

Screen Directions and Sample Topics from the Issue Pool

This is the set of directions above the topic.

Present your perspective on the issue below, using relevant reasons and/or examples to support your views.

Sample Issue Topic

"In our time, specialists of all kinds are highly over-rated. We need more generalists -- people who can provide broad perspectives."

Please note: All of these sample essays are reproduced as written, although reformatted for this document. Misspellings, typos, grammatical errors, etc. have been retained from the originals.

Benchmark 6 -- Outstanding

In this era of rapid social and technological change leading to increasing life complexity and psychological displacement, both positive and negative effects among persons in Western society call for a balance in which there are both specialists and generalists.

Specialists are necessary in order to allow society as a whole to properly and usefully assimilate the masses of new information and knowledge that have come out of research and have been widely disseminated through mass global media. As the head of Pharmacology at my university once said (and I paraphrase): "I can only research what I do because there are so many who have come before me to whom I can turn for basic knowledge. It is only because of each of the narrowly focussed individuals at each step that a full and true understanding of the complexities of life can be had. Each person can only hold enough knowledge to add one small rung to the ladder, but together we can climb to the moon." This illustrates the point that our societies level of knowledge and technology is at a stage in which there simply must be specialists in order for our society to take advantage of the information available to us.

Simply put, without specialists, our society would find itself bogged down in the Sargasso sea of information overload. While it was fine for early physicists to learn and understand the few laws and ideas that existed during their times, now, no one individual can possibly digest and assimilate all of the knowledge in any given area.

On the other hand, Over specialization means narrow focii in which people can lose the larger picture. No one can hope to understand the human body by only inspecting one's own toe-nails. What we learn from a narrow focus may be internally logically coherent but may be irrelevant or fallacious within the framework of a broader

perspective. Further, if we inspect only our toe-nails, we may conclude that the whole body is hard and white. Useful conclusions and thus perhaps useful inventions must come by sharing among specialists. Simply throwing out various discoveries means we have a pile of useless discoveries, it is only when one can make with them a mosaic that we can see that they may form a picture.

Not only may over-specialization be dangerous in terms of the truth, purity and cohesion of knowledge, but it can also serve to drown moral or universal issues. Generalists and only generalists can see a broad enough picture to realize and introduce to the world the problems of the environment. With specialization, each person focusses on their research and their goals. Thus, industrialization, expansion, and new technologies are driven ahead. Meanwhile no individual can see the wholisitic view of our global existence in which true advancement may mean stifling individual specialists for the greater good of all.

Finally, over-specialization in a people's daily lives and jobs has meant personal and psychological compartmentalization. People are forced into pigeon holes early in life (at least by university) and must consciously attempt to consume external forms of stimuli and information in order not to be lost in their small and isolated universe. Not only does this make for narrowly focussed and generally poorly-educated individuals, but it guarantees a sense of loss of community, often followed by a feeling of psychological displacement and personal dissatisfaction.

Without generalists, society becomes inward-looking and eventually inefficient. Without a society that recognizes the importance of broad-mindedness and for a for sharing generalities, individuals become isolated. Thus, while our form of society necessitates specialists, generalists are equally important. Specialists drive us forward in a series of thrusts while generalists make sure we are still on the jousting field and know what the stakes are.

Reader Comment on 6

This outstanding response displays insightful analysis, meticulous development, impressive vocabulary and a mastery of the elements of effective writing. The writer disagrees with the stated opinions by arguing that specialists and generalists are both vital: specialists prevent us from becoming "bogged down in the Sargasso sea of information overload," while generalists provide help to see "the big picture" and, unlike specialists, protect our "greater good."

The essay is carefully constructed throughout, enabling the reader to move effortlessly from point to point as the writer examines the multi-faceted implications of the issue and provides compelling reasons and examples to support the premise and take the argument to an effective conclusion. Although other "6" responses may not be as eloquent as this essay, they nevertheless all display the test taker's ability to articulate complex ideas effectively and precisely.

Benchmark 5 -- Strong

Specialists are not overrated today. More generalists may be needed, but not to overshadow the specialists. Generalists can provide a great deal of information on many topics of interest with a broad range of ideas. People who look at the overall view of things can help with some of the large problems our society faces today. But specialists are necessary to gain a better understanding of more in depth methods to solve problems or fixing things.

One good example of why specialists are not overrated is in the medical field. Doctors are necessary for people to live healthy lives. When a person is sick, he may go to a general practitioner to find out the cause of his problems. Usually, this kind of "generalized" doctor can help most ailments with simple and effective treatments. Sometimes, though, a sickness may go beyond a family doctor's knowledge or the prescribed treatments don't work the way they should. When a sickness progresses or becomes diagnosed as a disease that requires more care than a family doctor can provide, he may be referred to a specialist. For instance, a person with constant breathing problems that require hospitalization may be suggested to visit an asthma specialist. Since a family doctor has a great deal of knowledge of medicine, he can decide when his methods are not effective and the patient needs to see someone who knows more about the specific problem; someone who knows how it begins, progresses, and specified treatments. This is an excellent example of how a generalized person may not be equipped enough to handle something as well as a specialized one can.

Another example of a specialist who is needed instead of a generalist involves teaching. In grammar school, children learn all the basic principles of reading, writing, and arithmetic. But as children get older and progress in school, they gain a better understanding of the language and mathematical processes. As the years in school increase, they need to learn more and more specifics and details about various subjects. They start out by learning basic math concepts such as addition, subtraction, division, and multiplication. A few years later, they are ready to begin algebraic concepts, geometry, and calculus. They are also ready to learn more advanced vocabulary, the principles of how all life is composed and how it functions. One teacher or professor can not provide as much in depth discussion on all of these topics as well as one who has learned the specifics and studied mainly to know everything that is currently known about one of these subjects. Generalized teachers are required to begin molding students at a very early age so they can get ready for the future ahead of them in gaining more facts about the basic subjects and finding out new facts on the old ones.

Reader Comment on 5

The essay presents a strong analysis of the complexities of the issue.

This writer's argument is rooted in two extended examples, both of which are well

chosen and effective. The example in paragraph 2 begins with a discussion of the need in the medical field for general practitioners as well as specialists and moves into an example within the example (breathing problems and the need for an asthma specialist) to illustrate the point. This extension from the general to the specific also characterizes the example in paragraph 3. Overall, the essay is well-organized, in part because the writer connects ideas through the use of appropriate transitions: "but," "usually," and "for instance," among others.

While the writer handles language and syntax well, several bothersome problems keep this otherwise well-argued paper out of the 6 category. The problems vary from the lack of a pronoun referent ("When a sickness progresses or becomes diagnosed,...he may be referred to a specialist") to an error in parallel structure ("...how it begins, progresses and specified treatments"), to loose syntax and imprecise language ("Generalized teachers are required to begin molding students at a very early age so they can get ready for the future ahead of them in gaining more facts about the basic subjects and...")

Benchmark 4 -- Adequate

The need for generalists is undeniable but one can not underestimate the need and importance of specialists. The medical profession is a good example of an area that requires both generalists and specialists. If there were no generalists in the profession there would be no one to help patients determine when a specialist was needed. There are certain problems that a general practitioner can take care of and there are other problems that are out of his or her league. The general practitioner is the an appropriate place to start when a patient develops a problem. Many times the general practitioner is more than capable of handling problems that arise and other times he or she is unable to fully take control of the patient's care. It isn't a fault with the general practitioners. There is just too much to know for any one person to be an expert on all topics. It takes people years to become experts on a single topic, never mind being an expert on everything in the medical profession.

I am currently working in a large teaching hospital where the need for both general practitioners and specialists is obvious. When a patient is admitted to a general medicine floor, the general medicine physicians are not always able to deal with every problem the patient has without some help from the specialists. It would be unrealistic, not to mention unfair to the general practitioners, to expect the general practitioners to know everything about everything. The key is to know where everyone's knowledge and area of expertise lie and use their strengths to optimize patient care.

On the general medicine team in which I worked, the team would constantly be requesting consults from specialists. Whether it be a renal, psychiatric, orthopedic, rehabilitation, speech, gastroenterologist, or any other specialist, their input was constantly needed and used to get the patient well as quickly as possible. The list of specialists can go on longer than one would think and it is just impossible for one

person to know everything about each one of them.

Although the need for generalists is apparent, it would be hard to survive without specialists, also. When a person acts as a generalist, they know little bit about everything, but certainly not a totally inclusive knowledge of everything. The specialist is there to help add the expertise and inclusive knowledge that the generalist may be lacking. The most important thing to remember with specialists and generalists is to recognize both's strengths and weaknesses and capitalize on the strengths to achieve whatever goal may be desired.

Reader Comment on 4

Overall, this is a competent response to the topic. The writer disputes the claim that "specialists are over-rated" and argues from the position that both specialists and generalists are needed. The single extended example clearly supports the premise of the argument as the writer compares the roles and responsibilities of generalists and specialists in the medical profession. By paragraph 3, however, the discussion falters, and the concluding paragraph does little more than repeat ideas presented in the first two paragraphs.

This essay displays generally adequate control over syntax and usage, and the word choice, while appropriate, lacks precision.

Benchmark 3 -- Limited

Generalists have the ideas and beliefs of what America is made of. America's wealth of knowledge can be related to the generalists of the past generations and the original leaders of our Constitution Period that helped shape our great nation. If our former leaders would have not been generalists when creating our country's Constitution in the late 1770's, American generations of would have been burdened with the constant understanding that they are doomed to failure.

The fact that our past leaders were not specialists gave the creation of the Constitution the ability to be changed through amendments passed by our represented leaders of today. The Constitution was created with the ability to adapt to the countries needs and demands in running our society as it changes over time. The generalists approach to this creation of a non-specialized Constitution shows the need for todays generations to continue with the beliefs that a specialist would not follow.

America has learned from it's past and has done what it can to make the changes through adaption. America's greatness has been from the generalist leaders of the past, thinking for the Americans of the future. Americans with a broad perspective is what will continue to lead our great nation into the twenty-first century.

Reader Comment on 3

This response displays some competence but is flawed by imprecise use of language and limited analysis of the issue.

The writer supports the claim that generalists are preferable to specialists, offering as evidence the historical example of the generalists who created the U.S. Constitution. The example, while relevant, is not adequately developed. The middle paragraph traces the flexibility of the U.S. Constitution to the generalist orientation of 18th century leaders, but the ideas in the first paragraph are too vaguely expressed to contribute to this discussion, and the final paragraph consists of unsubstantiated generalities.

Frequent minor errors in punctuation, pronoun use, and verb tense, as well as imprecise syntax and phrasing (e.g., "Generalists have the ideas and beliefs of what America is made of. " and "...gave the creation of the Constitution the ability to...") contribute to the overall inadequacy of this response.

Benchmark 2 -- Seriously Flawed

I disagree with the portion of the "Specialists of all kinds are highly overated" statement. Specialists are persons who take care of certain tasks or a specific area of whatever the case may be. These persons contibute more time and effort than those with general titles. the specialists are the ones who can tell or give the client more details on what is happening to them. The generalist can only give broad ideas which can be a number of things. The specialist narrows the ideas down to the specifics. For example if one goes to a "general practioner doctor" for pains in the chest area, he would tell the client that the poblem may be heart burns, or something else that's not be so serious, depending on the symptoms. He may also refer him to a cardiologist to be sure it's not any thing else. The point I'm making is that specialist are people who can help us out even more that our generalist. Also the fact that one would go to a specialist only in dire needs.

Reader Comment on 2

The response presents a position on the issue but the development of that position is seriously flawed.

The writer begins by disagreeing with the assertion that "specialists...are highly over-rated" and then attempts to define and contrast specialists and generalists. The attempt is unsuccessful, partly because the descriptions are vague and ill-conceived.

Whereas the example of going to a "general practitioner doctor" is certainly relevant, the writer's claim that a general practitioner would tell a patient with chest pains that the problem "may be heart burns or something else that's not so serious" seems far-

etched.

The response is further weakened by poor word choice and by numerous errors in sentence structure, usage, and grammar. These problems, while not severe enough to seriously interfere with meaning, contribute to the overall rating of "2."

Benchmark 1 -- Fundamentally Deficient

In today's society, there are many people who feel generalist are more broad than specialists. I will discuss how there is a need for generalists in the medical field, education, and the work place.

First, I will discuss how there is a need for generalists in the medical field. A generalist in this area would be straight foward with clients. For instance, in explaining to a patient they had cancer. A specialist would use wording that you would believe everything is fine.

Second, I will discuss how there is a need for generalists in the education field. In this field some instructors use "big words" and try to out smart themselves with there own thoughts of character.

Last, I will discuss how there is a need for generalists in the workplace. In the workplace the bosses should be open with personell. For instance, instead of acting like they know everything they should be open to knew thoughts and ideas.

Reader Comment on 1

On the surface, this essay appears to present an organized discussion of the issue. In actuality, there are fundamental deficiencies in analysis and development.

The essay begins with a tautology: "...there are many people who feel generalist are more broad than specialists." Then, in the three short paragraphs that follow, the writer promises to discuss "a need for generalists" in a specific field, but none of these discussions materialize.

The rest of the essay only confirms the sense of "fundamental deficiency." Rather than analyze the issue, the writer unpersuasively vilifies specialists as people who use their power to deceive and mislead others.

Although the errors (sentence fragments, incorrect verb tenses, and awkward syntax) are persistent, language problems alone do not earn this essay a score of "1." Rather, this response fits the scoring guide criterion of showing "little evidence of the ability to develop or organize a coherent response to the topic."