

“Short-Cut” Society (13 points)

In today’s academic culture, the rift is no longer about who is the most intelligent. It seems to be more about who can best utilize the tools available to them to get to the answer faster. Students are inundated with technological tools and all forms of media are now at their fingertips, readily available for the taking.

Some students prefer to take a more traditional approach when faced with an academic task – hit the books and persevere until a conclusion is reached. Encouraged to be self-motivated learners, some students bury themselves in the library and research primary sources in print.

However, in a media-rich society, others prefer to take any short cut available to them, even if that means barely skimming the surface of critical thinking. (a)Tools such as Internet search engines, banks of fantastic essays readily available for a fee, Cliffs Notes and other annotated texts are easily accessible with the click of a mouse. These are often free, completely legal and very useful for the struggling student who just wants to complete his assignments. According to Gamerman, some consider this cheating, but why re-invent the wheel? Even the great thinkers drew upon research from outside sources to arrive at their own conclusions. Those who were the best researchers often found themselves ahead in the academic game. Methods of research have simply changed.

Clearly, the issue of students using outside resources to help them get by has been on the rise. Reading guides can help to enrich a student’s understanding of a text. For example, a student who stumbles upon a word she doesn’t know immediately searched the internet for the definition. This can save valuable time. While Cliffs Notes may be used to substitute reading, they can also be used to supplement reading. (b)According to Ellen Gamerman, a Ph.D. in educational technology, “In a wireless age where kids can access the Internet’s vast store of information... schools have been wrestling with how to stem the tide of high-tech cheating.” The rules regarding these issues are not black and white, and so individuals differ in their responses of using outside help sources—which can be faulty—rather than relying on personal knowledge.

With today’s culture, the sense of immediacy has become the norm. We contact other continents in split seconds. We get our music and information in record time, and we certainly don’t have to wait until the next day to see if we’ve defeated the bad guy in our video games. (c)Gone are the days of waiting. Gone are the days of actually having to work for something to see the means to an end. We are caught up in the McDonaldization of society. It is efficiency over quality.

Thus, nearly gone is the hard-working, self-motivated student who labors over material and toils over facts to acquire education. Here is the day of the “short-cut” society, and unfortunately, the student is behind the bulk of it. The cultural lack of respect for teachers also factors in to this shallow knowledge base. (d)Perhaps commensurate pay for measurable growth would encourage teachers to return to critical thinking skills in the classroom.

(e)Standardized, normed tests such as the ACT and SAT have shown a drop critical thinking following the advent of so-called “test prep” materials like Cliffs Notes and SparkNotes. Low self-expectations contribute to low-expectations of others. Nia Enterprises’ Blanche Williams expresses that, “Critical thinking has become a lost art form filled with media’s attempt to persuade us to sidetrack our ability to come to a conclusion, based on the facts.” In relying on content breadth instead of depth, we are harming our ability to truly interact with and analyze the complexities of the world.

While there are situations in which outside aides can be beneficial and efficient, students taking the easy way out lack the critical thinking skills necessary to succeed in the real world. If students continue to think that the Cliffs Notes’ versions of literature are sufficient for an in-depth understanding, they will cheapen their own educational experiences. When showing up for a job interview, a student can’t expect to use a Cliffs Notes version of a résumé and get the job.

Do we want students who read a synopsis of a “masterpiece of prose” and think they’ve mastered it themselves? (f)Critical thinking can’t work with crutches: either we stop enabling superficial learning, or we raise a generation of kids completely unable to think for themselves. Some would argue that some knowledge is better than none, but what about the misinformation that occurs because of the missing pages of the texts?

7. Identify the mode of development for this argument _____
8. *Identify *kairos* _____
9. Identify the three logical fallacies highlighted in this argument.
d.) _____ e.) _____ f.) _____
10. *Identify the rhetorical device used in the highlighted sentence.
c.) _____
11. Identify the parts of the rhetorical triangle highlighted in the article.
a.) _____ b.) _____