

Fast Food: Who's to Blame?

On-Demand Writing Assignment

You will have 45 minutes to plan and write an essay on the topic assigned below. Before you begin writing, read the passage carefully and plan what you will say. Your essay should be as well-organized and carefully written as you can make it.

As Americans add pounds, critics are increasingly blaming the fast-food industry. Teenagers have filed lawsuits blaming McDonald's for their health problems, and a public health group in California has asked the governor to declare childhood obesity a state of emergency. But parents—not the fast food companies, not the government—are in the best position to fight the epidemic of overweight children. Parents are responsible for teaching healthy eating and exercise habits. Parents are to blame if they let their kids eat unhealthy foods and sit in front of the television or computer for hours at a time. We have laws against parents leaving a loaded weapon where children can find and use it to hurt themselves or others. It's time to get parents to take the same responsibility to protect their children from unhealthy foods and lack of exercise.

Adapted from Daniel Weintraub's
"The Battle Against Fast Food Begins in the Home"
The Sacramento Bee, December 17, 2002

Explain Weintraub's argument and discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with his analysis. Support your position, providing reasons and examples from your own experience, observations, or reading.

The sample student essays that follow reflect the EPT Scoring Guide's criteria.

Sample student essay with a score of 6:

Daniel Weintraub, in "The Battle Against Fast Food Begins in the Home," states that parents are responsible for the increasing epidemic of child obesity. Parents need to be responsible enough to teach their children healthy eating & exercise habits. In our world today, children sit around & play video games all day, if they are allowed to. Weintraub argues that parents need to "step up to the plate" and get children involved in some type of exercise. I agree that parents need to take more responsibility for child obesity, but schools, fast food companies & the government also need to take that same initiative.

Parents have a lot of influence on their children from the day that child is born. Children learn how to talk from their parents, how to respect their elders and they *should* learn healthy eating & exercising habits from their parents. There are many steps to take in showing a child what is healthy & unhealthy. A parent could make sure that a child receives a serving of fruits or vegetables at lunch & dinner, eliminate soda from the house and even eliminate all junk food from the house. From a young age, my parents taught me to have an apple for a snack instead of a cookie & that I should be getting 5 servings of fruits or vegetables a day. This lesson has influenced me even until today when my friends & I will go and eat a salad at lunch instead of pizza or chips. I have also eliminated all soda from my diet.

Parents need to show their children that exercise is not a bad thing. At a young age, parents need to show children that there are other things to do, like playing tag or playing at the park, than just watching t.v. Parents could introduce their children to different sports until the child finds one that he or she is interested in. My parents entered me in dance class & were lucky in finding that that was what I enjoyed. I have been dancing since I was three years old & I also played soccer for 8 years. It isn't very difficult to turn off a t.v. and send your children outside to play.

Parents are not solely responsible for child obesity; schools, fast food companies & the government also need to take action against child obesity. Schools today do not provide a great selection of healthy food. My student body is lucky that we have an off-campus lunch but even then it is difficult to find healthy food. Fast food companies definitely need some blame. With advertising that appeals to children, it is no wonder that America is fat. Through whining for that toy that a child can get with a kid's meal, the parent is pressured to go to a fast food place.

Daniel Weintraub argues that parents are responsible for child obesity. I agree with Weintraub but schools & fast food companies also need to help in the fight against child obesity.

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Commentary

This essay illustrates the EPT Scoring Guide's criteria for a score of 6. The superior response indicates that the writer is very well-prepared to handle college-level reading and writing.

- The writer clearly explains Weintraub’s argument regarding childhood obesity in the first paragraph and takes a thoughtful position, contending that Weintraub is right to a degree but that “schools, fast food companies & the government also need to take that same initiative.”
- The writer skillfully restates Weintraub’s argument in the first paragraph and makes a further connection in the second paragraph by saying, “they *should* learn healthy eating & exercising habits from their parents.” However, the emphasized “should” suggests that the writer questions whether this always happens. The conclusion again refers back to Weintraub.
- The essay demonstrates “quality and clarity of thought” with its careful analysis of both the strengths and weaknesses of Weintraub’s somewhat overstated position.
- The essay reflects an effective use of topic statements and strong personal examples to both support Weintraub’s argument that parents are responsible for childhood obesity with respect to eating and exercise habits and make the case that others are responsible as well.
- Sentence structure is varied and word choice is precise.
- The essay has few errors.

Sample student essay with a score of 5:

America is now known as the fattest country in America. Many of our country’s people blame the fast food industry for over-advertising, selling unhealthy food, and selling oversized portions. However, others feel that America’s obesity is a matter of personal responsibility. In his article “The battle against fast food begins in the home,” Daniel Weintraub explains that parents need to take responsibility for the eating habits of their kids, and I agree with his opinion in this matter.

As Americans, we are given the freedom of choice, however, before we become adults, it is our parents that have to teach us how to make the right decisions. This is Weintraub’s point. If parents are not willing to teach their kids the dangers of eating too much fast food and not getting enough exercise, then those kids have no way to make the right choices. Kids learn best at an early age, therefore, teaching them good habits will allow them to make the correct decisions later.

I agree with Weintraub’s opinion that parents are responsible. Obviously, fast food companies are going to market towards kids; they are more impressionable. Because of this, if parents would start teaching kids early on, they could use that impressionable quality to their advantage. The benefits of education are apparent in almost everything we do. For example, a better educated person can solve problems quickly and easily. The same goes for someone educated in terms of health habits. They can make the best choices because they have been taught to do so. Fast food companies provide a service. It is up to us, or our parents if we are not yet of age, to decide how much of that service we should use.

In conclusion, Daniel Weintraub is correct in his assessment of one of the causes of America’s obesity. The truth is that no child can grow up to be

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an intelligent human being without a proper education, whether it be in mathematics or eating habits. Fast food companies are always going to compete for customers and try to make money, but they cannot control our decisions. The only people that can make choices for us ourselves, and we cannot make the right choices without proper education from our parents. We cannot blame others for our own problems. Only when parents and the population of America in general are educated and choose to live healthy lifestyles will the country's obesity cease.

Commentary

This essay illustrates the EPT Scoring Guide's criteria for a score of 5. The clear competence of the essay indicates that this writer is quite ready to handle college-level reading and writing.

- The writer addresses the topic of childhood obesity clearly, summarizing and then agreeing with Weintraub's position. Further references to Weintraub in the body and conclusion maintain a clear focus on the argument.
- The essay presents a well-reasoned response, indicating that various factors contribute to childhood obesity but finally siding with Weintraub in placing the responsibility on parents: *"We cannot make the right choices without proper education from our parents."*
- The essay shows some depth of thought in making the case that adults are responsible for making their own sound choices while parents are responsible for the choices their children make. However, the writer simply dismisses the responsibility of the fast-food industry without analysis.
- The essay is fairly clearly organized around the ideas that parents are responsible for their children's choices and that the best way to counter fast-food advertising is through education; however, some repetition and a lack of strong examples weaken the writer's argument.
- The sentences are varied and word choices are generally precise and effective.
- The essay has only a few minor errors: failure to use a semicolon with "however," misspelling of "obesity," and the distracting repetition of "America" in the first line.

Sample student essay with a score of 4:

Obesity Can Be Stopped Within the Home

The article titled, "The battle against fast food begins in the home," is the author's Daniel Weintraub, point of view on the rising obesity problem in America. Mr. Weintraub wrote this particular piece with one intention; to educate the readers with his own views. Mr. Weintraub doesn't blame the Government, or advertising for America's weight problem. But, instead he feels that parents are the sole component. He not only blames parents for

their children’s poor eating habits, but also for they lack of exercise, and physical activity. I strongly agree with Mr. Weintraub because of the dynamics and regimne of parent’s lives today and parents wanting to blame everyone and thing but themselves.

I strongly agree with Mr. Weintraub because of the dynamics and regimne of parent’s lives today. Mr. Weintraub makes the point in his article that, “Fast Food is fast.”, and “It can also seem cheap.” (Weintraub) This is just what parents who work all day want. They want to feed their children, not cook but feed, and relax after a hard days work. They may not mean to, but they are already to blame for their child’s eating habits. However, taking the easy route, they have already put their children at risk. The dynamics of their daily regimne naturally allow them to feed their child “junk”.

Not only do I believe that Mr. Weintraub is correct because of the dynamics and regimne of parent’s lives today, but I also strongly Agree with Mr. Weintraub because of parents wanting to blame everyone and thing but themselves. First off, in an article written by Shannon Brownlee titled, “Its Portion distortion that makes America fat,” a mother who was suing McDonalds stated, “1 always believed McDonalds food was healthy for my son.” (Brownlee) This statement shows a parent who is willing to blame a company, whose sole purpose is making money, for her child’s obesity. All the while parents eat, themselves, the exact same food as their child. They don’t hold any responsibility that maybe their child will mimic these same habits. In the “Letters to the Editor” section a woman, Patricia Gonzalez, poses a good question; “Why aren’t they (parents) home cooking them (children) healthy food?” (Letters to Editor) Instead of parents complaining about how companies made their kids fat, or how advertising hooked their kids, why don’t they eliminate these factors and cook their children a meal they know is healthy?

I strongly agree with Mr. Weintraub because of the dynamics and regimne of parent’s lives today and parents wanting to blame everyone and thing but themselves. Mr. Weintraub expressed the right point. As Americans, we need to take responsibility ourselves and not just blame other people. Parents could eliminate obesity before it became a problem in their child’s life. That is why I strongly agree with Mr. Weintraub.

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Commentary

This essay illustrates the EPT Scoring Guide’s criteria for a score of 4. This adequate response to the topic suggests that the writer should be able to handle college-level reading and writing.

- The writer clearly addresses Weintraub’s argument that parents are responsible for the epidemic of childhood obesity but fails to explain why the fast-food companies, “whose sole purpose is making money,” do not share responsibility.
- The writer generally understands the passage and develops a sensible, if somewhat simplistic, response: “why don’t they . . . cook their children a meal they know is healthy?”
- The essay has a clear organization around the issues of parents’ lack of time—“dynamics and regimne of parent’s lives”—and parents’ desire to

shift blame to others. However, well-chosen examples would strengthen the support for this argument.

- The essay demonstrates adequate use of syntax and language; however, word choice is sometimes imprecise. For example, “The article . . . is the point of view . . .” and “hold any responsibility.” “Dynamics” and “regimne” are used both imprecisely and repetitively.
- The writer has general control of grammar and usage; however, errors in punctuation and capitalization are frequent and distracting.

Sample student essay with a score of 3:

Who is to blame the parents, fast food companies, the government or yourself? People now a days are so quick to sue fast food companies for making them fat but its all about self control. One should know his or her own body and watch what they eat. Fast food places are on almost every corner but doesn't mean their making you eat there.

In New York a teenager is suing McDonald's for making her fat. He weighs in at 400 pounds. His mother says “I always believed McDonald's food was healthy for my son”. How is this possible? Two patty cheeseburgers, deep fried potatoes, and a large cup of soda is clearly not healthy. This kid probably ate at McDonald's majority of the time but I doubt he ate there everyday for every meal so how is McDonald's fully to blaim. Whatever happen to exercising, if this teenager was getting the required exercise there is no way he could way in at 400 pounds.

Don't get me wrong I'm not just on the fast food companies' side. Yes McDonald's super-sizing most of their meals is a little extreme. Having good deals like dollar nugget Tuesdays is also a big temptation. Fast food companies could cut down on the location of there restuarants. Being that its so con-venient that it's close to your house, cheap and fast is another way that makes Americans so addicted.

In conclusion, Both Americans and Fast Food Companies can change for the better. Americans start taking some responsibility for what you put into your own body. Fast Food Companies think of how many lives are at risk because of what your feeding them and cut back on expanding your franchises.

3

Commentary

This essay illustrates the EPT Scoring Guide's criteria for a score of 3. Although the essay indicates a developing competence on the part of the writer, it is flawed in significant ways that suggest the writer needs additional practice before being able to succeed in college-level reading and writing.

- The writer does not arrive at a thesis until the conclusion, which states, “In conclusion, Both Americans and Fast Food Companies can change for the better.” Even if this thesis had been presented in the introduction, however, it would need to be made more specific.
- The writer does not summarize or explain Weintraub's argument and fails to respond to the argument that parents are primarily responsible for their children's eating and exercise habits.

- The writer does not use Weintraub’s argument about the role of parents to develop the response; as a result, the essay is not focused on Weintraub’s argument but instead focuses entirely on the responsibility of the individual and the fast-food industry.
- The essay demonstrates simplistic thinking. It ignores the socioeconomic and developmental issues that can impede children and parents from making wise decisions about what they eat. It also ignores the imperative for businesses to make money when it suggests that McDonald’s “could cut down on the location of there restaurants.”
- A skeletal organization is present, with the two body paragraphs each addressing a single idea that is summarized in the conclusion.
- The paragraphs are underdeveloped; they need additional specifics and analysis. In addition, the role of parental responsibility needs to be explored. The paragraphs need effective topic sentences relating back to a controlling idea or thesis.
- The writer’s language is highly informal, relying on a series of rhetorical questions and colloquial comments (“Who is to blame . . .?” “How is this possible?” “Whatever happen to exercising?” “Don’t get me wrong.”) in place of analysis.
- The writer uses vague or incorrect pronoun reference (“one should know . . . and watch what they eat”; “but doesn’t mean their making you eat there”), and sentence structure is weak (“Being that its so convinent . . . is another way that makes Americans so addicted.”). The main errors, however, are in the mechanics, with numerous errors in punctuation, spelling, and capitalization.

Sample student essay with a score of 2:

Bigger isnt always better

Last year a Bronx teenager who weighted in at a wooping 400 pounds sat in a confrence room while their mother tried to file a suit againt Mc-Donald’s for make her kid fat. When ask why she replied “I always believed McDonald’s food was healthy for my son.” More and more american’s are trying to blame fast food for the reason they are fat, but is it what they eat or how much. Shannon Brownlee asked this question and this is what she found.

Portion sizes has been creeping up ward science 1972. That when McDolands introduced it’s large size fries. (which now was smaller than a mediu today.) And now they make more money then ever, they do it by consumer manipulation. Example 7-Eleven can sell the 64-ounce Double Gulp for only 37 cents more the 16-ounce 89 cent regular Gulp. “You’d feel ripped off if you bought the smaller size.” And thats just the way I feel when I go to fast food why not get the bigger size your pay just as much as a regular. After reading Shannon Brownlee’s article I understand and agree that people arn’t getting fat from the food but from how much they eat. So maybe all those mom’s should stop getting mad that their kid are getting fat and be mad at their kid for eating so much and throwing away money on food that 70% of the time they don’t finish!

2

Commentary

This essay illustrates the EPT Scoring Guide’s criteria for a score of 2. The serious flaws here indicate that this writer will need considerable additional practice before being able to succeed in college-level reading and writing.

- The writer does not summarize or respond to Weintraub’s argument, instead lifting portions from another article by Shannon Brownlee about fast food.
- The writer does not use the passage at all.

Sample student essay with a score of 1:

Many people blame the fast food industry for making them obese. But it’s not their fault it is the fault of the parents. It is theirs for not teaching the person how to eat right. It is the parents responsibility to teach their children o eat right and to excise at lest once a day.

Americans have taken the blame of obesity and put it one that fast food industry. Many parents have filled lawsuits against McDonalds for their health problems.

1

Commentary

This essay illustrates the EPT Scoring Guide’s criteria for a score of 1. The fundamental deficiencies of this essay clearly indicate that the writer needs much additional practice to be ready to succeed at college-level reading and writing.

- The essay’s length—six sentences—is insufficient to respond to the question.
- The writer misunderstands the passage and fails to refer to it.
- The essay is repetitive. The first and fifth sentences repeat each other, as do the second, third, and fourth sentences.
- The writer culls the idea of parental responsibility from the passage but offers no support, reasons, or examples as the prompt instructs.
- The essay appears to be incomplete. It ends with a (misstated) statement of fact from the passage that either belongs in the summary portion of the essay or should be omitted in lieu of the writer’s own opinions and support—the better option.
- The writer lacks basic control of syntax and vocabulary.
- The writer has serious and persistent errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics that severely interfere with meaning. Pronoun confusion (“It is theirs . . .”), preposition misuse (“blame of obesity”), and punctuation errors are profound.