

6.1 BENCHMARK ESSAYS AT EACH POINT ON THE SCALE

ELI-UM has prepared benchmark essays at each performance level. These essays were written in response to the following ECPE writing prompt:

Some psychologists claim that people inherit most of their personality traits from their parents. Do you think that this is true? Give specific examples from your own experience to support your viewpoint.

The first sample essay appears on the following page, and the comments appear on the page after that.

APPENDIX A2

Essay 1

Rating: A

Is our genetic material a determining factor for our personality? Although it is an ambiguous issue, we can meet many ordinary people, as well as psychologists, who are in favor of this question. Of course, I do not believe that there is a unique answer to such questions. However, I have a rather different point of view. Here are some remarks.

Studying molecular biology and genetics at the moment, and having the opportunity to come in "contact" with the wonders of nature in person, I am aware that our appearance characteristics are inherited from both our parents. But when it comes to our personality, I believe that our genetic material has nothing to do with it. What we are is not based on our genes by our education experiences and generally on our way of life. I firmly believe that we are not just a mixture of genes, molecules and chemical reactions. On the contrary, we are beings with emotions, feelings and cognition.

When I was younger I was always being told that I resembled my father. As a matter of fact, everything I did could be attributed to a proportional trait of my father. "You are persistent, nervous and hard working just like him" you could hear them say. But since then, a lot of things have changed and all I seem to have inherited from him is his eyes and lips! But this I mean that when children are young they resemble their parents' characters because they admire them. But growing up, they are affected by so many events and other individuals that their personality may have so little in common with their parents.

To sum up, I believe that we are something more than a repository of genetic material and molecules. Our personality is not inherited by "curved" through the experiences we go through. That is why we should not take everything for granted and never stop the efforts for self growth and improvement.

Essay 1 Rating: A

This composition displays an impressive use of vocabulary and rhetoric. The introduction explicitly acknowledges the different points of view possible and the essay demonstrates a more complex perspective (that of nurture vs. nature). The final sentence of the essay is a little clichéd, and is not connected well to the earlier parts of the essay but this is a minor flaw. The writer demonstrates the ability to write a variety of syntactic structures (both simple and complex). Control over the complex structures is very accurate. The writer uses complex conjunctions and this indicates good rhetorical control and a broad vocabulary. There is one relatively simple error—the writer uses “by” instead of “but”—but this is likely to be a fossilized error and it does not prevent this essay from being graded with an “A”. There are no spelling and punctuation errors. In fact, punctuation is used effectively on one occasion to signal humor.

Nowadays it is a highly controversial issue whether children inherit their personality from their parents or they form it as they grow up. To my way of thinking, children are affected not only by their parents but also by media, friends and society. This means that it is, clearly, our responsibility to form our own, unique, personality.

It is an undoubtful fact that parents are very important as far as their children rise is concerned. However, they cannot force their children to follow their own example and be their clones. Of course children take some characteristics of the personality of their parents but they do not become identical to them. For example, a friend of mine, Sophia has very strict and over-protective parents. This is the way that they grew up. On the contrary, Sophia is very lenient with her children despite the fact that the way and the environment she was raised was awful. That her parents' personality was terrible helped her to understand that we actually do not inherit our personality from them but we are influenced by other factors.

Media and friends are two of the most important factors through which we can form our personality. First of all, television can affect us through films or advertisements that show the-supposed-best personality. Television can contribute to the form of our character but this is not direct. It affects us with unconscious messages. Friends are also very important and have a very big role in the form of our character. We want to be identical to them due to the fact that we are inclined to believe that they are perfect and they can lead us throughout our life. This is absolutely wrong, because we forget that each one of us is beautiful in his own special-way and we should not copy others in order to cause interest.

Taking these points into consideration I would say that although having friends is a great advantage and watching television can be very informative, we should bear in mind that we should not be affected by no one. Our parents are in a great degree--responsible for our personality but this is not always true. I wholeheartedly believe that we have the biggest responsibility as far as our personality is concerned. After all, the world would be boring if we were all the same.

Essay 2 Rating: B

This composition starts very well. The introduction gives a clear statement of the writer's point of view and the writer continues this theme in each paragraph. As a result the text is very coherent. Explicit conjunctions are used but what is more impressive is the use of a more implicit discourse technique of "end focus." In this technique, "known" information is repeated or referred to at the start of a new sentence to connect what is known to what is new; for example, "We actually do not inherit our personality from them but we are influenced by other factors. Media and friends are two of the most important factors...."

The writer attempts both simple and complex syntax. It is important to note, however, that the writer is not able to maintain grammatical accuracy in the more complex sentences. These errors are intermittent but they are sufficient to indicate that the writer does not have a firm grasp over grammar and syntax. Word choices show breadth of vocabulary but these selections are not always appropriate. In some cases the choice results in too strong a claim; for example, the phrase "highly controversial issue" is too strong; people hold different viewpoints but the discussion does not necessarily generate heated debate. Despite the flaws in the essay, the writer's meaning is usually clear. Spelling and punctuation errors are infrequent and do not impede understanding. This is consistent with a "B" band essay.

Recently many psychologists are inclined to believe that the people's personality is most affected by their parents. To what degree is that true?

To begin with someone at an early age is a great replica of his/her parents and close relatives. The child may act in a similar way as his/her parents. Everything done or said by a parent either good or bad is deemed by the child as a proper example. To that extent the person's personality can be influenced and copied too. A child is not capable to distinguish what is wrong or right so he/she might mimic her/his parents' personality traits. For example when a boy endures physical abuse by his father he may become as violent as his father in the future.

Furthermore, a person's personality is also affected by his/her friends especially when he/she has low self-esteem. When someone regards him/herself invalid to do anything he/she may become alienated or he/she behave as being one of his friends. For example if we take two girls, one very popular among boys and another who is considered invisible by them the invisible girl may start acting as the other girl which will really seem fake as she is not herself, she will just behave in a way to become acceptable and attractive to boys neglecting her undiscovered assets.

To conclude it is my firm belief that not only parents play a major role in personality's modification but everyone including ourselves. It is up to us to what we will become. Apart from that one thing that we should not change is our ideologies, they should remain unbiased. Because then we will be mature and independent enough to go on with our lives.

Essay 3 Rating: C

This composition is a “C” band essay. The essay discusses the influence of family upbringing and of society. It is important to note that these both address one side of the essay topic—the influence of external factors (rather than genetics). The essay does not address inheritance (the “nature” argument); even though the writer does discuss the influence of family, upbringing rather than the personality characteristics that we are born with are discussed.

The writer makes ambitious vocabulary choices (e.g., “undiscovered assets,” “inclined to believe,” “deemed,” “alienated”). However, these selections are not always appropriate; they do not fit into the context, are not idiomatically correct, or they result in too strong a claim. There are also numerous grammatical errors. Additionally, the writer does not sustain the same register throughout the essay and some informal language is used (“fake”).

“C” band essays such as this one show that the writer understands the genre of an argument and attempts a rich explanation of the stated point of view. However, the writer makes numerous errors in grammar and vocabulary. These errors do not prevent the reader from understanding the essay but some effort is required.

Essay 4

Rating: D

Nowadays that our society has been increasing the range on violence at an earlier age than in the old days. For this reason, it is more likely to set the statement that children do not inherit most of their personality traits from their parents.

Children are more likely to be more violent every time. Even though psicologysts say that children inherit most of the personality traits from their parents, we should also consider that children are not only surrounded by their parents, parents might be the first company they have had along the first years, by as the years go by they also begin to form part of a big society. This society is not as we would dream to be, so children also acquire different behaviours from their surroundings. This lead us to think that their personality changes every time they are in contact wit the society.

Even though most people think that psicologysts are right, and children inherit the personality of their parents, we must take into account that a family tree is not only conformed by parents. As parents inherit some qualities and some characteristics from the grandparents' personalities, children as well may inherit some of these characters from other members of their families and not only from the parents.

As we can see parents are not the only ones that are responsible for our personalities. We are the ones that develop our personality through the years.

Essay 4 Rating: D

This composition is a “D” band essay. The introduction is abrupt and it is not clear that the writer has understood the essay question. Though the writer does present a point of view, the different perspectives possible are not acknowledged.

Additionally, the opening sentence is a broad and sweeping claim (“Nowadays that our society has been increasing the range on violence at an earlier age than in the old days.”) that is unsupported by evidence. It also seems irrelevant to the prompt.

This tendency to make sweeping claims unsupported by evidence recurs at other points in the essay. Additionally, the paragraphs do not have a clear theme and the essay seems circular. Grammatically, the essay is relatively sound. There are a number of different errors but few are serious and some complex sentences are attempted. However, the sentences are not always meaningful (e.g., “Children are more likely to be more violent every time”). Also, the writer does not seem able to express ideas concisely and precisely. Consequently, phrases are used where a single word would do (e.g., “as we would dream to be” instead of “perfect”). On other occasions the phrases used are not idiomatically correct (e.g., “as the years go by” instead of “as time passes”). There are a number of spelling and punctuation errors. Overall, the essay can be understood but it requires conscious reader effort.

Nowadays, as the psychologists claim that people create their character or their personality from the beginning of their lives. The most responsible persons for having a good personality are the parents.

I actually agree with the psychologists, because I believe that a person's character it's up to it's family and specially from it's parents.

As a child is growing up, parents are the persons who can advice and help their child to communicate with others. They also help him or her to how behave good to other people, to the animals and to the environment.

In addition, they learn their child when being in childhood to be gently optimistic, polite, and friendly in their friendship, in their relationship, family and work.

All the parents do not behave like this to their children.

Essay 5 Rating: E

This composition is an “E” band essay. The content is minimal, developing (in a vague way) only the influence that parents have on their children through upbringing. There are many indications that the prompt has not been fully understood, including the thesis statement “I actually agree with the psychologists....” This sentence claims that a child’s character is molded by parents and family. The claim is not unacceptable but it is not the view expressed in the prompt. Therefore, the writer does not actually agree with the psychologists. Grammatical and lexical errors frequently impede understanding; the reader has to make considerable effort to retrieve meaning. The errors made also suggest that the writer has gaps in grammatical and lexical knowledge. For instance, the writer might know all the prepositions but might only know their main uses. The essay ends abruptly. It is not clear whether the writer ran out of time to write further or whether this was simply a poor attempt at a closing statement.