

## Part II

### General Directions

1. Be sure that you print your correct social security number and today's date in the upper right hand corner of the test booklet.
2. You will have seventy minutes to complete this part of the proficiency examination. You should finish the readings in about 20 minutes. Then, you should work for about 40 minutes on the essay and use the last ten minutes to re-read your work to make corrections and changes. Be sure you have not left out any words. You will be told when you have ten minutes left to work.
3. A good essay will be one that
  - A. states a central idea and develops it by means of paragraphs that contain specific details,
  - B. has an organization that indicates an overall plan,
  - C. deals with the assigned topic and addresses the specific question asked,
  - D. is free of serious errors in word choice, sentence structure, grammar, and mechanics,
  - E. effectively and smoothly incorporates quotations, paraphrases, and citations of the readings into the writer's own essay,
  - F. documents references to the reading materials. (For the purpose of this writing problem, "documentation" means that you name the person you quote, paraphrase, or cite. The names of the authors are given at the end of each selection.)
4. Before beginning to write, you may want to take some time to plan your response. You may use the space just below the "Question" on the next page for any jottings you may want to do.
  - Feel free to make changes or corrections in your essay. As long as changes and corrections are readable, there is no need to copy your essay over before you hand it in. Please write on only one side of the paper and use the paper provided.
  - Give your essay a title.
  - Be sure to write on the assigned topic. AN ESSAY ON ANOTHER TOPIC IS NOT ACCEPTABLE AND WILL BE GIVEN A SCORE OF ZERO.

## Part II

### Question

Most of us would probably say that television is both good and bad, depending on how a person uses it. Certainly, there's a lot of trash on TV, but there are some excellent programs, too. And with the advent of cable television and the video recorder, there has never been a time of greater choice. In any case, no one is *forced* to watch television. Each of us has the freedom to choose what to watch—or not to watch any TV at all. The decision rests with the individual. In this sense, television is what the individual makes of it, for good or bad.

But let us assume for the sake of "argument" that you cannot dismiss the issue by saying, "It's what the individual makes of it." Let us assume that you have to decide whether the members of your community will or will not be allowed to have television in their homes. In other words, you must answer this question:

#### **Would people be better off with television or without it?**

- Answer the question in an essay of about two pages.
- The readings are here to help you answer the question. First, form your own opinion and decide how you will organize your essay. Then, wherever you think it useful, work in references to at least two of the readings both to support your opinion and to contrast their statements with your own ideas on the subject. The references may be direct quotations, paraphrases, or citations of data or statistics. Be sure that you do not simply string together references to the readings: your essay must be your own composition presenting your own ideas and not merely a patchwork of others' work and ideas.

- Use material from at least two of the readings in your essay.
- Cite your sources. That is, tell from which readings you are getting your information.
- Wherever you think it appropriate, use examples from your own life to help support your opinion.
- Use the rest of the space on this page or the back of it for any jottings or planning that you want to do, and then begin writing your essay on the following page.
- Be sure to give your essay a title.

In summary, state and develop your opinion on the issue. Refer to the readings as they relate to what you are saying, and use the information you find in them to support or qualify your opinion.

## Part II

### Readings

Read the following selections. You will need them for the writing you will do next. They contain different ideas about television. You will probably agree with some of the ideas and disagree with others. In order to prepare for your next writing, think about how these selections compare with each other and whether you agree with them. Since the readings present more than a single side of the issue, not all of them will support your opinion, regardless of the side you take. Nevertheless, you must include specific references to at least two of these readings in your essay. Your essay will be evaluated in part on how effectively the readings are used. If you want, you may mark or write on the readings. Only the essay you write will be evaluated, but the readings must be turned in too.

1. In small European communities still without television, the old people remain physically active, mixing with the young, venturing out into the real world. Here, like their little grandchildren, they sit immobilized by TV. An American senior citizen once told me that his TV set gave him a sixth sense—at the price of removing the other five. I think that both young and old are acquiring, via television, a superficial glimpse of a narrow slice of unreality.... Does TV make real life more meaningful or individuals more active? Does it encourage adventure? Does it arm an individual against the pains inflicted by society, by other humans, by aging? Does it bring us closer to each other? Does it explain us to ourselves, and ourselves to each other? Does it?

For me, imagining groups of solitary individuals watching their private, remote-controlled TV sets is the ultimate future terror: a nation of *videots*.

- Kosinsky, Jerzy. Interviewed by David Sohn, "A Nation of Videots." In Horace Newcomb, ed., Television: A Critical View. New York: Oxford UP, 1976: 148-149.

2. "Escapism" is a much-used but puzzling term. Its ambiguities illustrate the overall bankruptcy of the television criticism that uses it as a flag.... Escapism critics seem to believe that the value of art should be measured only by rigorously naturalistic [realistic] standards. Television programs are viewed as worthless or destructive because they divert consciousness from "reality" to fantasy. However, all art does this. When the network voice of control says, "NBC is proud as a peacock," it is asking the recipient of this message to "escape" from all realistic data about the corporate institution of NBC into a fantastic image of a bird displaying its colorful feathers in a grand and striking manner. The request is made on the assumption that the recipient will be able to sort the shared features of the two entities from the irrelevant features and "return" to a clearer picture of the corporation. Representational television programs work in much the same way. If there were no recognizable features of family life in *The Waltons*. if there were no true-to-life features of life-style in *Three's Company*. if there were no believable features of urban paranoia in *Baretta*. then watching those shows would truly be "escapism." But if those features are there, the viewer is engaging in an act that does not differ in essence from reading a novel. The anti-escapist argument makes a better point about the structure of narrative in the television series. In the world of the series, problems are not only solvable but usually solved. To accept this as "realistic" is indeed an escape from the planet Earth. But how many viewers accept a TV series as realistic in this sense?

- Marc, David. "Understanding Television." The Atlantic August 1984: 4243.

3. Gerbner and Gross asked heavy television viewers and light television viewers certain questions about the real world. The multiple-choice quiz offered accurate answers together with answers that reflected a bias characteristic of the television world. The researchers discovered that heavy viewers of television chose the television-biased answers far more than they chose the accurate answers, while light viewers were more likely to choose the correct answers.

For example, the subjects were asked to guess their own chances of encountering violence in any given week. They were given the possible answers of 50-50, 10-1, and 100-1. The statistical chances that the average person will encounter personal violence in the course of a week are about 100-1, but heavy television viewers consistently chose the answer 50-50 or 10-1, reflecting the "reality" of television programs where violence prevails. The light viewers chose the right answer far more consistently.

The heavy viewers answered many other questions in a way revealing that what they saw on television had altered their perceptions of the world and society. They were more likely than light viewers to overestimate the U.S. proportion of the world population, for instance. They also overestimated the percentages of people employed as professionals, as athletes, and as entertainers in the "real world," just as television overemphasizes the importance of these groups.

The viewers' incorrect notions about the real world do not come from misleading newscasts or factual programs. The mistaken notions arise from repeated viewing of *fictional* programs performed in a realistic style within a realistic framework. These programs, it appears, begin to take on a confusing reality for the viewer, just as a very powerful dream may sometimes create confusion about whether a subsequent event was a dream or whether it actually happened.

- Winn, Marie. The Plus-In Drug. New York: Viking , 1977: 69-71.

4. Our myths of happiness... are easily realized by skillful media people like those who design and execute the Walton Show....

It could be said that these myths torment us, describing role fulfillments that aren't there, promising marital peace that never arrives and forcing us to stare at the pitiful discrepancy between what is and what we would want. If that were the only function of this kind of myth, we would manage somehow to do away with it. The TV ratings would fall and that would be the end of it all. However, another function of the myth is to portray the ideal, the goal—it's not good enough to be always realistic about what the world offers. There must be some kind of image to strive for, some kind of positive cultural thought that serves to heal wounds and to point to the future.

The Walton family drama takes place in our recent past, but all those experimenting with new forms of marital-family relationships, all those parents planning the birth of a first child, all those of us midway in family life are constantly trying to achieve in our private ways the protective, humane, decent loving family that seems to come so easily to the Waltons. Never mind that we all fail; it's a journey worth taking.

Yes, . . . there has always been a dichotomy in our society between what we believe--the image we would choose of ourselves—and the social realities. We think we are human and good and then we discover a My Lai massacre. We preach brotherhood as racial tensions mount. Nevertheless, with a more realistic view of ourselves we would probably behave even worse. And despite the laughability of the American romance, it's not such a bad thing to keep on dreaming.

- Roiphe, Anne. "Ma and Pa and John Boy in Mythic America: *The Waltons*." In Horace Newcomb, ed., Television: A Critical View. New York: Oxford UP, 1976: 72-73.