past color, race, creed, gender, ethnic background and physical limitations, straight through to talent and ability? What ever happened to that idea?

I can't pinpoint exactly where it went off the rails, but there must definitely have been a moment in time when somebody figured out there was more to be gained by being indignant than by being right.

You see, we can't talk, we can't think, we can't presume to judge unless we have all the pertinent information. And the most **pertinent**<sup>ix</sup> information these days is: whom does this offend?

Labeling yourself by your narrowest interests has become quite the rage during the past few years. I'm just surprised that no one has thought of taking this trend one logical step further and making those labels outwardly visible. Who knows? There might even be money to be made.

I wish I could take credit for this clever badge idea, but unfortunately, I can't. Some insane fellow with a ridiculous mustache came up with it more than 50 years ago. He wanted homosexuals to wear those pink triangles, Jews to wear yellow Stars of David, and so on. His motives weren't as pure as mine, I grant you. He wanted to kill people. I merely want to avoid hurting their feelings.

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<sup>i</sup> Meat of a young cow cooked in a sauce of lemon, parsley and butter.

<sup>ii</sup> an Italian restaurant serving simple food.

<sup>iii</sup> a ruling on a point of Islamic law given by a recognized authority.

<sup>iv</sup> a British Indian novelist and essayist.

<sup>v</sup> the visual images and symbols used in a work of art or the study or interpretation of these.

<sup>vi</sup> an American politician and lawyer who served as the 44th vice president of the United States.

<sup>vii</sup> add (something) as an attachment or supplement.

<sup>viii</sup> an excessively cheerful or optimistic person.

<sup>ix</sup> relevant or applicable to a particular matter; apposite.