

Sample Issues Essay



Issues Essay

The issues essay is a document that demonstrates your written communication skills to TWC and prospective internship site supervisors. In approximately 500 words, reflect on a key issue related to your professional field of interest. Here are some examples for your reference.

Example 1

Ted Koppel, longtime anchor of ABC News' Nightline, quipped that a journalist should always get a story first; but first, he should get it second. Running stories without credible sources is an issue concerning journalism today, just as it was in years past.

In American football, the left tackle position is concerned with protecting the quarterback's blindside from hits by defensive players. At left tackle, it is not the fifty-five snaps the player took during the game when he protected the quarterback from a blindside hit that people notice. Instead, people remember the one snap the left tackle took when he failed to block the defender and the quarterback was sacked for a loss.

Similarly, in journalism, it is not the innumerable times a journalist verifies his sources and double-checks his information that people notice, but it is the one time he fails to verify a story that people remember and that could ultimately cost the journalist his job. A recent case in point of irresponsible journalism is Andrew Breitbart's publishing on his news website a video of controversial statements made by Shirley Sherrod at a fundraising dinner for the NAACP. Breitbart's rush to publish illustrates why it is necessary to get the story second. Because of his shoddy verification, Shirley Sherrod faced public scrutiny and a forced resignation from her post in the Department of Agriculture.

Traditional media commentators, such as Nina Totenberg with National Public Radio, used this incident as an example of instantaneous updating of news websites for fresher content. While the fast pace of internet news reporting could contribute somewhat to careless verification practices, not all mistakes involve the internet.

A notable recent example of a journalist not double-checking his sources occurred in September 2004 with Dan Rather and the controversy surrounding President Bush's National Guard record. Rather thought he had documents that proved President Bush's failure to fulfill certain duties while he was serving in the National Guard. Rather did not further explore the validity of these claims, nor did he verify the documents as being legitimate. As a result, Rather's credibility, which he had spent decades amassing, disintegrated along with the story. This misstep culminated in the network forcing him to leave CBS Evening News the following year, and then CBS News entirely in June 2006.

Decades before the formation of the internet another case of negligent verification occurred. During the 1948 Presidential election, the Chicago Tribune erroneously declared Republican candidate Thomas Dewey the victor over President Harry Truman. No matter what the medium, no matter the speed of the technology, no matter how soon a story needs to be delivered, a journalist must first get it second before reporting it first.



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Example 2

I find one aspect of my generation absolutely startling: the general apathy toward government actions. In some aspects, politics in America have become a second Hollywood. Far too many of my friends base their votes on who is most celebrated in popular culture without being able to explain a single piece of legislation the politician supports. Maybe my peers' views would remain the same even if they were more politically educated, but I would like to find a way to pique the interest of all young adults to ensure they know why they support certain politicians and legislation before voting.

A particular issue of extreme importance but usually of little interest to young voters is the tax system. As we graduate college and get our first real jobs, and then our first real paychecks, and then our first real experience with taxes, it becomes clear why tax reform initiatives are so attractive and even necessary. With a taxation system in place that no American seems to like, it is now that young voters must be educated on reform ideas because they are the ones who will be affected by the system in just a few years.

An idea particularly interesting to me is the FairTax proposal. The Constitution was written and edited to provide equality for all, yet our tax system penalizes the rich by demanding a greater percentage of their income. It is not, by any definition of equal, equal to charge some citizens half their income to live in this country, and allow capable others to continually pay nothing and depend on the government their entire lives. A fair tax would eliminate this injustice by replacing all federal income taxes with a nationwide consumption tax on retail sales.

This would expand the tax base to everyone living in the United States, including the rapidly approaching majority of people who pay zero or negative income taxes, which would theoretically benefit the government immensely, encourage people to save and invest more money, and spur economic growth with the money they would be saving instead of being taxed. Critics argue it would actually be regressive in nature and incite the growth of an underground economy. While the FairTax would offer a "prebate" tax refund for poverty-level citizens as a solution for the regression, it is more difficult to find ways to prevent the growth of an underground economy of people avoiding sales taxes, not to mention the feasibility of instituting a complete overhaul of the system.

It is impossible to fully predict what the outcome of such a change would be, but nonetheless, fresh concepts like this are the ones that young voters need to explore and educatedly form opinions on, even if in disagreement, rather than continue on a cycle of broken and outdated political institutions. If campaigns can find ways to engage young voters with such ideas, the political system in America will evolve to support modern times, while still holding true to the foundations of the Constitution.

