

Sample Essay I.2. Good, in the 3-4 score range.

Question: In this excerpt from Marie Winn's 1977 book *The Plug-In Drug*, Winn draws several parallels between drug or alcohol addiction and "the television habit." Do you find Winn's arguments to be persuasive? Why or why not?

In her discussion of television "addiction," Marie Winn argues that t.v., like alcohol or heroin, is a harmful and debilitating habit. She contrasts the concept of being "hooked on t.v." with being hooked on gardening or cookies, habits which she considers "more worthwhile by any human measure." I would argue, however, that t.v. may not be compared to heroin use. Such a comparison (value-based, generalizing, and a marked over-simplification) fails to consider the complex roles t.v. may play in the life of an individual, as well as who bears ultimate responsibility for the ills of television.

Winn argues that t.v. is an uncontrollable addiction, which becomes more important than "other experiences" and adversely affects one's life. She fails to consider that t.v., unlike heroin or alcohol, rarely causes an individual to lose his or her job. In fact, t.v. addicts seem able to lead very normal lives (as well as being up to date on the evening news and such fascinating trivia as one finds on The Discovery Channel). There is no Television Addict Recovery Center or T.A.A. group (Television Addicts Anonymous). Winn's comparison seems over-estimated, as well as dramatic.

Further, as noted in Question 2 of this exam, "Winn makes no distinction between 'good' and 'bad' television programming." I would not presume to so moralize myself, but surely there is a difference between Sesame Street and Beavis and Butthead. A great deal of programs focus on education. In fact, channels such as A&E, The History Channel, Animal Planet, Discovery, and The National Geographic Channel are devoted specifically to expanding our knowledge. There are also channels and programs devoted to the news. CNN, MSNBC and others offer up to the minute coverage of the world's events in detail and timeliness unavailable through any other medium.

It is important to recognize, however, that many of these channels/programs were unavailable when Winn wrote this excerpt. Regardless, her opinion fails to take into consideration the power of t.v. to communicate important information. In addition, her argument is biased, based entirely on her individual system of values. She states, "the fact that he [the "t.v. addict"] doesn't read and doesn't plant his garden or sew or crochet or play games or have conversations means that those activities are no longer as important...He is passing up the activities that lead to growth or development or a sense of accomplishment." This statement begs the question: who decided that crocheting is more conducive to growth than watching t.v.? The answer: Marie Winn. The fact is that t.v. does not preclude other activities, and is no less "healthy" than an hour in the garden. Winn does not allow that an avid gardener may enjoy a gardening show or that one may learn to crochet from an instructional program. Her idea of productive pursuits is skewed—is the opera productive? Are books? Perhaps, but how can an individual decide this?

To follow Winn's assertions to their logical conclusion (i.e. result) suggests that we must abolish t.v. for the good of humanity. While I am not trying to suggest that t.v. is all good (I won't deny that it produces consumerism and may occasionally be inappropriately violent or sexual), I don't believe that we can blame the t.v. set for everything. It is, after all, nothing but a box of wires charges with electricity. If anyone bears ultimate responsibility for its ills, it is us—t.v. buyers, household cleaner buyers, consumers of sex and violence. If you want to control the negative by-products of t.v., monitor yourself and your children. All that one must do to keep t.v. from becoming an "addiction" is to STOP WATCHING IT. Despite Marie Winn's lament of its ills, I feel that t.v. can be a constructive force, affirming and building onto life rather than detracting from it. The power to control its effects rests with the individual.

Comments: This essay succeeds despite some flaws in its logic. Although it is written 'with attitude', the writer keeps her authorial voice within accepted academic bounds. Her language is direct, clear, and active. She pointedly attacks Winn's premise that television viewing is dangerous by showing that television viewing is both less dangerous and more healthy than Winn

contends. She connects the contents of Winn's essay with everyday life, weaving the names of programs and channels into the essay in an authoritative way. She loses some credibility when she takes up the issue of who is to blame for t.v. since Winn's essay does not address this question. However, it is clear that this writer understands Winn's major arguments and rejects them. Because that is the focus of the question, this response is effective. Given more opportunity to revise, this student should more carefully group her ideas into paragraphs (see paragraphs 3 and 4), elaborate on her first argument (paragraph 2), and improve her phrasing at several points.