

Concours Paris : 2012

No killer app

In the late morning of April 20th 1999 a pair of teenagers, Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, walked into the cafeteria at Columbine High School in Colorado and began gunning down their classmates. The two senior-year students killed 13 people in a 45-minute rampage before turning their weapons on themselves. The massacre remains the deadliest high-school shooting in American history.

5 In the days after the killings it emerged that, besides enjoying violent movies, the two liked playing “Doom”, a gory video game from the mid-1990s in which the heavily armed players use shotguns and rocket launchers **to dispose of** legions of zombies and demons. Parents, politicians and psychiatrists fretted that exposure to virtual violence had prepared the ground for the real-world killings. Two years later the parents of some of the victims sued dozens of gaming companies, including id Software, the developers of “Doom”, alleging that their products had contributed to
10 the murders.

The massacre fed long-standing worries about video games, particularly in America, the industry’s biggest national market. Governments from California to Switzerland have tried to ban the sale of violent games to children, and most countries have an age-rating system similar to that for films.

15 However, since gaming has become more **mainstream**, the proportion of violent games has fallen. According to vgchartz, a website that tracks games sales, the ten bestselling console games of 2010 included just three violent shooters. The rest were inoffensive sports and fitness titles, a Super Mario platform-jumping game and a Pokémon product, a cartoony franchise of games based on a Japanese TV series for children. Many games that do feature violence serve up a slapstick version. The sort of gruesomely realistic killings found in serious war films are rare.

20 Still, many games require the player to dispose of great numbers of Nazis, gangsters, aliens and other bad guys. A few games serve up stylised violence for its own sake. And the critics say there is a crucial difference between films, plays or books, where the players are just passive onlookers, and video games, where they are active participants in the simulated **slayings**. That, the argument goes, makes it more likely that they will resort to violence in the real world, too.

25 But the evidence is hard **to pin down**. Violent crime in America, Britain and Japan, the three biggest video-game markets, has dropped over the past decade at the same time as sales of video games have soared. That does not, by itself, exonerate the industry—after all, without games violent crime might have fallen still further. And several studies purport to show that playing violent video games raises aggression levels. But Chris Ferguson, a psychologist at Texas A&M International University, points out that much of this work is of poor quality. In a meta-analysis published in 2007, he found no evidence that games made their players violent. Indeed, after decades of research, he
30 has concluded that violence in any media has little or no effect on their consumers. A review commissioned by the Australian attorney-general, published last year, backed this up.

35 But might players not get addicted to gaming? In 1983 David Sudnow, a sociologist, wrote a bestselling book, “Pilgrim in the Microworld”, in which he described his obsession with a game called “Breakout”. It consists of the player bouncing a ball off a paddle to destroy a collection of bricks on the screen. “Thirty seconds of play...and I’m on a whole new plane of being, all synapses wailing,” he wrote.

That sensation of losing track of time will be familiar to most gamers. Again, critics point to the interactive nature of video games, which allows their designers to tweak risks and rewards to make them irresistible. Some countries, including China and South Korea, are attempting to limit the number of hours that youngsters can play online games.

40 Even games developers themselves have expressed concern about online games that rely on keeping players hooked. But there is no suggestion that games are addictive in the sense that they create physical dependence in their players. That makes them akin to other compelling but legal pastimes, such as gambling, following a football club or collecting stamps.

45 There is a long tradition of dire warnings about new forms of media, from translations of the Bible into vernacular languages to cinema and rock music. But as time passes such novelties become uncontroversial, and eventually some of them are elevated into art forms. That mellowing process may already be under way as the average game -player gets older. Mr. Ferguson notes wryly that the latest targets of attack are social media such as Facebook and Twitter, which are said to expose children to paedophiles, invade their users' privacy and facilitate riots. Perhaps video games are not so bad.

The Economist online - January 10th 2012

I. TEXTUAL COMPREHENSION (/10)

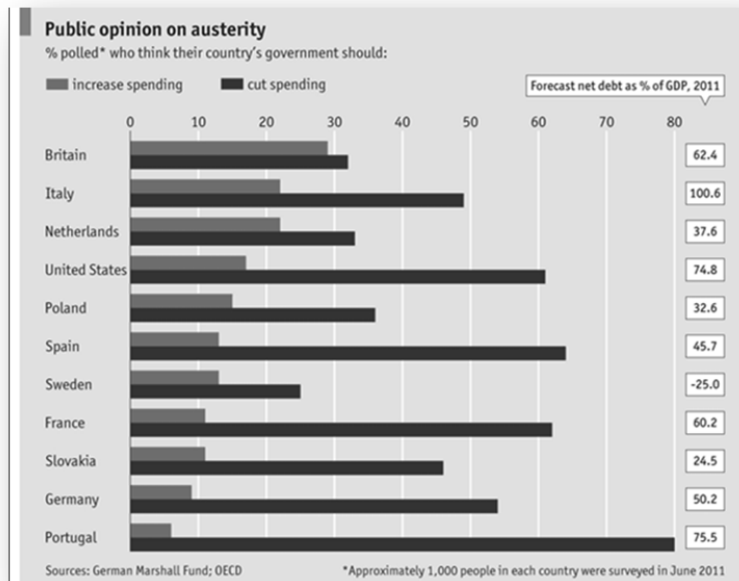
A/ After reading the text carefully, reply in English and in your own words to the following questions (/6).

1. What were the consequences of the Columbia High School massacre for video gaming companies and their international market?
2. Is the critics' argument that there is an obvious link between violent video games and violent crime justified? Give reasons.
3. What is the columnist's argument in the conclusion of the text?

B/ Give an appropriate English synonym for the following words (synonyms to be used in the context of the text) (/2):

1. to dispose of:
2. mainstream:
3. slayings:
4. to pin down:

C/ After a brief description, comment on the following graph in English (/2):



Sep 15th 2011, 15:48 by The Economist online

II. ESSAY

(/10)

Write a short, well-argued essay in English (two pages) on one of the two subjects below. Circle the number which corresponds to the essay chosen.

1. Do you believe that youngsters can become addicted to video gaming and that the time spent playing these games should be limited?
2. “The last targets of attacks are social media such as Facebook and Twitter, which are said to expose children to paedophiles, invade their users’ privacy and facilitate riots.” Discuss.



I. Textual Comprehension (/ 10)

A/

(/6)

- 1. What were the consequences of the Columbia High School massacre for video gaming companies and their international market?**

Companies had to comply with age limits being imposed in most countries around the world and even seeing some countries (Switzerland) attempting to forbid the sale of too violent games. (30 words)

No marks will be given if you just copy from the text. So, AVOID this at all costs.

Make sure that you stick to the three lines maximum which means 30-40 words. Do not write outside of the three lines as you will be penalised.

- 2. Is the critics' argument that there is an obvious link between violent video games and violent crime justified? Give reasons.**

It is not entirely justified. Studies carried out have been doubtful and of low quality. Psychological research shows that there is no correlation. Crime has also fallen in the countries that have the most sales of video games. (38 words)

Don't try to write an introduction or use expressions such as 'in my opinion, I think that...'. They will just be a waste of the space. You are limited, so make everything count towards the grade.

You are not being asked in question 2 for your personal opinion. Careful! Answer with regard to what the text states and interpret that.

- 3. What is the columnist's argument in the conclusion of the text?**

We believe change brings along danger. As time goes by, we become used to new things and we accept them. We move on to being afraid of something else (Twitter, for example, today). (33 words)

B/

(/2)

- 1. to dispose of**

éliminer

Synonyms:

- To eliminate
- To destroy
- To scrap
- To get rid of
- To jettison

Don't forget to put the same form of the word as in the original text. If it is in the plural, then put it in the plural in your suggestion.

- 2. mainstream**

grand public

Synonyms:

- Accepted

Average
Common
Conventional
Dominant
Established
Typical
Widespread

3. slayings

meurtres / assassinat ions

Synonyms:

Murders
Killings
Assassinations
Executions
Slaughters

4. to pin down

localiser précisément / trouver

Synonyms:

To find
To point out
To pinpoint

C/

(/2)

This is only a suggestion and as such, there may be many different types of paragraphs that could be written to describe the graph.

The graph is entitled 'Public opinion on austerity' and is the result of a survey held in June 2011 (in which 1, 000 people were polled in each of the 11 countries). The figures are in percentage terms and we have either the opinion that spending should be cut, or not, along with the figure for debt as a percentage of GDP (Gross Domestic Product). The source is the German Marshall Fund and the OECD.

Clearly all countries believe that spending should be cut, regardless of the level of debt-GDP ratio. This is to say that even countries such as Slovakia (24.5%) or Poland (32.6) or even Sweden (that has a negative ratio: -25%). There seems, therefore, to be no correlation between level of debt and this opinion. Perhaps those countries that are not indebted are cautiously wary. Countries that are in the greatest financial difficulty (Italy and Portugal, for example) have the highest 'cut-spending opinion'.

(157 words)

Despite the fact that this particular part of the Paris examination is no longer present as from 2013, we will provide the suggested answer as the vocabulary may still be of importance and will give you some idea as to how to write a short concise, descriptive paragraph in English.

- *You will not have long to write this part and you should be ready to launch straight into a description.*
- *Do not forget that a commentary is essential. Every sentence must count. Don't waste time and remember that you will be limited in the number of words you can write.*
- *If you attempt to squeeze your writing up and get more in for any of the sections where you are limited in space, then you will be penalized. AVOID doing this at all costs.*

II. Essay

(/ 10)

1. Do you believe that youngsters can become addicted to video gaming and that the time spent playing these games should be limited?

/ 10

IDEAS:

Space Invaders (1978) was the first video game that led to discussions about being addicted and creating dependency in players.

Possible symptoms and disorders that may be created in those that are addicted could be one or more of the following:

- Isolation from family and friends.
- Reduction in other forms of social contact (meeting family and friends, telephone, etc.).
- Neglecting personal hygiene.
- Losing weight.
- Gaining weight.
- Day-dreaming.
- Lying (in particular about how much time they may be spending on playing).
- Sleep deprivation.
- Playing anywhere and everywhere (work, for example).
- Focusing solely on the game rather than their lives.

Possible causes may be:

- Reward system. You play to win, and you are rewarding each time with something. (Stanford University School of Medicine study (2007)).
- Some games are designed not to end and continue infinitely on-line.
- Games slowly create addiction in people (the first levels are easy and take a little time to reach a new level. Once hooked, the game becomes more and more difficult, but the person is unable to break away since he has been conditioned about being rewarded to gain access to a new level).
- Other already-present mental disorders in those that are addicted (research carried out by Griffiths (2008)).
- Video gaming today allows for playing on-line, which means that this has created a new form of socialization with others that have the same interests.
- It is only a game: people have trouble admitting that they have a problem to deal with, since we are not talking about known addictions (like drugs or alcohol, for instance). However, according to research carried out by Ko (2009) the same craving occurs in all types of addiction (gaming and drugs or alcohol).
- Games have variable reward ratios (rewards take different times. A player doesn't really know how many times he will have to try to complete a task, but he knows that he will be rewarded eventually if he tries long enough).
- On-line video gaming develops the world in which the action is taking place regardless of whether you play or not. So, you will miss out if you do not play.
- Characters have human attributes today and are almost life-like. They are not flat characters of the past. Thus the emotions felt through the character are similar to life.

- *No need to express a plan in the Paris entrance examination. You will not have enough time and not enough space (the number of words is strictly limited). Do not think that the more you write, the better the grade will be.*
- *Make sure that you write normally and do NOT try to squeeze up your writing to get more information in. Do NOT write overly small.*
- *Make sure that you read a lot before sitting the examination. Keep up to date with what is going on in the world. The text will be a recent text. Read newspapers on line regularly.*
- *Read the culture files after each chapter and the vocabulary to make sure that you have current affairs knowledge and information.*
- *The information that you have here is far more than you would ever be able to include in any essay. However, it provides you with extensive knowledge on the subject.*

Some statistics that may back up your argument are:

- 72% of households in the USA play video games today (but this does not mean they are addicted)
- Only 4% of those people are actually termed as 'extreme users', playing an average of 50 hours a week.
- 8.5% of young Americans are clinically diagnosed as being 'addicted'.
- 1.5-3% of teenagers showed signs in a German study of addiction (Peukart (2010)).
- Males are more likely to have addiction problems than females (Ko (2005) and Griffiths (2008)).

BUT:

Professor Griffiths (Nottingham Trent University, UK) who has carried out studies stated that those that are addicted are in fact "few and far between".

Since 2005 the Chinese government has made it law that anyone who plays on-line games for more than three hours is automatically expelled from the game. This was changed and relaxed a year later in 2006 when it was applied to only those under the age of 18. A year after that, the law was changed again: anyone who plays for more than three hours and who is under 18 gets a warning telling them to play sport after three hours of play. If they continue then they lose half the points that they have accumulated. If they play for more than 5 hours, they lose the total number of points they have acquired until that point.

Examples of people dying abound:

- A man died in Taiwan after having played for more than 23 hours.
- Another Taiwanese 18-year-old died after laying for 40 hours in an internet café.
- A man in China died in 2007. He was aged 30 and had been playing for more than 3 days non-stop.
- A woman tried to sue Nintendo in 2002 because her son died after playing on it for up to 8 hours a day, 6 days a week.
- A teenager shot his parents in 2007 because they had confiscated his video game (USA).

2. "The last targets of attacks are social media such as Facebook and Twitter, which are said to expose children to paedophiles, invade their users' privacy and facilitate riots." Discuss.

/ 10

IDEAS:

Privacy and Child Protection:

There are growing concerns over the use of social networks as a means to trap and ensnare children or young people.

- Reports state that since 2009 there have been a total of 1, 642 cases of sex-related cases involving social networks in the UK alone. One example is of Ryan Chambers that managed to amass the phone numbers of 1, 000 young adolescent girls (12-15 years old). Chambers was jailed in 2013 for 3 years.
- Crimes have quadrupled (139 in 2009 and 614 cases in 2013).
- 50% of those that were sexually assaulted were under the age of 16.
- Rape cases alone have increased from 22 to 117 cases in the UK.
- Victims do not realize that they have been taken advantage of until after the act and when they see postings on Twitter or on Facebook, boastfully commenting on what has taken place.
- Police (after a study carried out by 25 police forces in the UK) believe in the UK that personal information allows paedophiles to 'groom' young adolescents. There were 250 complaints of this in the UK in 2010 alone.
- The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) asked Facebook to put a 'panic button' that was directly linked to their centre for adolescents to be able to denounce 'grooming' tactics. Facebook refused stating that buttons 'confused' people and that it was better to ask a question (which would then be filtered by Facebook, rather than going straight through to CEOP).
- The UK government attempted to forbid access to Facebook for known sex-offenders in the UK (30, 000 people on the register). However, this was in breach of Human Rights as they would have had to provide details about the people to Facebook. However, in the USA, the registers are made public and offenders are banned from such sites.

- But an Irish man won a court case against Facebook (2012) for allowing a child-protection site that listed the names of paedophiles. The verdict meant that the man was granted damages and the site had to be removed. Although it reopened a few days afterwards.
- In 2012 the group known as Hacktivist Anonymous a list of handles on twitter that were associated with paedophilia.
- BUT, there are cases of mistaken identity (Alastair McAlpine was wrongly listed in a tweet as a paedophile. He was a former Tory party treasurer).

ADVICE:

- Don't meet anyone without telling a member of your family or an adult.
- Children who are under age should not be on the internet (but is this realistic today?).

In 2010, it was reported by the BBC that a security expert had been able to scan the pages of millions (100 million) users of Facebook and take their details (that were considered to be private). The expert (Ron Bowes) published the information on line in an attempt to point out the growing concerns over internet privacy issues with sites like Facebook.

In 2012, it was revealed by Facebook itself that in fact 8.7% of Facebook users are fake accounts. These profiles are created with the idea of sending spam or profiles of non-human entities (pets, for instance).

Riots:

During the riots that hot the UK in the summer of 2011, people were later convicted for having incited others to take part in riots. Mitchell Stancombe, 2, was found guilty in 2012 and sentenced to 3 years in prison after posting "When are we going to start Southampton riots?" on Facebook. Two other men (Blackshaw and Sutcliffe-Keenan) were also convicted in 2011 of having tried to 'organise and orchestrate disorder'.

Perhaps sometimes disorder turns out to be good. The Arab Spring was orchestrated in the main by Facebook against the various dictatorship regimes.

Sample Essay Answer

This is only a sample essay and as such is only one of many that might be written. However, it should help you get the gist of how to write a coherent essay and how to structure it clearly with an introduction and a conclusion.

1. Do you believe that youngsters can become addicted to video gaming and that the time spent playing these games should be limited?

72% of US households play video games these days and that figure is not surprising. Internet has become so much part of our digital world today that we are all doing it. But, it is possible that some might become addicted to this type of activity and measures are being taken by governments around the world to curb our use or over-use of these games.

Most would agree that certain games are based today upon a 'reward' system. Players are rewarded when playing and thus incited to continue. Furthermore, games played on-line are never-ending. It could be very much like getting a fix from drugs or drinking for alcoholics. Characters have become almost life-like and 'experience' emotions just like real people. There are a great number of examples around the world of people that have succumbed to over-playing. To cite just one example, we could mention the 18-year-old Taiwanese boy that played non-stop for 40 hours and that died of cardiac arrest.

Governments are taking the situation very seriously. Countries like China, amongst others, have been trying for a number of years to limit the number of hours that youngsters spend playing these games. Since 2007, for instance, measures have been taken to make people under the age of 18 become responsible about the number of hours they play these games. They first receive a warning after three hours of play and then if they continue they lose 50% of their points, with the possibility of losing everything if they play for more than five hours.