

HElghten[™] Written Communications

Sample Items

Direct Writing Measure (Constructed Response Question)

The following argument appeared in an opinion piece in your local newspaper.

“We live in an age that gives us more choice than ever before—so much so that we’re in danger of ‘choice overload,’ as any trip to the supermarket will confirm. Just choosing among all the different types of cereals or shampoos can be confusing and frustrating. What about making a major life decision with long-term consequences? We’ve assumed that since choice is good, more choice is better. But this seemingly reasonable assumption turns out to be false. Having so many options for every decision, big and small, can create stress, indecision, and ‘paralysis by analysis’ rather than liberation. Ironically, we would all be better off with less choice.”

In a well-organized letter to your local newspaper, use your understanding of the above argument to develop your own position on whether we would all be better off with less choice. Support your argument with reasons and examples from your own experience, observations, reading, and/or analysis of the reasoning in the above argument.

Selected Response Questions**Questions 1 - 6 are based on the following passage.**

(1) Comic Sans MS may be the world’s most hated typeface, or font. (2) It is, for the most part, a sans serif typeface, which means that it lacks the small embellishment strokes at the ends of letters (the exception is the uppercase “I,” which includes the horizontal bars at the top and bottom of the letter). (3) The creation of Vincent Connare, Comic Sans is one of the default typefaces of Microsoft’s popular Word series of word processing software. (4) In recent years, however, it has become the center of some heated debates regarding when different fonts should be used for various purposes.

(5) In order to understand the reactions people have to the Comic Sans typeface, it is important to understand its origins. (6) Vincent Connare invented Comic Sans in the 1990s when he was working on a program called Microsoft Bob, it was designed to help children and new computer users navigate personal computers. (7) The program used a cartoon dog to guide users through the experience. (8) When Connare saw the working prototype of the software, they worried that the font used for the dog’s speech bubbles looked too formal. (9) He needed a typeface that seemed inviting and relaxed—something that would help users feel at home.

(10) For inspiration, Connare turned to two comic books he had in his office: *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns* (lettered by Dave Gibbons and John Costanza, respectively). (11) The lettering in those works had exactly the sort of relaxed, informal look that Connare wanted. (12) From these inspirations, he created a typeface that struck a balance between the formal and the informal, between more traditional fonts and the lettering used in comic book speech bubbles.

(13) Today, Comic Sans is probably best known for the really bitter ranting it inspires: critics object to the growing use of this informal typeface for more serious messages. (14) The Comic Sans font has been used on ambulances, electrical warning signs, and even in a scientific presentation by a lead researcher at the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN). (15) This kind of usage spawned movements such as Ban Comic Sans, a mostly tongue-in-cheek Internet campaign to do away with the type, and it also prompted the creation of Web sites such as Comic Sans Criminal, a light-hearted educational tool designed to teach people to select the correct typeface for the situation at hand. (16) The lesson, according

to opponents of Comic Sans, is not that an informal typeface is never appropriate, just that it should only be used in appropriately informal situations.

1. Which of the following best describes the purpose of sentence 5 (highlighted and underlined)?

(5) In order to understand the reactions people have to the Comic Sans typeface, it is important to understand its origins.

- (A) It restates the main idea of the passage.
- (B) It provides a transition that effectively introduces important background material.
- (C) It establishes the writer's credibility by acknowledging counterarguments to the passage's position.
- (D) It raises an important objection to the idea introduced in the previous sentence.

2. Which, if any, of the highlighted and underlined portions of sentence 6 needs to be corrected?

(6) Vincent Connare invented Comic Sans in the 1990s when he was working on a program called Microsoft Bob, it was designed to help children and new computer users navigate personal computers.

- (A) invented
- (B) when
- (C) it
- (D) (No error)

3. Which, if any, of the highlighted and underlined portions of sentence 8 needs to be corrected?

(8) When Connare saw the working prototype of the software, they worried that the font used for the dog's speech bubbles looked too formal.

- (A) saw
- (B) they
- (C) for
- (D) (No error)

4. Which of the following, if added immediately after sentence 12 (highlighted and underlined), provides the most effective conclusion to the paragraph?

(12) From these inspirations, he created a typeface that struck a balance between the formal and the informal, between more traditional fonts and the lettering used in comic book speech bubbles.

- (A) He named the resulting typeface Comic Sans as a nod to the comic books that inspired him.
- (B) He never expected, however, that his invention would end up being used in nearly every subsequent Microsoft program.
- (C) He became so notorious for creating the Comic Sans typeface that he was asked to give the keynote speech at the 2014 Boring Awards.
- (D) Today there are many other fonts, such as Cartoon Script and Captain Comic, that also mimic the effect of comic books.

5. Which of the following is the most effective change to make to sentence 13 (highlighted and underlined) ?

(13) Today, Comic Sans is probably best known for the really bitter ranting it inspires: critics object to the growing use of this informal typeface for more serious messages.

- (A) Change “is probably best known” to “must be best known”.
- (B) Change “really bitter ranting” to “vitriol”.
- (C) Change “growing” to “continually increasing”.
- (D) Change “serious” to “highbrow”.

6. The writer wishes to provide a graphic to illustrate one of the points made in the fourth paragraph (highlighted and underlined).

(13) Today, Comic Sans is probably best-known for the really bitter ranting it inspires: critics object to the growing use of this informal typeface for more serious messages. (14) The Comic Sans font has been used on ambulances, electrical warning signs, and even in a scientific presentation by a lead researcher at the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN). (15) This kind of usage spawned movements such as Ban Comic Sans, a mostly tongue-in-cheek Internet campaign to do away with the type, and it also prompted the creation of Web sites such as Comic Sans Criminal, a light-hearted educational tool designed to teach people to select the correct typeface for the situation at hand. (16) The lesson, according to opponents of Comic Sans, is not that an informal typeface is never appropriate, just that it should only be used in appropriately informal situations.

Which of the following is the most effective choice?

- (A) A table showing the number of visitors to the Web site of the Ban Comic Sans campaign
- (B) A chart comparing the physical details of the Comic Sans and the Times New Roman fonts
- (C) A slide from the CERN scientific presentation that uses the Comic Sans font
- (D) A photo of the founders of the Ban Comic Sans movement, Dave and Holly Combs

Keys

1. B

2. C

3. B

4. A

5. B

6. C