

In the era of e-mail, teens should learn to write the forgotten essays

July 20 2005

Teens communicate in ways their parents didn't dream of—e-mails, instant messaging, wireless phones—but that means less time for a good, old-fashioned essay and less preparation for new test requirements.

Many students aren't used to writing more than a paragraph or two, leaving them unprepared for new SAT/ACT writing requirements. A 2003 College Board study said most schools should double the amount of time they now spend on teaching writing.

"One of the effects of e-mails and instant messaging is that today's students are more fluent in terms of writing words but they're far less familiar with other genres like the inverted pyramid or the five paragraph essay," said Anne Ruggles Gere, a University of Michigan professor of English and education and an authority on writing. "IM experience doesn't serve them very well when they have 25 minutes to write an essay on the SAT."

Gere and Virginia Commonwealth University English professor Leila Christenbury, both past presidents of the National Council of Teachers of English, joined with U-M graduate student Kelly Sassi to write "Writing on Demand: Best Practices and Strategies for Success," as a guide for teachers preparing students for the SAT/ACT and other writing tests.

Sassi, who taught high school English for several years before attending U-M, noted that so many students learn to use computers at a young age,

that there's even less emphasis on old-fashioned demands like teaching good penmanship as well as writing.

The SAT's new essay requirement can be nerve-racking for today's students. Research shows most writers need three things when they write: ownership of the form and subject of their writing; feedback from other writers; and time to draft and revise. But essay tests offer none of that. So the authors focus on ways to:

- Decode writing prompts to uncover the goals and expectations of the assignment.
- Organize thoughts swiftly and use the allotted time efficiently.
- Understand how tests are scored.

The authors have workshops scheduled for Ann Arbor, New York and Houston between August and October through the National Council of English Teachers of English.

Related links:

For more on the workshops, visit:

lists.ncte.org/t/592610/690201/2007/0/

For more on Gere, Sasi and Christenbury, visit:

lists.ncte.org/t/592610/690201/2009/0/

For more on the book, visit:

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Source: University of Michigan

Citation: In the era of e-mail, teens should learn to write the forgotten essays (2005, July 20)
retrieved 24 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2005-07-era-e-mail-teens-forgotten-essays.html>

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