

On-the-Spot Essay: Sample Prompts and Responses

The On-the-Spot Essay will assess your ability to engage with the prompt, think critically, and express ideas clearly. It is absolutely essential that you produce only original content to represent yourself. If your content is found to be copied from elsewhere, it will render your admission not eligible.

Note that the On-the-Spot essay prompts for the year will be different from the samples provided below. These provide a writing reference, and we are mindful of the time limitations that may impact your writing.

Disclaimer: *The views expressed in these sample essays by the various authors do not reflect the opinions and views held by Ashoka University or the Office of Admissions.*

Sample Essay #1

Science communication has been transformed by social media, as it makes scientific research easily accessible and engaging to the masses. In your opinion, to what extent does social media retain the accuracy and reliability of scientific knowledge? Write a reasoned response and give examples as required to support your views.

Social media has democratised communication regarding scientific developments. For many, a handful of short-form, engaging videos can help absorb information that would otherwise require extensive research and academic inquiry. While this may cut down entry barriers for diverse audiences, this improved dissemination comes at a high cost. A dependence on social media platforms as the sole archive of scientific knowledge alarms us about the accuracy of information shared by users or influencers. The structural incentives piecing these platforms together favour emotion and immediacy, consequently compromising scientific integrity to a substantial degree.

As users doomscroll for a consistent dopamine rush, algorithms continuously optimise user experience for maximum engagement and retention. Platforms compete with one another for virality, as oversimplified or sensational content gains popularity overnight. Yet rigorous verification procedures such as sample sizes and peer reviews lend credibility to scientific progress. While this scrutiny may delay discovery and dissemination, it strengthens the overarching framework and quality of scientific knowledge. An example of such a discrepancy is when brands and influencers promote particular ingredients such as apple cider vinegar, chia seeds or green tea as miracle detox methods to cure chronic illnesses or influence metabolic health overnight. Similar to clickbait headlines in newspapers, social media creators often opt for visual hooks such as “before-and-after” transformations, pseudoscientific language, or anecdotal evidence. While such content may break the internet overnight, its generalised claims, suggestions and recommendations cannot, and should not, be blindly applied by every viewer in their life.

When creating bite-sized reels or YouTube shorts, the emphasis inevitably shifts from scientifically reliable infotainment to content for shock value. This recurring pattern, as seen in WhatsApp forwards, highlights a rise in unverified home remedies, claiming homemade cures during health crises, changes in

weather, and so on, instead of official and nuanced advisories from applicable institutions such as the National Health Authority of India (NHA) or Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

As scientific communication captures the attention of the masses through social media, viewers must prioritise critical media literacy. Platforms should foreground built-in fact-checkers to educate users, so people can reliably balance factual fidelity through intentional research and complement it with learning from short-form media. Ultimately, while it sparks novel gateways into learning, social media cannot be the sole form of learning to uphold the sanctity of scientific communication.

Sample Essay #2

Is ‘Graffiti’ (anything written, painted, or drawn on walls or other surfaces, usually without permission and within public view) considered to be art or acts of vandalism? Which do you agree with? Provide reasons to support your response.

To investigate the role of graffiti in society, we must first question what we define as acceptable art. Does art only constitute any work placed on the walls of a gallery or museum, historically rendered high in socio-cultural value? In its true essence, art is a fundamental means of communication. To decipher if graffiti can be categorised as art requires an evaluation of who in a society is allowed to communicate, through which mediums, and for what purpose or audiences. Art that does not fit our conventional yardsticks easily falls off the radar, further sidelined and neglected. When we deconstruct a hierarchical understanding of art, we begin to note how public walls may be one of the most accessible channels for marginalised communities to speak back to people in positions of power.

Categorising graffiti as vandalism raises concerns of property rights. We rush to consider unsanctioned marks, writings, or painting on public infrastructure as chaotic and disruptive, as a means of denying their credibility. Graffiti defies or threatens urban aesthetics that we hold sanctimonious and sacred, without making room for collective consent.

However, reducing graffiti to vandalism as a result of mere property violation or destruction is often an attempt by those in power to silence the various voices and their artistic and political expression. Art is definitely political; often transgressing considerations of decoration or comfort, and holds the power to question, challenge, and unsettle authority. To classify the entire medium as vandalism, for its bypassing of legal processes, is to conflate legality with socio-cultural worth. In many ways, graffiti is also a reclamation, forcing masses to challenge injustice. For example, Banksy’s *Love is in the Air* depicts a masked rioter throwing a bouquet instead of a bomb. This message of peace is a tangible reminder of possibility, hope, and humanity in times when people are desensitised to conflict. Furthermore, murals in public spaces also offer an opportunity to develop an artistic identity, much like Delhi’s Lodhi Art District.

These visual narratives form a crucial archive of resistance, identity, and shared struggle and must be considered a legitimate form of expression. To promote graffiti as art, we must go beyond perceiving street art as an assault on public order or spaces, and an invitation to have democratic conversations. Allowing public artistic expression by those who have been systematically silenced is to welcome weaving their stories into the fabric of the city. Graffiti, in my opinion, must be considered art, and the onus is on society to expand its boundaries of art, instead of gatekeeping any voice that defies our current traditions.