Fear of Flailing:

Mastering the HSE Essay

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The Good News

The current HSE Composition requirement is no more challenging than the former GED – and, in many ways, it is far easier.

The TASC writing prompt is specific and the examinee is provided with opposing viewpoints that are used to establish the basis of the essay. Unlike the former GED, in which the test-taker was required to prepare a format-structured essay in response to an open-ended, and often vague, prompt, TASC is more open to variance in structure and is specific in its prompts.

For example: a GED prompt might be one such as: What are the essential characteristics of a good parent?

While this is certainly a question worth asking, it is so open to interpretation and personal speculation that it can really only be used to measure the most basic compositional skills.

In contrast, TASC requires the student to read and consider opposing two selections, take a position regarding the specific topic and prepare an essay that puts forth his or her own thesis. In the process, the student must correctly cite opposing views from the selections provided and synthesize information based on their own analysis.

This requirement conforms much more closely to the Aristotelian concept of rhetoric: Ethos - ethics, Pathos - emotion, and Logos - logic.

The TASC writing requirement obviously places most of its emphasis on the Logos, or logical argument approach to Aristotle’s model, but it accommodates both ethics and emotion and is an improvement over the purely emotional position that students tended to favor under the former system.
A. Directions: Read each of the following passages. Take a position on whether or not you think that sale of violent video games to minors violates the First Amendment.

Pro

**Banning sale of games to minors is limited infringement.** Justice Alito opinion June 2011: "The California law involved here, by contrast, is limited to the sale or rental of violent video games to minors. The California law imposes no restriction on the creation of violent video games, or on the possession of such games by anyone, whether above or below the age of 18. The California law does not regulate the sale or rental of violent games by adults. And the California law does not prevent parents and certain other close relatives from buying or renting violent games for their children or other young relatives if they see fit. [...] The Court's opinion distorts the effect of the California law. I certainly agree with the Court that the government has no "free-floating power to restrict the ideas to which children may be exposed," ante, at 7, but the California law does not exercise such a power. If parents want their child to have a violent video game, the California law does not interfere with that parental prerogative. Instead, the California law reinforces parental decision making in exactly the same way as the New York statute upheld in Ginsberg. Under both laws, minors are prevented from purchasing certain materials; and under both laws, parents are free to supply their children with these items if that is their wish.

Con

**Violent video games are protected by the first amendment.** Justice Scalia wrote in June 2011 "opinion of the court" against the California ban on the sale of video games to minors: "Like the protected books, plays and movies that preceded them, video games communicate ideas — and even social messages — through many familiar literary devices (such as characters, dialogue, plot and music) and through features distinctive to the medium (such as the player's interaction with the virtual world). That suffices to confer First Amendment protection. Under our Constitution, "esthetic and moral judgments about art and literature . . . are for the individual to make, not for the Government to decree, even with the mandate or approval of a majority." United States v. Playboy Entertainment Group, Inc., 529 U. S. 803, 818 (2000). And whatever the challenges of applying the Constitution to ever-advancing technology, "the basic principles of freedom of speech and the press, like the First Amendment's command, do not vary" when a new and different medium for communication appears. Joseph Burstyn, Inc. v. Wilson, 343 U. S. 495, 503 (1952).

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Conclusion – Re-State/Summarize/Expand:

Check Grammar & Mechanics
1. Directions: Read each of the following passages. Take a position on whether or not you think that random sobriety check points are consistent with individual rights.

Pro: Random sobriety tests are a just public safety intervention Robert Solomon, a law professor at the University of Western Ontario and the director of legal policy for MADD Canada, argues that implementing random sobriety tests on roads would be a just impingement on Canadian's lives because of the death and injury toll drunk driving is inflicting there: “We have one of the worst records for impaired driving of any comparable democracies.” In a paper he co-authored in 2010, he reported The totals for 2007 as being worse than seven years earlier: 210,000 impairment-related crashes, 1,239 deaths, 73,120 injuries. All of this, he argues, justifies the invasiveness of RBT; it protects people and saves lives.

Operating dangerous vehicles requires giving up some rights. The U.S. Supreme Court held in 1991 that a sobriety-checkpoint program in Michigan did not violate the Fourth Amendment to the federal Constitution. The reasoning by six of the nine justices was that driving a car is a dangerous and regulated activity, and that citizens in their cars are not as immune from police intrusions as when they are in their own homes.[1]

Random breath tests are done to public vehicle drivers. It can hardly be called an invasion of privacy or an investigation without due cause, because random tests are routinely carried out by many train and bus companies and are being introduced on airlines as well. This is not considered a breach of employee privacy because public safety is at stake. The same applies for other drivers, who are a major liability to the safety and lives of other drivers.

Con: Random sobriety tests amount to unreasonable searches "Random breath tests for DUI is a bad idea." Canadian Cincinnatus. October 7th, 2009: "In a free society it should be the case that a citizen can move about at will without ever being hindered by the police. The job of the police officer, who used to be called a peace officer, is to keep the public peace. If the public peace has not been broken he should leave well enough alone, not go around making criminals out of people minding their own business. It is for that reason that the traditional requirement of ‘reasonable grounds” was put into place."

Randomly testing employees is different than testing citizens. People who have to take random breath tests to drive trucks or fly planes as part of their jobs are taking the test as part of their job. They are being paid and must do what their employer wants them to do in order to keep their job. Searching random people outside of the context of employment with no suspicion of a crime is very different. It erodes civil liberties and sets a dangerous precedent.

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Check Grammar & Mechanics
2. Directions: Read each of the following passages. Take a position of whether or not you think that mandatory military service should be required for all American citizens.

Pro:

In the military, young men acquire many skills for everyday life. These include first aid, driving an ambulance, extra practice for surgeons, swimming, etc.) that might be beneficial either to their own careers, or in cases of emergency to everyone as these skills are transferable. That means that "conscription makes for a more disciplined and skilled workforce, as men (and women) leave the military and take the skills which they honed there back to their civilian jobs." (by Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia)

Test of manhood. Men are tested, to see whether or not they can endure the hardships of military training and earn the right to be called men.

Conscription may inspire camaraderie, unifying a people. "All able-bodied males together as a union have had the same experience and are soldiers, and that may create unity and a national spirit." (by Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia)

Con:

Using conscription as a 'rites of passage' is harmful for a country's collective values. At the end of the day, the point of military training is not to educate the population in 'useful skills' (For example: The skill of digging a foxhole in under six hours is unlikely to be of any use for a commercial based economy such as Singapore) or to make them physically strong and understand the importance of team work (PE classes in schools or fitness camp can do the same thing). It's only real purpose is simple, it is to indoctrinate a group of 18 year-olds that they have to obey orders from their officers without question. To kill someone just because your commander tells you to do so, and to line up every morning to be trained in ways to take another human's life. A normal person is going to hesitate to do things that a soldier needs to do in order to survive, killing without hesitation would be on the top of the list. The augment that conscription is good as a 'rites of passage' isn't only implying that being a cold-blooded killer a 'manly' act that should be encouraged (this in itself implying that being violent is something that is associated with males), but it also (intentionally or unintentionally) implies that the entire population should be united a common value: violence and obedience to the state without question.

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3. Directions: Read each of the following passages. Take a position of whether or not you think the “Occupy” movement can effectively influence the American Public.

**Pro: Occupy protesters understand Public Relations techniques.** Ronn Torossian. "Why the Occupy Wall Street Protesters Will Occupy A Lot of Media Attention? They understand PR." Op-Eds. October 12, 2011: "The simple truth is that as these protests begin their 3rd week, one can expect that this group will attract increasing media attention in the days and weeks to come. This group understands Public Relations and is capturing attention by understanding a series of key elements necessary to capture public attention. Authenticity: As I outline in my new PR book: "For Immediate Release: Shape Minds, Build Brands, and Deliver Results with Game-Changing Public Relations" authenticity is key. We are living in a time where America -- across the board regardless of political stance is Anti-establishment and few view big business as real and trustworthy. From failed bank loans to Bernie Madoff, the media has made noise surrounding "bad" unauthentic people, and these street protestors, seemingly idealistic can be seen as authentic and the real deal. Media naturally can't ignore these demonstrations in the heart of Wall Street. Conflict: The protestors thus far have engaged confrontation with the police department, which invites drama -- and encourages a situation which the media has to cover. They are waiting for the confrontation and won't miss police officers swinging clubs, or mass arrest. Regardless of numbers, conflict makes for great media. Timing & Theatre: Following a summer where the media has been focused on street protests in the Middle East and elsewhere, these protestors are using catchy slogans and understand street theatre. The timing is right -- Cairo, Libya and Greece all had it -- how can the media now not report in the "people" speaking out on Wall Street?"

**Con: Occupy protests can't sway Congress due to lack of message.** "5 Reasons Why 'Occupy Wall Street' Won't Work." The Atlantic. October 3rd, 2011: "The Protesters Can't Sway Congress. The Tea Party accomplished something very key: it helped to significantly alter the makeup of Congress through the 2010 election. It had a goal -- to put out of power the big government candidates -- and it accomplished that goal. The Occupy Wall Street cannot hope for any result as significant. As mentioned, it doesn't have a clear set of objectives. But let's say, for argument's sake, that it has some general fringe-left goals. Some that have been suggested include new taxes on Wall Street and much stronger financial regulation. The problem is that these views aren't likely to catch on in Congress: even when the mix was much further to the left in 2009 through 2010, a relatively mild financial regulation bill was passed and even the Bush tax cuts remained intact. The reality is that the U.S. is a center-right nation, and Congress reflects that. While some cities are farther to the left than others, they already have very progressive representatives. Meanwhile, the message of Occupy Wall Street isn't likely to catch on and affect any change in more center-right regions like the Tea Party did."

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4. Directions: Read each of the following passages. Take a position on whether or not you think that child beauty pageants are positive experiences for children, or should they be banned?

**Pro: Beauty pageants teach kids to be their very best.** The promoters of Australia’s first Universal Royalty Beauty Pageant defended the practice saying that it taught the lesson of "striving to be your very best."

**Beauty contests can boost a child’s self-esteem.** The most cited reason parents give for putting their children into beauty pageants is to boost their child’s self-esteem, as well as teach poise, public speaking skills, tact, and confidence. "She learns skills such as going out in a crowd, not to be shy, and to be herself while people are watching and focusing on her," one mother noted.

**Child beauty pageants judge whole person.** Some of the criteria considered in judging a pageant are writing skills, interviews, personality, looks, confidence and talent, depending on the specific competition.

**Child beauty contest teach there will always be somebody better.** Another child beauty contest mother noted: "I want my child to be aware that there’s always going to be somebody better than her. It’s a hard thing to learn – it was for me – and I want her to start early."

**Beauty contests teach kids how to strive to move up.** You see this a lot among people on the lower-income and education scales. They want their kids to learn skills that are needed to move up the social scale.

**Con: Beauty pageants are not good for a child's confidence.** Karen Brooks. "Children’s Beauty Pageants: The Ugly Truth." March 20th, 2011: "Claiming, let alone believing, an arena where very young children are primped like mini-adults and pitted against each other in a bid to decide who’s the prettiest is good for confidence or self-esteem, is to dwell in a fool’s paradise."

**Beauty pageants foster destructive perfectionism, self-criticism.** William Pinsof, a clinical psychologist and president of the Family Institute at Northwestern University: "Being a little Barbie doll says your body has to be a certain way and your hair has to be a certain way. In girls particularly, this can unleash a whole complex of destructive self-experiences that can lead to eating disorders and all kinds of body distortions in terms of body image."

**Pageants teach that self-worth is in physical beauty only.** Melinda Tankard-Reist, one of the founders of Collective Shout: "Competing in these events very young children are taught very early that their only value comes from their appearance and the way they look. This in turn leads to emotional problems, eating disorders and a distorted sense of self-worth and self-esteem."

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5. Directions: Read each of the following passages. Take a position on whether or not you think that fraternities are positive experiences, or should they be banned?

Pro:

Fraternities can rob women of their education. Caitlin Flanagan. "Shutter Fraternities for Young Women's Good." Wall Street Journal. April 23rd, 2011: "Can the mere presence of slur-chanting fraternity men really create an environment that robs young women of equal opportunity to education? Yes, it can. [...] My fourth night at school, I went with some friends to Rugby Road, where the fraternity houses are located. [...] they seemed sinister, to stand for male power at its most malevolent and institutionally condoned. I remember standing there thinking I'd made a terrible mistake. It wasn't worth it, I decided. The next day I withdrew from the university. [...] I went back in the spring, and while few things have had as a profound an effect on my life as my UVA education, my deep mistrust of the fraternities limited the ways I engaged in life on campus and almost robbed me of the education itself. If you want to improve women's lives on campus, if you want to give them a fair shot at living and learning as freely as men, the first thing you could do is close down the fraternities."

Con:

Controversy hides all the good coming from frats Charles Eberly. "Unfairly Singled Out." New York Times Room for Debate. May 5, 2011: "negative consequences surrounding the actions of fraternity and sorority members seem to be highlighted with far greater frequency than the positive outcomes associated with membership. Typical of the latter are examples from a fraternity chapter I counsel at Eastern Illinois University. One member who is graduating with a master's in school counseling developed a program on healthy men's development that is presented to all new members of the college's fraternity system each year, and another brother created a charity to support a local children's advocacy center. Yet a third is running marathons in all 50 states to support suicide prevention in memory of a brother who committed suicide in 2008. The chapter is planning a fund raising drive to construct a wishing well on campus in coordination with another fraternity chapter that lost brothers in a bus accident, with the contributions going to the children's advocacy center."

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6. Directions: Read each of the following passages. Take a position on whether or not you think that bullfighting is decent or that it verges on animal torture.

Pro

**Life of bullfighting bull more decent than factory bull.** Robert Elms. "End bullfighting and you give in to the neutering forces of accepted taste." The Independent. July 31st, 2010: "Those who see bullfighting as cruel are, of course, right. It is cruel that man should breed and kill animals for his enjoyment whether as a dinner or a dance. But to my mind the life of an Iberian fighting bull, a thoroughbred animal which lives to a minimum age of four, roaming wild, feasting on Spain's finest pasture, never even seeing a man on foot, is far superior to that of the many thousands of British bulls whose far shorter lives are spent entirely in factory conditions and killed in grim abattoirs so that we can eat beef burgers."

**Bulls are celebrated and honored in bullfighting.** In most bullfighting countries, bulls are honored as mystical creatures of immense strength and beauty. Statues of bulls regularly stand outside of bullfighting stadiums, and depict the animals in the most majestic, strong, and beautiful way possible. These statues frequently stand-alone without an accompanying matador in the depiction. This respect and appreciation of the bull is a demonstration of the decency with which the art form treats the animal

Con

**Bullfighting is an indecent form of torture** Jeremey Bentham, *Theory of Legislation*. *Principles of the Penal Code*. "The Culture of Benevolence*. 1802 - "Cock-fights and bull-fights, the chase of the hare and the fox, fishing, and other amusements of the same kind, necessarily suppose a want of reflection or a want of humanity; since these sports inflict upon sensitive beings the most lively sufferings, and the most lingering and painful death that can be imagined.

**Bulls are usually not killed quickly, die in agony.** According to anti-bullfight veterinarian José Zaldívar, in the great majority of cases, the matador missed the vital spot that would cause the bull to die quickly. "These provoke internal bleeding. It is a slow, agonizing death – as the high acidity of their blood proves.

**Bulls can't reason, but they can suffer; bullfighting wrong.** Jeremy Bentham once said: "It doesn't matter if they can reason; it doesn't matter if they can speak; what does matter is if they can SUFFER."

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