

Sample 2.1. Good, in the 4 score range.

Question: In his essay, Frederick King, a respected expert in animal research, defends the use of animals in medical research. Do you find his case persuasive? Explain why or why not.

The use of animals in research is obviously a controversial topic in our society. The primary source of this controversy lies in the many allegations of dreadfully inhumane methods employed by scientists in their work. In his article “Animal in Research: The Case for Experimentation,” Frederick King argues that the involvement of animals in research is justified when we take into account the benefits to humankind along with the high standards of humane treatment imposed by our governing agencies. More specifically, he defends the use of animals in psychological studies. He also highlights a few seemingly irrational arguments and contradictory views held by many animal-rights extremists. Despite some instances that seem to beg further evidence or examples, I find King’s argument (when taken in its entirety) convincing.

Commentary: This introduction shows understanding of the text and question and contains a thesis statement that clearly presents the writer’s argument and suggests the direction the essay will take. The writer has chosen an appropriate academic voice and shows competency in her use of language and mechanics.

After explaining that many animal activists would love to see experimentation with animals eliminated, King allows us to read many of the claims made by these activists. According to King, the Mobilization for Animals Coalition (MFA) has accused many scientists of mutilating animals’ limbs to change behavioral patterns, subjecting them to repeated electrical shocks, and allowing their bones to be crushed and their organs ruptured. Following these accusations, King defends the scientists by citing studies which effectively refute any such accusations in several hundred reported experiments. King admits that cases of animal abuse “may have gone unreported or been reported elsewhere,” but insists that it is inaccurate to claim that these few possible occurrences are commonplace. Although many “extremists” may not be satisfied if only one case of neglect or abuse remains, this portion of King’s argument alone effectively refutes the assumption that scientists who use animals for medical research are sadists. King goes on to list specific examples of governmental precautions and research guidelines set forth in an effort to ensure the proper treatment of the subjects. Again, this aids readers in avoiding an unformed opinion and prevents us from assuming that the field of animal research is poorly regulated.

Commentary: This paragraph accurately and concisely explains the first portion of King’s defense, but the writer does not merely summarize King’s argument. Instead, she proceeds to explain precisely why she finds this portion of King’s argument effective.

King then describes many cases showing the benefits offered through psychological research with animals, from biofeedback for controlling blood pressure to behavioral modification for treating drug addictions. The only point I took issue with here concerns his statement, “Biofeedback can also be a cost-effective alternative to certain medical treatments and can help avoid many of the complications associated with long-term drug use.” Here, the “medical treatments” remain vague, the “complications” are not specified, and hence, questions are raised concerning the validity of these claims. In light of the many other benefits listed, however, combined with the fact that King is a respected neuroscientist, it is easy to overlook these generalities.

Commentary: The material in this paragraph is cohesive, specific, and logical. The writer has a clear purpose in using King’s quote: she wishes to illustrate his vague language and the lack of support for his claim. With her thesis in mind, she ends the paragraph by explaining that although she has given an example of a flaw in King’s argument, she still finds his argument persuasive as a whole.

Next, anticipating a skeptic’s argument, King mentions the possibility of alternatives to animal research and notes that many experiments that formerly required animal research have been replaced with “feasible and valuable” alternatives. He moves on to say, “For psychological

studies, however, it is often necessary to study the whole animal and its relationship to the environment.” So, while some experiments would not suffer without the use of animal subjects, many of them would not be possible.

Commentary: In this paragraph, the writer praises King for anticipating and refuting a counter-argument to his position. Rather than ending the paragraph with a quote, she explains its meaning and its relevance before moving on.

King’s next point attacks the integrity of the extremist groups and their view that “animals have rights equal to or greater than those of humans.” King makes the argument that, despite the “moral position” of these organizations, many of them “condone—and indeed sponsor—activities that appear to violate the basic rights of animals to live and reproduce.” Among the activities, he says, are the ten million dogs destroyed per year by public pounds and programs endorsing “pet sterilization.” It is extremely difficult for me to believe that the same extremist groups mentioned would approve of these activities. If one held the view that animals have equal rights to those of humans, it is such a blatant contradiction to promote unwilling sterilization or death that even the most irrational person should have difficulty taking this stance. King’s credibility does not help quite as much in this case. He later describes moderate activists who have the primary aim to “ensure that animals are treated humanely and that discomfort in animal experimentation is kept to a minimum.” Without any examples of contradictory extremist organizations, I am led to believe that it may be the moderates who contradict themselves in this way, rather than the extremists. If my assumption is correct, King’s argument carries much less weight here, since the moderate activists do not hold the view that animals possess the same rights that humans have.

Commentary: This portion of the writer’s argument is less precise than the rest, though her point (King undermines his credibility by providing no evidence to support his assertion that the extremist groups are hypocritical) is valid.

A powerful statement concludes King’s argument: “...fortunately, there are many who, while deeply and appropriately concerned for the compassionate treatment of animals, recognize that human welfare is and should be our primary concern.” After taking King’s arguments into consideration, I have drawn the same conclusion. Despite his occasional lack of specific support, these arguments form an undeniable logic pointing toward a sensible justification for the use of animals in research.

Commentary: The writer provides a brief and focused conclusion.

Commentary: The above essay, scored as a 4, reflects critical thought and attention to detail. The writer takes a clear and consistent position on the issue presented in the prompt and argues with clarity, detail, and relevance in support of the thesis statement. The organization and fluent language of the essay allow for smooth reading and do not undermine the argument, although occasional lapses in diction, voice, or mechanics may occur.