



CUNY ASSESSMENT TESTS

General Guidelines: CATW

How to Understand the Reading and Get Started

Before you start to write your response, we recommend you spend 20 minutes reading and underlining significant ideas and 10 minutes planning and prewriting. The more time you spend understanding the reading and getting ideas before you write, the easier it will be to write.

Below is a practice reading. Read it and underline significant ideas. Make notes of how you plan to organize your response.

How to Do One Thing at a Time

By now, we all know that multi-tasking can be a losing proposition. Talking on the phone while driving? Dumb idea. Texting while driving? *Really* dumb idea. But even seemingly harmless multi-tasking—like chatting with a friend while sending out an office e-mail—isn't as harmless or efficient as we'd like to believe. A recent article published in the science journal *NeuroImage* revealed that when we attempt demanding tasks simultaneously, we end up doing neither as well as we should because our brains have cognitive limits.

What's more, we're also less efficient *after* we've shut down e-mail and turned off our phones. In a recent experiment at Stanford University, a group of students was asked to spend 30 minutes simultaneously compiling a music playlist, chatting, and writing a short essay. A second group focused on each task individually for 10 minutes each. Afterward, they were given a memory test. The single-taskers did significantly better than their multi-tasking peers.

"A tremendous amount of evidence shows that the brain does better when it's performing tasks in sequence rather than all at once," says Clifford Nass, Ph.D., a professor of communication at Stanford University. "We still don't know the long-term effects of chronic multi-tasking, but there's no question we're bad at it, and it's bad for us."

Many experts believe, however, that it's possible to repair your power of concentration. Through solutions such as yoga and acupuncture, experts believe we can break our multi-tasking habit and sharpen our focus.

Adapted from Women's Health Magazine, May 2010

How to Develop Your Response

In the Writing Directions for the CATW assignment, you are asked to “develop your essay by identifying one idea” and explaining its significance. You are also told to support your ideas with evidence or examples from “what you have read, learned in school, and/or personally experienced.” Below is a portion of a response to the passage, “How to Do One Thing at a Time.”

Read the *partial* response below and identify the idea the writer has chosen to focus on. How does the writer develop the idea? Does the writer use examples and details from his/her reading, previous school learning, or personal experience? Notice also what the writer does in the first paragraph.

Sample Response

The article says we’re less efficient even after we stop emailing and get off the phone. This conclusion was based on an experiment where students were asked to do three things at once for 30 minutes—create a playlist of music, chat on email, and write an essay. A second group was asked to do the same three things but one at a time, for ten minutes each. At the end, students in the second group performed better on a memory test than those who tried to multitask.

I am not surprised the second group performed better. I can imagine chatting on email at the same time I’m fooling around with an iPod, but I certainly couldn’t write an essay as well. Writing an essay takes (me) a lot of time and concentration. I once had a teacher who made us practice writing 10-minute essays so we would be ready for a timed test. We did it every class for a couple of weeks before the test, and it was effective for training the class to concentrate and write fast enough to do a 50 minute test. He called it “special case” writing, something to do for a timed test to get ideas down quickly. He never said it was the way to really write. Writing an essay involves reading, thinking, and revising, not while doing other things. That’s why we have libraries and quiet study areas. I envy the person who can write an essay while doing other things—but only if the person gets an A on the essay. Otherwise, I’ll stick to my slow, single-minded approach.

Students who think they can multitask are in for a big surprise when they get to difficult subjects and demanding assignments. This carries beyond school to many activities in life, driving, parenting, getting promoted for doing a job well....

Note: This response is not finished. It needs further development and an ending.

Below is the sample response showing its development.

Development of “Sample Response”

Summary of
passage



The article says we’re less efficient even after we stop emailing and get off the phone. This conclusion was based on an experiment where students were asked to do three things at once for 30 minutes—create a playlist of music, chat on email, and write an essay. A second group was asked to do the same three things but one at a time, for ten minutes each. At the end, students in the second group performed better on a memory test than those who tried to multitask.

Personal
response to
summary



I am not surprised the second group performed better. I can imagine chatting on email at the same time I’m fooling around with an iPod, but I certainly couldn’t write an essay as well. Writing an essay takes (me) a lot of time and concentration. I once had a teacher who made us practice writing 10-minute essays so we would be ready for a timed test. We did it every class for a couple of weeks before the test, and it was effective for training the class to concentrate and write fast enough to do a 50 minute test. He called it “special case” writing, something to do for a timed test to get ideas down quickly. He never said it was the way to really write. Writing an essay involves reading, thinking, and revising, not while doing other things. That’s why we have libraries and quiet study areas. I envy the person who can write an essay while doing other things—but only if the person gets an A on the essay. Otherwise, I’ll stick to my slow, single-minded approach.

Idea writer
wants to
develop



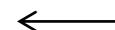
Personal
experience
to develop
idea



Lesson in
personal
experience

Students who think they can multitask are in for a big surprise when they get to difficult subjects and demanding assignments. This carries beyond school to many activities in life, driving, parenting, getting promoted for doing a job well....

continuing
development



How to Demonstrate Connections Between Ideas

In the CATW analytic scoring rubric, the category “Structure of the Response” looks at how well you organize your response and “demonstrate connections between ideas.” In other words, it is important that your sentences and paragraph connect one to the next, so the reader can follow your thinking. You don’t want the reader to fall into a hole between sentences or paragraphs.

As an example, here are two sets of sentences: A and B. In which set are the two connected? Explain your answer.

- A. ¹It is safe to say that advertisements are a person’s guideline in life. ²After the Industrial Revolution almost everyone wants to transfigure into a modernized individual.
- B. ¹Although it may be irritating to see an ad come on in the middle of your favorite show, the information supplied by that ad may not be available to you anywhere else. ²Corporations create ads to keep us updated on what is new.

Answer: The sentences in B are connected. The second sentence provides a specific detail/example as a restatement of the first. It “opens up” the first sentence. In contrast, the sentences in A seem unconnected. You cannot be sure of the connection, and the meaning is not clear.

Further Examples

Look at the Sample Student Paper #1, paragraphs 5 and 6 below. Notice how the writer connects each sentence and paragraph to the next one.

I suppose I’ve written all of this to show, as the author points out, how advertising permeates our entire society. There’s a chemical term which I think would apply to this, the Point of Saturation. Basically, when you have mixed so much solute (e.g. sugar) into a solvent (e.g. water) to the point that the solvent can hold no more of the solute (In my example, any further sugar crystals would just drop to the bottom), it had reached its P.O.S. Somehow, I think this aptly describes our minds when it comes to advertising. I wonder if we can take much more without any adverse effects. The author starts to delve into this when they mention how children watch ads in the classroom, and in the last sentence [kid singing the ... song]. Actually, most advertisements target children. They want children to see the ads, desire the product, and then beg their parents to buy it. As an additional bonus, this constant message of consumerism at such a young age will ensure that many children wanting (overspending) all sorts of products into adulthood. To illustrate, one study found that Polish families spend the most family time when shopping together. Maybe facts like this, and the rising number of families in perpetual credit card debt, can be taken as evidence of the adverse effects of advertising.

All things considered, we suffer. We are victims of a malady known as overabundant advertising. Maybe one day, a commission will be formed to limit the amount, and location of advertisements companies can use. But until then, one thing is certain. It is only a matter of time before we all begin hearing that Oscar Meyer song in our heads.

Explanation: Paper #1, paragraph 5 begins with a summarizing sentence: “I suppose I’ve written all of this to show, as the author points out, how advertising permeates our entire society.” This sentence connects everything written before, as well as the reading, to this writer’s restatement of the main point. Paper #1, paragraph 6 begins: “All things considered, we suffer.” Once again, the writer reminds us of all that’s been written (“All things considered”) and draws a conclusion.