

Students often ask, “What kinds of social and ethical issues can I write about?” The range of possibilities is wide. This list **IS NOT** a suggested list of **topics**! It merely lists topics that some students have chosen in the past. You are free to select other issues.

Choosing a topic area is the first step in defining a writing topic. Narrowing the focus to a topic is the second. Once a student identifies a topic area, then s/he narrows the topic to be manageable for Essay 2. For example, a student might begin with a concern about high divorce rates in the U.S. and then narrow the topic to a comparative analysis of the effects of divorce on children. Another student focusing on divorce might research and write about the rights of non-custodial fathers. In narrowing your topic, be sure to define your subject clearly from a comparative angle!

TOPIC AREAS OF PREVIOUS STUDENT PAPERS—These topic areas have a U.S. focus, unless otherwise noted.

POVERTY

Child Labor: Should it be Illegal?

Homelessness: Different Approaches

Minimum Wage Laws: Do They Reduce Poverty?

Welfare Reform of the 1990s: Benefits and Drawbacks in Reducing Poverty

GENDER/SEXUALITY/FAMILY ISSUES

Abortion Rights: Pro and Con

Adoption: Closed or Open Adoption?

Arranged Marriage: Cultural Repression or Alternative Marriage Strategy?

Divorce: Should Divorce Laws be Liberal?

Domestic Violence: Different Approaches to Reducing Partner Abuse

Gay Marriage Rights: Pro and Con

Sex Education: Does it have a Place in Public Schools?

Single Sex Education: Alternative Educational Strategy or Gender Discrimination?

Teen Pregnancy: Different Approaches to Dealing with the Issue

Transgender: Different Approaches

Working Mothers and Workplace Equity- Competing Approaches

Women and Workplace Equity in China-Different Strategies

EDUCATION

No Child Left Behind Act: Pro and Con

SAT and College Admissions: Should the SAT be abolished?

High-Stakes Educational Testing: Pro and Con

Community Service in School: Should it be Compulsory?

Homeschooling: Pros and Cons

Higher Education and MIT Topics (GIRS, Mental Health support, Structure of the Freshman Year, Community Service Requirement, ROTC on Campus)

Mainstreaming of Students with Disabilities: Positive or Negative Strategy?

RACE/ETHNICITY

Affirmative Action (in Education, Employment): Pro and Con

Immigration Policy Reform: Different Approaches

Racial Equality Issues on Campuses (e.g. Is Racial Self-Segregation a Problem?)

HEALTH

Rights of Dying Patients: Right to Assisted Suicide?

Health Care Reform: Different Perspectives

Mandatory Immunization: Public Health Necessity or Violation of Rights?

Legalizing Medical Marijuana: Pro and Con

Population Crisis/Population Control: Should Governments mandate contraception?

Organ Selling; Should This Practice Be Legal?

Should Tobacco Be Made Illegal?

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Genetically Modified Foods: Benefits and Drawbacks

Global Warming: Different Theories

Stem Cell Research: Pro and Con

Ethical Debates in Reproductive Technology

Beyond Oil: Alternative Energy Sources

Siting a Bio-Safety Level 4 Research Lab in Boston: Pro and Con

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Open Knowledge or Illegal Downloading?

CONSTITUTIONAL AND INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS

Constitutionality of the Draft

Free Speech and “Hate Speech” on Campus

Gun Control: Pro and Con

Rights of Mentally Ill Persons

Pornography: Free Speech or Hate Speech?

Should the Drinking Age Be 18 (or lower) or 21?

CRIME/CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Alternative Sentencing; Pro and Con

Capital Punishment: Pro and Con

Philosophy of Prisons: Punishment or Rehabilitation?

MEDIA

Video Games: Negative, Neutral or Positive Influence on Children and Teens?

Facebook and New Networking Technologies: Different Perspectives

FOREIGN POLICY

The War in Iraq/Afghanistan: Pro and Con

Should The Guantanamo Bay Facility Be Closed?

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