

Look at the exam question and essay and do the exercises to improve your writing skills.

Preparation

Match the vocabulary with the correct definition and write a–h next to the numbers 1–8.

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|--------|-----------------------|----|--|
| 1..... | a portion | a. | an extra charge added by the government to the price of some goods and services |
| 2..... | to outweigh something | b. | a special, enjoyable thing or experience, often given as a gift to somebody or to yourself |
| 3..... | a tax | c. | harmful or dangerous |
| 4..... | detrimental | d. | the amount of food served to one person |
| 5..... | a treat | e. | extreme and unpleasant |
| 6..... | drastic | f. | to look for something or someone, often requiring effort |
| 7..... | to victimise somebody | g. | to be a more important factor in an evaluation or decision (than some other factor) |
| 8..... | to seek out something | h. | to treat someone in an unfair way intentionally |

Exam question

In some countries an increasing number of people are suffering from health problems as a result of eating too much fast food. It is therefore necessary for governments to impose a higher tax on this kind of food.



To what extent do you agree or disagree with this opinion?

Nowadays, more and more people are affected by health issues such as diabetes and heart disease which are linked to overconsumption of cheap, mass-produced food. Some people believe the only solution is to make fast food less affordable by taxing it highly. Despite the severity of the problem, I think this is quite wrong. Increasing the tax on fast food would unfairly penalise people and may not necessarily bring about the desired health benefits.

First, fast food is about more than just nutrition. Many teenagers spend money on fast food not because they need to eat out but because this is how they socialise. Fast-food restaurants provide a safe, convenient place for young people to meet friends. For another group, low-income families, fast food can provide an inexpensive treat for their children. Denying people a small pleasure in life could affect their social lives or happiness.

Another important point is that if the reason for taxing fast food is to reduce obesity, it may be ineffective. It is true that fast food is high in sugar, salt and fat, all of which cause weight gain and are detrimental to our health. However, we also know that there are other factors which contribute to the risk of obesity, such as lack of exercise and inappropriate portion size. While home-cooked food is generally healthy, this is not always the case. I personally know a family that used to eat high-fat, home-cooked food in enormous portions. They all suffered from health problems due to obesity.

On the other hand, I do understand the point of view of those who say drastic action is needed. If fast food were taxed and became expensive, people would be forced to seek out healthier options. In addition, food producers would have an incentive to provide healthier foods. However, there is likely to be resistance from consumers and producers who want to have a wider choice.

To conclude, although imposing a higher tax on fast food could have some positive effects, these would be outweighed by the drawbacks. For one thing, some sectors of society would feel victimised, and there is also the fact that simply raising tax would not result in a much healthier society. What we really need is greater awareness of diet and cheaper healthy food.

Top Tips for writing

1. Avoid repeating words used in the question. It makes your vocabulary seem limited. Instead, use synonyms to demonstrate your vocabulary.
2. If you are asked to give your opinion, make it clear at the beginning and the end.
3. Give a reason for your opinion in paragraph 2 and another in paragraph 3. Support them with examples and explanation.
4. In paragraph 4, balance your essay by discussing the opposing view. If possible, highlight a disadvantage of it to reinforce your viewpoint.
5. Use linkers to show the logical connections between ideas. These may include addition, contrast, concession and sequencing.

1. Check your understanding: matching

Match the essay paragraphs with their content and write a–e next to the numbers 1–5.

- | | | | |
|--------|-------------|----|---|
| 1..... | Paragraph 1 | a. | Restate your opinion on the issue and the reasons for it. |
| 2..... | Paragraph 2 | b. | Give a reason for your opinion and explain it. |
| 3..... | Paragraph 3 | c. | Give another reason for your opinion and explain it. |
| 4..... | Paragraph 4 | d. | Briefly introduce the issue and why it's important, and state your opinion. |
| 5..... | Paragraph 5 | e. | Consider the opposite viewpoint and highlight a problem with it. |

2. Check your vocabulary: gap fill

Complete the sentences with a collocating word from the box.

severity	crisis	detrimental	deny
penalise	urgent	size	treats

- It is hard to _____ that the problem is getting worse.
- Giving children little _____ like sweets and chocolate is actually bad for their teeth.
- There is an _____ need for more beds at the local hospital.
- It isn't fair to _____ people who have a lower income.
- Smoking is very _____ to health.
- Shared plates of food make it hard to control portion _____.
- The obesity _____ is linked to the increase in processed food.
- The _____ of the situation has meant that the government is now taking action.

3. Check your writing: multiple choice

Circle the correct linker for these sentences. Both may be possible, or neither may be correct.

1. Some people think it is bad to eat carbohydrates. _____, most dieticians believe they are part of a healthy diet.
 - a. However
 - b. Nevertheless
 - c. Both of the above
 - d. Neither of the above
2. _____ what many people think, the USA does not have the most obese population.
 - a. Despite
 - b. Although
 - c. Both of the above
 - d. Neither of the above
3. _____ I can see their point, I still believe that they are wrong.
 - a. Although
 - b. Even though
 - c. Both of the above
 - d. Neither of the above
4. Vegetables are a good source of dietary fibre. _____, they contain many nutrients and vitamins.
 - a. On the other hand
 - b. In addition
 - c. Both of the above
 - d. Neither of the above
5. _____ fast food is bad for us, many people enjoy it.
 - a. Despite
 - b. Despite the fact that
 - c. Both of the above
 - d. Neither of the above
6. _____ the economic crisis, the employment rate is falling.
 - a. In spite of
 - b. Despite
 - c. Both of the above
 - d. Neither of the above
7. _____ there is a lot of traffic in city centres, pollution is a problem.
 - a. Since
 - b. Because of
 - c. Both of the above
 - d. Neither of the above
8. Young people are thought to be lazy. _____ most young people I know are extremely hard-working.
 - a. Another important point is that
 - b. On the contrary,
 - c. Both of the above
 - d. Neither of the above

4. Check your vocabulary: gap fill

Complete the sentence with the correct form of the word in brackets.

1. Restricting pollution is now a matter of some _____. (**urgent**)
2. The president was accused of lying, but she issued a _____ this morning. (**deny**)
3. _____ water shortages have led, in turn, to food shortages. (**severity**)
4. Students sometimes have to work to pay for their education, to the _____ of their studies. (**detrimental**)
5. Recycling more waste would be _____ for everyone. (**benefit**)
6. There should be stiff _____ for criminals who reoffend. (**penalise**)
7. In many countries sport is compulsory at school, but art and music are _____. (**option**)
8. In my view, the most _____ solution would be for citizens to vote online. (**effect**)

Discussion

Is fast food popular in your country? Do you think it causes health problems or any other kinds of problems?