

ANNOTATIONS FOR THE “5” ESSAY

1. What makes this a “5” essay?

First, the writer makes clear his/her awareness of the conventions of overall essay structure. The thesis has two distinct points that the writer goes on to develop in the body paragraphs. Each body paragraph begins with a topic sentence that echoes the language of the thesis, demonstrating that the writer stays on track throughout the entire essay. The writer makes abundant use of transitional words and phrases, which helps to keep the essay structure coherent between and within paragraphs and to keep readers focused on the flow of the writer’s ideas. Next, the author demonstrates a thorough understanding of the topic and careful thinking-through of the related issues. The writer develops his/her major points with adequate (and sometimes more than adequate) detail. For example, the first body paragraph is particularly well developed with specific examples and details. Finally, the essay has good sentence variety and a generally effective use of language. It contains only a few grammatical and mechanical errors.

2. Why is this not a “6” essay? How could it be improved?

Although this is a clearly passing essay, it does not achieve the level of high pass for the following reasons. To begin, both the introduction and conclusion need to be more thoughtfully and accurately developed in order to meet the expectations of a “6” essay. The thesis statement could be elaborated more precisely, showing a more in-depth knowledge of the topic. Next, while the student introduces interesting examples, the examples often lack sufficient elaboration and explanation to clarify fully the author’s point. In particular, the examples found in the second body paragraph often consist of vague or general words and phrases, which can confuse rather than inform readers. For example, the writer says that “there are many problems that just occurred,” but does not specify these problems or clarify in what sense they “just occurred.”

The essay incorporates some sentence variety and a creative, energetic use of language. However, the vocabulary and syntax tend to be overly conversational, lacking precision and variety. Also, the essay has relatively few grammatical errors, but the errors that are present fall into the category of “major” errors. There are two sentence fragments, one run-on, and instances of faulty and awkward syntax. While these mistakes do not interfere with the overall coherence of the essay, they do interrupt the smooth and effective flow of ideas.

These characteristics do not demonstrate the depth of thought and rhetorical clarity required for a score of “6.”

3. What did readers like best about this essay?

Most readers appreciated the way in which the supporting examples go beyond the ordinary, demonstrating the writer’s originality, sense of humor, and intimate appreciation for the topic. To reinforce these examples, the student incorporates vivid and

compelling metaphors that further engage the readers—grabbing their interest, making them laugh, and helping them relate to the writer’s point of view.

The student also shows a strong command of basic organizational principles. The thesis statement, topic sentences, and transitional words are clearly and strategically placed. In the body paragraphs, the use of transitional words highlights the student’s strong effort to elaborate a sequence of distinct examples.

4. Evaluate the opening paragraph.

The opening paragraph has a sufficiently developed introduction and a thesis. However, the introduction leading to the thesis is not clearly related to the assigned question or the thesis itself. The topic asks students to consider whether couples should live together before marriage, but the student’s opening sentences imply that the essay will explore the idea of life without marriage, which, of course, is not what the essay will be about. A better introduction would lead more logically into the writer’s thesis by focusing on the issue of couples living together.

The thesis statement establishes this paper’s central argument efficiently by making the direct claim that premarital cohabitation is beneficial. The thesis also provides a substantial supporting reason: couples that live together can discover and solve any unforeseen major problems before they actually get married. This thesis statement, however, could be more specific. For example, the student should explain in more depth what it means to "practice marriage." In particular, this thesis could be revised to clarify which aspects of marriage a cohabitating couple would benefit from practicing. Instead of writing “practice marriage,” for instance, the student could have written that “Premarital cohabitation allows a couple to experience shared marital responsibilities, discuss the challenges of raising a future family, and learn to compromise in order to solve disputes.”

5. Evaluate the first body paragraph.

The first body paragraph begins with a clear topic sentence and is followed by relevant examples and sufficient detail to clarify those examples. Consistent transitional words highlight the effective organization and logical development of the paragraph.

The topic sentence is clearly relevant to the thesis statement since it restates the main thesis claim that premarital cohabitation is in many ways beneficial. The reason given (“because it’s good practice”), however, is a bit too general. The student could improve this topic sentence by stating that premarital cohabitation teaches a couple to resolve potentially conflicting needs in an everyday environment that is anything but romantically ideal.

In addition, the student could have developed some of the examples further by explaining how they support the thesis. For instance, the first two examples in this paragraph are wonderfully colorful but would benefit from more explanation. The student could have added that a man’s willingness to follow his girlfriend’s inconvenient bathroom rules is

an example of his willingness to compromise, which might help make the couple's eventual marriage more successful. Furthermore, the paragraph would benefit from adding more examples that focus on the woman's experience during premarital cohabitation. Making almost all the examples male-oriented tends to exclude women from the audience that this essay is intended to reach.

6. Evaluate the second body paragraph.

The second body paragraph has a clear scheme of organization that begins with a direct topic sentence. The examples are relevant and the supporting details sufficient, though they lack the precision and conviction of those in body paragraph one. For instance, the first and second examples ("having children" and "place of residency") are fine examples of "decisions" that prospective marriage partners need to consider. The second example, "learn about each other and make compromises" is only vaguely related to a type of "decision." The writer should specify that compromise is already a form of decision-making.

Furthermore, the supporting details for the first example ("having children") begin well but lose focus when the writer generalizes: "there are many problems that just occurred, and many people don't realize that they don't really know each other as well as they thought they did. So you should know each other better by living together." In these overly-general statements, the student has lost a strong connection to the issue of having children. Likewise, the supporting details for the third example ("place of residency") seem hasty and incomplete; the student could have elaborated several options other than "she moves in with you or you move in with her." This rushed formulation of the details shows a superficial level of thought.

7. Evaluate the conclusion.

The conclusion clarifies the main idea expressed throughout the essay, but it is not as thoughtful or carefully expressed as it could be. The simplistic repetition of the essay's thesis statement is adequate to the task, but it lacks imagination and insight. Furthermore, the student begins two sentences with the same phrase, "Living together," and the paragraph ends with a grammatically incorrect sentence. Hence, this paragraph would benefit from revision that focuses on varying sentence structure and the use of a larger vocabulary.