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New York City College of Technology of the City University of New York

CATW Reading Selection

A Resource Handbook for Students and Faculty

Prepared by:

Dr. Lubie Grujicic-Alatriste

Coordinator, Program in English as a Second Language

Department of English

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General Introduction

Note to Students

All readings are carefully selected to draw on the themes and topics found in the departmental textbooks used this semester. The themes are also timely topics.

Below you will see "Writing Task" instructions. All CATW reading selections have the same writing task. Therefore, the writing task is provided only once to save space and conserve paper. Please refer to this page every time you are reading a selection or you are preparing to write your response.

Writing Directions

Read the passage above and write an essay responding to the ideas it presents. In your essay, be sure to summarize the passage in your own words, stating the author's most important ideas.

Develop your essay by identifying one idea in the passage that you feel is especially significant, and explain its significance. Support your claims with evidence or examples drawn from what you have read, learned in school, and/or personally experienced.

Remember to review your essay and make any changes or corrections that are needed to help your reader follow your thinking. You will have 90 minutes to complete your essay.

Ready, Set, Go. Why We Love Our Games

The love of athletics has now become deeply rooted in national life. Senior vice president and executive editor of the sports cable network, ESPN says, "Sports have moved from being a **subculture** to becoming a major force in America's social and **cultural landscape**." The idiom of sports is the way that many Americans feel most engaged – and comfortable – talking about racial issues, standards of excellence, **comparative worth**, even right and wrong. The passion over sports issues can rival the intensity of political debates.

For example, Americans are **sharply divided** about the purpose and role of the Olympic Games. A recently conducted survey shows that fifty-one percent of the interviewed people said that the Olympics should be open to all **athletes** (amateurs and pros), while 46 percent say only amateurs should be allowed to participate. Similarly divided is the view of what the Olympic Games represent: forty-nine percent think the competition is among individuals; 47 percent view it as competition among nations. Clearly, the opinions are divided almost evenly down the middle.

In unusual ways, sports **have turned a mirror on ourselves**. Our language reflects their impact, from "three strikes" laws in criminal sentencing to "level playing fields" in trade to "slam-dunks" in business deals. Our fashion is transformed by baseball caps, basketball sneakers and football jerseys. Our audiovisual tastes are shaped by radio and TV commercials, sports-specific magazines and Internet-linked **scoreboards**. Our **pocketbooks** are opened to buy billions of dollars in **sports gear**, tickets for sports contests, team accessories, and **memorabilia**. Sports and music have become a true universal language. No matter where you are, you can **relate to it**.

Maybe Americans invest too much of their lives and their energies in sports and the **spectacle** they provide. Maybe, though, the majority have it right. They're not saying that athletic competition **is the sum of** all that's good in American society. They're more likely saying that sports have been good to them and sports heroes represent some of the best of who we are and what we **cherish**.

Excerpted from Mike Tharp, "Ready, Set, And Go. Why We Love Our Games," in *American Perspectives: Readings on Contemporary U.S. Culture*. Susan Earle-Carlin & Colleen Hildebrand, Eds. New York: Longman /Pearson, 2000, 52-55.

Cultural Concepts: Olympic Games; sports gear: baseball caps; basketball sneakers; team accessories, memorabilia

Vocabulary: to turn a mirror on to oneself; pocketbook, scoreboards, sports gear; relate to; is the sum of; cherish;

Sports metaphors: "three strikes"; level playing fields"; "slam-dunk";

R#2

Adapted From
Decline and Fall of Teaching History
By Diane Ravitch

During the past generation, the amount of time devoted to historical studies in American public schools has **steadily** decreased. About 25 years ago, most public high-school youths studied one year of world history and one of American history, but today, most study only one year of our history. In contrast, the state schools of many other Western nations require the subject to be studied almost every year.

Does it matter if Americans are ignorant of their past? Does it matter if the general public knows little of the individuals, the events and the movements that shaped our nation? The **fundamental premise** of our democratic form of government is that political power **derives from** the informed **consent** of the people. Informed consent requires a citizenry that is rational and knowledgeable. If our system is to remain free and democratic, citizens should know not only how to judge **candidates** and their competing claims but how our institutions evolved. An understanding of history does not lead everyone to the same conclusions, but it does **equip** people with the knowledge to reach independent judgment on current issues. Without historical perspective, voters are more likely to be **swayed by emotional appeals, by stirring commercials**, or by little more than a candidate's good looks or **charisma**.

Adapted From
"Turning Failure into Success"

By
Fredelle Marynard

Fear of failure **grips** all of us at one time or another. Sometimes we wonder whether we even ought to try to succeed. If you have ever thought about trying out for a **school team**, or taking a course in a new subject, or even **breaking the ice with a person** who might become a new friend, you know the **temptation** to give up before you start. Your reason for not acting, of course, is the fear that you might fail. But failure can have a **positive influence on** our lives, guiding us toward future growth.

Success that comes too easily can be damaging. The child who wins a prize for a **dashed-off essay**, the adult who distinguishes him or herself at a first job by a lucky accident, faces probable disappointment when real challenges arise. Success is also bad when it's achieved at the cost of the total quality of an experience. Successful students sometimes become so obsessed with grades that they never enjoy their school years. They never branch out into tempting new areas, because they don't want to risk their grade average.

We assume that everyone is either a success or a failure when, in fact, **infinite** degrees of both are possible. There's a world of difference between "I have failed three times" and "I am a failure." Indeed, the words failure and success cannot be reasonably applied to a complex, living, changing human being. They can describe only the situation at a particular time and place.

Why are so many people afraid of failure? Quite simply this is because no one tells us how to fail so that failure becomes an experience that will lead to growth. Of course, failure is never **pleasurable**. It hurts adults and children alike. But it can make a positive contribution to your life once you learn to use it. Step one is to ask, "Why did I fail?" **Resist** the natural **impulse** to blame someone else. Ask yourself what you did wrong, how you can improve.

Failure frees one to take risks because there's less to lose. Often there's a **resurgence** of energy-- an awareness of new possibilities. If faced, **absorbed**, and accepted, failure **contributes** to personal growth and often leads to improved personal relationships.

R#4

Adapted from
Easy Way Out Can Lead Kids Nowhere
By
Norman Lockman

According to a story in The New York Times, a **suburban** middle school principal in Plainfield, Ind., has decided to remove competition from all **extracurricular activities**. With the approval of his faculty, he has made all extracurricular activities, including sports and activities based on skills, available to all students **regardless of ability**.

The experiment is becoming the focus of a controversy over larger values: Should children **be shielded from** competitive pressure or should they learn early that things don't come easy?

The **positive aspect** of this experiment is that it is happening to sixth, seventh, and eighth graders, ages 11 through 13. Perhaps this is as good a time as any to remove the focus from competition. It's the last moments of real childhood for a lot of kids, and participation can be more important than anything. This is the time when just the fear of not **measuring up** can keep **some kids on the sidelines making excuses**.

But I suspect that behind this **seemingly** wonderful idea is a **rotten** motive. **Apparently** many of the supporters of the program **recall** painful moments of **not making the grade** and being dropped from certain school activities. They say they want to protect this **crop** of kids from such **traumas**, but I'm not sure they are doing the kids in Plainfield Community Middle School a favor in the long run by not **differentiating** between having easy fun and working hard to get good enough at something to **earn a special spot on a team**.

The danger in programs like Plainfield's is not the effort to involve as many kids as possible, but the **pretension** that whatever they bring to the activity is **valuable**. To set up a program that does not allow a band director to say, politely, "I know you'd like to be in the band, Johnny, but first you'll have to take clarinet lessons," is a program built on supporting instant gratification – or getting happy or satisfied right away. I don't know about you, but I'm finding the pursuit of instant gratification and demand for no standards problematic, even for sixth graders.

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ESOL Writing Diagnostic

- Dictionaries are permitted
- Use only blue booklets. No scrap paper.

Read the selection below, "Why Learn a Foreign Language?" Then, in your blue booklet, write a THREE-FOUR paragraph essay discussing the main ideas expressed in the text. Use your own life examples, experience, or knowledge to support your view. Remember to edit your essay for grammar and punctuation. You have 90 minutes to write your essay.

Why Learn a Foreign Language?

Adapted from The Deseret News by May Lundy

Hello, hello, hello, how are you?" are words to the first song I learned in English. The teacher sang along while we covered our hands in glue from pasting paper drawings on our workbooks. I was 3 years old and attending a bilingual kindergarten in Veracruz, Mexico. I was blessed to have parents who were quite involved in my education, especially in learning a second language at a very young age. At first, I attended schools that offered only two hours of English per day. I remember how much I liked to learn new vocabulary and read from colorful storybooks. I always took my new discoveries very seriously, so much that I began teaching my grandmother English lessons out of my first-grade books.

By the time I was in third grade, we were living in Puebla, Mexico, and I was enrolled in a school where we were taught entirely in English the first of second half of the day. Social studies, health, English grammar and spelling were some of the subjects. I loved the smell of new books and I was thrilled at the thought of mastering the spelling of a new word.

I also remember student competitions where we had to memorize verbs in present, past and past participle. Much of my recollection of verb tenses comes from those days. I still recall learning about joints and muscles and their functions. What I learned in those first formative years laid a strong foundation and a love for learning. I am grateful for my parents' sacrifice, since attending private bilingual schools is pretty expensive in Mexico. Because of their effort, I am able to write this article today.

Years later, I came to the US for a small period of time. It was then that I took a deep dive into the language and learned many idioms such as: "raining cats and dogs" and "pulling a leg." My father always used to tell me that one day I would see the fruits of the sacrifices made to learn a second language. I didn't think much of it at the time, but I was about to discover an entire world of opportunities.

Learning English as a second language helped my ability to grasp new concepts and retain information at a faster rate. After returning to Mexico, I decided to take French in high school. Having learned English made it easier for me to learn a third language. It opened many doors in my life and helped me become successful.

Assignment

Begin by reading the passage below.

Listen Up: Accidents Rising Among Pedestrians Wearing Headphones

Whether it's a frenzied hike to work or a meandering stroll around town, walking is often improved when there's music in the air. Or, more commonly, when there's music blaring directly into your ears, keeping you from avoiding potentially fatal hazards.

The number of pedestrians killed or seriously injured while wearing headphones has tripled in the last six years, a recent study found. The 16 cases in 2004-2005 spiked to 47 in 2010-2011, according to the study's chief researchers at the University of Maryland Hospital for Children. *The Daily Mail* reported that two thirds of the victims were men under age 30, and one in 10 victims was under 18.

Concerns about texting while walking have received national attention and prompted possible bans last year, but the distinct issue of using headphones while walking has made fewer headlines. According to the study's authors, the dangers of using mobile phones and other devices while driving are also well documented.

"Sensory deprivation that results from using headphones with electronic devices may be a unique problem in pedestrian incidents, where auditory cues can be more important than visual ones," the researchers wrote. Bloomberg reported that the study incorporated data from the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, Google News archives and a campus research database.

In 70% of the 116 collisions this past year, the victim died. In a quarter of the cases, a warning that the victim most likely couldn't hear, like a horn, was sounded before the accident.

Adapted from article by Samantha Grossman. Originally published in *Time* on January 17, 2012.

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Assignment

Begin by reading the passage below.

Is Google Making Us Stupid?

Who doesn't love Google? In the blink of an eye, the search engine delivers useful information about pretty much any subject imaginable. I use it all the time, and I'm guessing you do too.

But I worry about what Google is doing to our brains. What really makes us intelligent isn't our ability to find lots of information quickly. It's our ability to think deeply about that information. And deep thinking, brain scientists have discovered, happens only when our minds are calm and attentive. The greater our concentration, the richer our thoughts.

If we're distracted, we understand less, remember less, and learn less.

That's the problem with Google—and with the Internet in general. When we use our computers and our cellphones all the time, we're always distracted.

The Net bombards us with messages and other bits of data, and every one of those interruptions breaks our train of thought. We end up scatterbrained. The fact is, you'll never think deeply if you're always Googling, texting, and surfing.

Google doesn't want us to slow down. The faster we zip across the Web, clicking links and skimming words and pictures, the more ads Google is able to show us and the more money it makes. So even as Google is giving us all that useful information, it's also encouraging us to think superficially. It's making us shallow.

If you're really interested in developing your mind, you should turn off your computer and your cellphone—and start thinking. Really thinking. You can Google all the facts you want, but you'll never Google your way to brilliance.

Adapted from the book *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* by Nicholas Carr.

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From *When Teenagers Work*
Lawrence Steinberg and Ellen Greenberger

When teenagers work a great deal—even within the limits imposed by current legislation—they perform worse in school, report higher rates of drug and alcohol use, and develop cynical attitudes toward work itself.

It is still widely held that paid work is a character-building enterprise for young people—even more so than schooling. Yet studies indicate that the sorts of characters work builds in the current workplace aren't exactly what most of us have in mind.

Teens who work long hours in today's routinized adolescent workplace of mostly dead-end jobs are more cynical about the value of hard work and more tolerant of improprieties on the job than their peers who work less or not at all.

The more teenagers work, the more likely they are to endorse such attitudes as "People who work harder at their jobs than they have to are a little bit crazy," and "People who break a few laws to make a profit aren't doing anything I wouldn't do in their position." Given that many young people work for employers who ignore child-labor regulations, it isn't surprising that one of the first lessons teens learn at work is that laws are meant to be violated.

According to recent estimates, more than two-thirds of all U.S. high school juniors and seniors, and about half of all sophomores, hold jobs during the school year. Government statistics indicate that a large proportion of employed high school students work more than twenty hours per week. Contrary to popular wisdom, the vast majority of these student workers are not from disadvantaged backgrounds, but are middle class.

High school is all too often something that American adolescents fit into their work schedules. And, contrary to public opinion, the majority of student workers do not save the bulk of their earnings for college, but spend most of their wages on cars, fashions, stereo equipment, drugs and alcohol.

By permitting our adolescents to compromise their schooling and health in the interest of self-indulgent consumerism, we continue to violate the spirit of adolescence.

340 words

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Name _____
Part I 60 pts

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- Read the following passage.
- Write an outline for the essay you plan to write. Make sure you include the "text" connections you plan to use.
- Write the introductory paragraph including the thesis and the supporting points
- Write the introductory statement for all of your body paragraphs
- Write your 3- sentence concluding paragraph.

Do Cell Phones Belong in the Classroom? *Robert Earl*

If you were to drop in on almost any American high school these days, what would you observe? Cell phones --Lots of them. Virtually all students have one, and it's typical to see them ardently tapping away or listening to music through the ear buds lodged in their ears-- not just in the hallways during the five minutes between classes, but also in the classroom, at every opportunity the teacher gives them.

Most schools allow students to have cell phones for safety -- a reaction to the Littleton, Colorado, high school shooting incident of 1999. Apart from emergency situations, most schools don't officially allow students to use cell phones during class time. However, when the teacher is busy helping out another student or writing on the board, out come the phones as students send instant messages to friends, listen to music, or watch videos on the Internet. Eventually, the teacher notices and warns them that their phones will be confiscated. The phones disappear with reluctant obedience -- until the next opportunity arises to surreptitiously pull them out again. They're use cannot be overstated.

At a time when middle-class homes are going overboard with computers and mobile devices, schools are grappling with the question of how much technology to bring into the classroom. But whatever a school's approach to technology, cell phones seem to be excruciatingly plentiful. An April 2010 study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project and the University of Michigan found that in schools that permitted students to have cell phones, 71 percent of students transmitted or received text messages on their cell phones in class. In the majority of schools -- those that allow students to have phones in school but not use them in the classroom - the percentage was almost as high: 65%. Even in schools that ban cell phones entirely, the percentage was still a shocking 58%.

Many teachers have given in and allowed their students to listen to music through the ear buds while they're doing individual class work (reading or writing or conducting research). "I concentrate better on my schoolwork when I'm listening to music," is the rationalization from many students. Many teachers seem to accept this reasoning, little knowing about the data on multitasking and its deleterious impact on concentration and the ability to think clearly. Two years ago, for example, Peter Bregman wrote in the Harvard Business Review Blog Network that multitasking can reduce productivity by as much as 40%, increase stress and cause a 10-point fall in IQ. Young people are plagued by significant exposure to cell phones, but experts are skeptical about how to accurately address the challenges.

So what's the solution? Do teachers simply need to crack down harder, to impose harsher penalties against extracurricular texting and Internet surfing? Are they correct to speculate that the dangers of cell phone use are being played down? Or are the cell phones themselves a symptom of a larger problem?

Assignment

Begin by reading the passage below.

Who Can You Trust?

by Tara Parker-Pope

How do we decide whether to trust somebody?

Researchers from three universities recently identified four separate behaviors that, together, appear to warn our brains that a person can't be trusted. One day, this new research could be used to develop computer programs that can rapidly analyze behavior in airports or other public places to identify security risks.

In the researchers' experiment, 86 undergraduates were given five minutes to get to know a fellow student they hadn't met before. Half of the pairs met face to face; the other half interacted online by instant message.

Then the students were asked to play a game that involved winning money by either being selfish or by cooperating with their partners. The way they played the game measured how trustworthy they were.

The researchers filmed the students' five-minute conversations before the game started. They found that players were better able to predict whether their partner was going to be trustworthy if they had met face-to-face.

"There is something the mind is picking up that gives you greater accuracy and makes you better able to identify people who are going to be trustworthy when you see them face-to-face," said the study's lead author, David DeSteno, a professor of psychology.

The researchers discovered four specific gestures that predicted when a person was less trustworthy: leaning away from someone; crossing arms in a blocking fashion; touching, rubbing, or grasping hands together; and touching oneself on the face, abdomen, or elsewhere. These cues predicted untrustworthiness only when they occurred in combination, not alone.

Test subjects intuitively picked up on the cues. "The more you saw someone make the gestures, the more intuition you had that they would be less trustworthy," Dr. DeSteno said.

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