

Sample Writing Placement Exam
UTC English Department

Directions: Read the following excerpt from a New York Times article, then follow the instructions below to respond in essay form.

In the last few years, some retailers have begun hiring workers based on their appearance to project an image. The clothing retailer Abercrombie & Fitch is one of those companies. According to A&F spokesman Tom Lennox, the company likes to hire sales assistants, known as “brand representatives,” who “look great.” Mr. Lennox explains that “We want to hire brand representatives that will represent the Abercrombie & Fitch brand with natural classic American style, look great while exhibiting individuality, project the brand and themselves with energy and enthusiasm, and make the store a warm, inviting place...for the customer.” Supporters say that using these “walking billboards” is essential for success in today’s competitive retail market.

Critics, however, note that companies like Abercrombie & Fitch who hire people based on their looks are skirting the edges of anti-discrimination laws and provoking a wave of private and government lawsuits. If A&F defines “classic American style” as blond, blue-eyed, and preppy, and hires only people who fit that look, they could be guilty of discriminating against qualified applicants who don’t fit that mold. Hiring attractive people is not necessarily illegal, but discriminating on the basis of age, sex or ethnicity is.

Adapted from Greenhouse, Steven. “Going for the Look, but Risking Discrimination.” New York Times 13 July 2002: A12.

Assignment: Assume that UTC is staging a panel discussion for faculty, staff, and students on clothing stores’ practice of hiring workers based on their looks. The University has asked for your input: Should companies like A&F be allowed to hire people based on their looks? Why or why not? Write an opening statement in essay form that you would read aloud to open the panel discussion. Using quotations or paraphrases, your essay should refer directly to the summarized article above. You may also use examples from your own reading, prior studies, and/or personal experience to make your points. The essay should have a clear thesis that helps readers see how your essay is organized and include detailed examples to support your argument.

Directions: You have one hour to complete your exam. Spend a few minutes brainstorming and organizing your thoughts on this sheet of paper, then write your essay on the paper provided. You should reserve a few minutes at the end of the exam period to proofread your writing.

Evaluation Criteria: There is no length requirement, but you are expected to write a complete essay draft. Your writing will be judged on its clarity, organization, supporting details including direct reference to the reading above, and basic mechanical correctness. Exams that do not engage the reading above are unlikely to receive a placement into English 121 or better.

BE SURE TO WRITE YOUR NAME, TODAY’S DATE, AND YOUR UTCID ON YOUR EXAM BOOK COVER.

RETURN THIS SHEET WITH YOUR COMPLETED ESSAY.