Discourse, debate, and analysis

CAMBRIDGE RE:THINK ESSAY COMPETITION 2024

Official Essay Guideline

CAMBRIDGE CENTRE *for* INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH

About the Competition

The spirit of the **Cambridge Re:think Essay Competition** is to encourage critical thinking and exploration of thought-provoking and often controversial topics.

Sponsored by the Cambridge Centre for International Research (CCIR), the competition covers a diverse array of subjects, from historical and present issues to speculative future scenarios. Participants are invited to engage deeply with these topics, critically analysing their various facets and implications. It promotes intellectual exploration and encourages participants to challenge established norms and beliefs, presenting opportunities to envision alternative futures, consider the consequences of new technologies, and reevaluate long standing traditions.

Ultimately, our aim is to create a platform for students and scholars to share their perspectives on pressing issues of the past and future, with the hope of broadening our collective understanding and generating innovative solutions to contemporary challenges. It aims to underscore the importance of discourse, debate, and critical analysis in addressing complex societal issues.

About the Essay Prompts

We've collaborated closely with **esteemed academics and professors hailing from renowned universities** to curate an array of thought-provoking prompts. These questions are meticulously selected as they address pivotal and significant themes that resonate across various disciplines. Crafted by experts in their respective fields, these prompts are designed to spark reflection, challenging participants to explore, analyse, and offer insights into some of the most pressing and crucial inquiries shaping our world today.

What is the judging process and judging criteria?

All submissions will be reviewed by a judging panel with scholars drawn from prestigious institutions, including Harvard, Cambridge, Oxford, and MIT.

Double-Blind Review

The Cambridge Re:think Essay Competition 2024 will employ a double-blind review system for its judging process.

The identities of both the authors and the reviewers are concealed. This means that reviewers are unaware of the author's identity, academic affiliation, or reputation, and similarly, authors do not know who is reviewing their work. This anonymity helps in minimising biases that could influence the review process. Such biases may arise from various factors like the author's reputation, institutional affiliation, or even previous interactions in the academic community.

By implementing a double-blind review process, the Re:think essay competition aims to create a more equitable environment where essays are judged solely on their content, quality, and adherence to the competition's criteria, rather than any external factors related to the author's identity or status. This approach enhances the integrity of the judging process and promotes a merit-based evaluation of the submitted works.

Original and interesting ideas

The competition is designed to inspire students to deeply reconsider and reflect on the intricate relationships between science, society, and the global environment. Original thoughts and perspectives are greatly encouraged.

However, it's important to clarify what we mean by 'original idea'. Participants are not expected to come up with a concept that no one has ever thought of before. Instead, essays can advocate for an existing viewpoint, provided they do so with compelling and thought-provoking arguments. Additionally, essays can offer new analyses or insights into the issues at hand, thereby contributing fresh perspectives to current discussions.

Quality of Argument and Writing

Clear writing and well-supported arguments are crucial. This means that essays should be well-structured, with each claim or argument supported by evidence or logical reasoning. Additionally, the judges will consider the style of writing, which includes language use, idea flow, and overall engagement with the topics.

Plagiarism and AI Assistance

The competition has a strict policy against plagiarism and the use of AI writing assistance. Essays found to have such content will be disqualified. This means students must ensure their work is entirely their own.

What are we looking for in a good essay?

A good essay takes many forms—and there are no real formulas we can offer on how to write one. That being said, we wanted to offer some general guidelines for what we think are, in general, the features of a good essay. These guidelines serve as a framework to help participants craft compelling essays for the competition. While emphasising critical analysis, originality, evidence-based arguments, clarity, and creative thinking, it's important to note that these are guidelines rather than strict rules. We encourage participants to experiment, think innovatively, and explore diverse approaches to their topics. The aim is to inspire intellectual exploration without confining ideas within rigid boundaries, fostering a space where creative expression and unconventional perspectives are celebrated.

With all that, when we think about a good essay, we are usually thinking of an essay that demonstrates:

1. **Critical Analysis:** Demonstrate a strong ability to analyse and evaluate the topic critically. This involves breaking down the subject matter into its constituent parts, examining each aspect thoroughly, and considering its implications from multiple perspectives. Highlight the underlying assumptions, strengths, weaknesses, and potential consequences associated with the topic.

2. **Originality and Depth:** Strive to present unique insights and delve deeply into the intricacies of the topic. Avoid reiterating commonly held opinions; instead, offer fresh perspectives or angles that haven't been widely explored. Delve into the nuances and complexities of the subject matter, considering its implications beyond the surface level.

3. **Evidence and Research:** Support your arguments and claims with robust evidence from reputable sources. Conduct thorough research using credible academic references, scholarly articles, historical data, or empirical studies. Incorporate data-driven insights and relevant examples to strengthen your essay's credibility.

4. **Clarity and Structure:** Ensure your essay is well-organised and easy to follow. Begin with a clear introduction that sets the stage for your discussion, followed by a structured body that logically presents your arguments and evidence. Use transitions to create a seamless flow between ideas and conclude succinctly, summarising your key points without introducing new information.

5. **Critical Thinking and Creativity:** Encourage unconventional thinking and imaginative approaches to the topic. Challenge conventional wisdom by exploring alternative viewpoints or proposing innovative solutions. Apply creative thinking to address the complexities of the subject matter, fostering a unique perspective that stands out in the discourse.

6. **Form and Style:** Pay attention to the essay's structure and writing style. Strive for a cohesive and engaging narrative that captivates the reader. Experiment with different writing styles, ensuring clarity, coherence, and an appropriate tone that resonates with the subject matter. Consider using vivid language, effective metaphors, and eloquent prose to enhance the essay's impact.

How should I get started with the essay?

Getting started is often the most challenging part. Here's some general advice on how to get started.

1. Select a Topic that Resonates with You

This is arguably the most important step. Choose a topic that genuinely interests you or evokes your curiosity. Your passion for the subject will drive your motivation to delve deeper and explore it comprehensively.

2. Read Relevant Materials

Do some research. Good thinking always stands on the shoulders of giants. Engage with a variety of sources—academic papers, articles, books, and credible online resources—to gain a comprehensive understanding of the topic. This diverse reading will provide you with multiple perspectives and help you form a well-rounded viewpoint.

3. Think for Yourself

Dare to present a fresh perspective or an unconventional argument. Originality often stems from challenging established ideas, so don't shy away from presenting an idea that challenges the norm.

4. Look for Support

A good essay will support your thesis with credible evidence and logical reasoning. Use data, examples, expert opinions, and well-reasoned arguments to bolster your position and lend credibility to your essay.

5. Question Yourself

A good essay will also preempt counterarguments and engage with alternative positions. In other words, in your essay, you should do your best to acknowledge and address opposing viewpoints. Engaging with counterarguments demonstrates a nuanced understanding of the topic and strengthens your essay's credibility by showcasing a well-rounded analysis.

6. Plan the Process

Break down the process into manageable steps, and don't be discouraged by initial drafts. Keep refining your ideas, seek feedback, and revise your work to create a compelling and well-supported essay.

The Re:Think Writing Workshop

The Re:Think Writing Workshop is a monthly online Zoom session designed to support prospective essay writers as they get started on their essays. In the session, participants will find guidelines on how to write an essay for the Cambridge Re:think Essay Competition. This guideline aims to help participants become better thinkers – engaging with the essay prompt at a deeper level – and to improve their writing skills.

Led by experienced PhD writing mentors, these sessions offer participants valuable guidance on both the structure and substance of their essays. Writers have the opportunity to engage in interactive discussions, receive personalised advice, and explore various approaches to enhance the form, style, and content of their work. These sessions aim to foster a collaborative environment where aspiring writers can refine their ideas, improve their writing, and receive expert feedback to craft compelling and impactful essays for the competition.

Reading list:

There are dozens of books on the market about how to write well. Here are four which we believe are especially useful, and why:
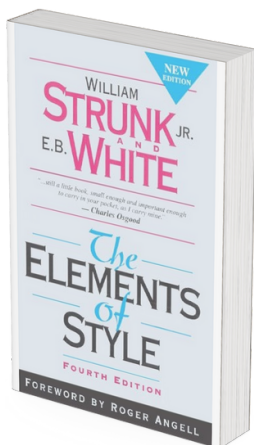
**The Elements of Style by Strunk and White:**

- Offers concise rules and principles for clear and effective writing, focusing on grammar, style, and usage.
- Provides timeless advice on brevity, clarity, and the importance of omitting needless words, making it a foundational guide for writers.
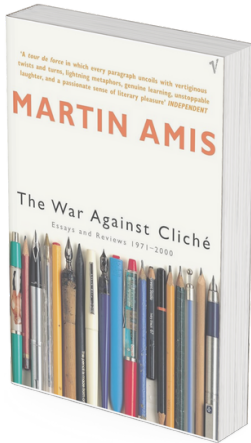
The War against Cliché: Essays and Reviews 1971-2000 by Martin Amis:

- Presents a collection of essays and reviews that challenge clichéd thinking and encourage originality in writing.
- Offers diverse insights into literature, language, and culture, inspiring writers to break away from conventional tropes and explore innovative approaches.
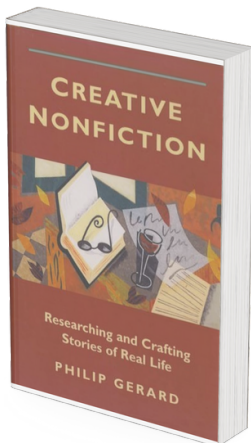
Writing Creative Nonfiction by Philip Gerard:

- Guides writers in crafting compelling narratives within the realm of nonfiction while maintaining accuracy and authenticity.
- Offers techniques for blending creativity with factual storytelling, providing practical advice for writers exploring the creative possibilities of nonfiction.
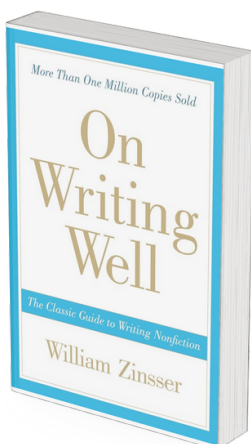
On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction by William Zinsser:

- Emphasises simplicity, clarity, and sincerity in nonfiction writing, encouraging writers to develop their unique voice.
- Covers various aspects of nonfiction writing, from structure and style to the importance of revision, serving as a comprehensive and accessible resource for aspiring writers.

Submission Guidelines

- All essays should be submitted through the Re:think Essay Competition program on the **CCIR admissions portal (https://ccir.smapply.org/prog/cambridge_rethink_2024/)** by the deadline indicated on the site.
- Please ensure that your essay does not exceed 2000 words; this word count excludes footnotes and bibliography.
- Please use a consistent font format and set the line spacing to 1.5 space.
- All submissions will be routed through a plagiarism and an AI checker. As such, we expect all submissions to be properly cited. The format of citation for this competition is MLA 8, the 8th edition of the Modern Language Association style. To find out more about MLA 8, please refer to this guide here.
- The essay must be submitted in PDF format. In the PDF document, please remove your name, affiliation, or any personal information to ensure a blind review. You will be asked to provide personal information in the submission system.

Checklist Before Submission

Before submitting your essay, please review the following checklist to ensure your essay meets all the necessary criteria:

✓ **Essay Structure:** Is my essay clearly organised and well-structured? Does it flow logically from one point to the next?

✓ **Word Count and Format:** Does my essay adhere to the 2000-word limit, excluding footnotes and bibliography? Is the line spacing set to 1.5?

✓ **Argument Support:** Are my arguments well-supported with evidence and reasoning? Have I provided sufficient justification for my viewpoints?

✓ **Clarity and Accuracy:** Have I carefully checked for typos and ambiguities? Is my language clear and precise?

✓ **Anonymity for Blind Review:** Have I removed my name and any affiliation from the essay itself? (Note: You will be asked to provide your personal information in the submission system, but the essay document should not contain any personal identifiers to ensure a fair and unbiased review process.)

✓ **Title:** Does my essay have a clear and relevant title?

✓ **Citation and Referencing:** Have I properly cited all sources? Are all references accurately documented, including author names and sources?

✓ **Adherence to MLA 8:** Am I using the 8th edition of the Modern Language Association (MLA) style for citations and references?

✓ **Inclusion of References:** Have I included a complete list of references at the end of my essay?

Annotated Winning Essay

Please find an officially annotated winning essay on the following page. The annotations have been kindly prepared by a CCIR Programme Coordinator currently affiliated with Stanford University.

Justice in Covid-19 Crisis Triage: Race Equity and Maximization

The Covid-19 pandemic has forced hospitals into a crisis standard of care that has required the allocation of limited resources and forced clinicians to make difficult decisions about who gets the ventilator, dialysis machine, or ICU bed. The crisis standard of care triage scoring guidelines in place today follow the utilitarian framework of maximization which allocates scarce resources to those deemed most likely to survive long-term, in order to save the maximum number of lives. At times this goal can supersede the principle of justice by placing those in marginalized groups at the lowest priority. Racial minorities, specifically Black and Hispanic populations, have been disproportionately harmed by utilitarian triage guidelines that seem neutral on paper, but this neutrality comes with negative consequences. As a result of systemic inequalities regarding access to care, jobs, adequate education, and housing, these populations are fundamentally disadvantaged in scoring systems because of their comorbidities, which result in reduced expectations for long-term survival.

If saving the maximum number of lives perpetuates health inequities for people of color, is it possible to maintain a utilitarian goal while simultaneously valuing justice and mitigating inequalities for these populations? When considering both the value of human life and acknowledging existing barriers to health, the decision of who gets the needed resource introduces many sides to the complex ethical dilemma of medical triages.

Background on Crisis Standards of Care

In public health crises like Covid-19, hospitals often find themselves with considerably more patients in the ICU than the number of resources to go around, constituting the need to switch to new standards of care in order to meet the high demand. The continuum in hospitals increases in intensity from conventional standards to contingency standards, and then finally crisis standards, where it reaches its highest intensity. Crisis standards are defined by the goal of maximizing lives saved using triage, i.e., maximization (Kirkpatrick). This change from conventional to crisis standards raises the stakes considerably, and with no guarantee that additional resources will be obtained, hospitals are left to prioritize some patients over others.

The most recognized scoring system for triage in the Covid-19 pandemic is the SOFA score, or the Sequential Organ Failure Assessment. The SOFA score was developed in 1994 to diagnose the acute morbidity of a critical illness at a population level in the ICU. The SOFA score assesses the six major systems of the body: respiratory, cardiovascular, neurological, renal, hepatic, and coagulation. Each system is given a score from 0 to 4, higher numbers reflecting a higher level of dysfunction (Lambden). Patients with the least amount of organ dysfunction are given the highest priority and those with the highest amount of organ dysfunction are given the lowest priority.

One important thing to consider is that SOFA scores were not designed to take into account racial injustices. Some might see this as a benefit, but in the framework of justice, it is an area of consideration, something I will discuss in detail later in this paper. It is important to consider the fact that scoring methods for crisis standards were not intended to be fair in every circumstance or exception, because crisis standards call for temporary solutions. This does not mean hospitals have to continue with the guidelines they established at the start of the crisis, but rather learn the flaws and conceive of a more ethical resolution.

Disparities in Prioritization

Comorbidities are a major criteria for the allocation of scarce resources, meaning patients with conditions that significantly lower their overall health will not be prioritized. Systemic injustices affect most significantly the development of comorbidities in Black and Hispanic communities like chronic kidney disease, diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and hypertension (Manchanda et al.). The combination of one of these conditions plus Covid-19 results in a substantial percentage of deaths (Stawicki et al.). The highest contributor to mortality is chronic kidney disease, something Black patients are four times more likely to develop than white patients. Additionally, Hispanics are just about two times as likely, in comparison to all non-Hispanics, to be diagnosed with chronic kidney disease. In African American adults over 20, a shocking 42% have hypertension compared to the percent of hypertension in Caucasion adults at 28.7% (Carratala and Maxwell)(Tartak et al.)(NIDDK). The SOFA score is solely meant to diagnose the severity of acute diseases, and with a systemic predisposition to developing these conditions, it begs the question: Is it fair to prioritize allocation of scarce resources to individuals

based on the SOFA score (or similar assessments), when structural inequalities make it more likely that people of color will score lower on these scales?

When deciding who will benefit the most from treatment, hospitals generally weigh a patient's short-term survival. This encompases the time up until a patient's discharge and up to a year after (White and Lo). Saved life-years is determined by a patient's life expectancy, something that is impacted by one's disabilities or conditions stemming from social injustices. Not to mention, long-term life expectancy is extremely difficult to predict and those predictions can be easily impacted by a physician's biases. From 2019 to 2020, life expectancy for Black and Hispanic individuals has decreased disproportionally. The largest decline of life expectancy for individuals was for African Americans which dropped by 2.7 years in comparison to 2019. The second largest decline was by Hispanic individuals whose life expectancy dropped by 1.9 since 2019 (Rodriguez).

Triage From a Utilitarian Perspective

injustice of current system viewed through a philosophical lens

anchor in philosophical framework; define your terms

The theory of utilitarianism is defined by generating the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Under a utilitarian-centered triage approach the goal is simple: save the maximum number of lives. This maximization works alongside crisis standards to optimize the health of the greater public by prioritizing those with a greater chance of surviving beyond Covid-19 with the scarce resource.

Consider this simplified example, if you have two patients in need of a ventilator, one with a 90% chance of survival, and another with a 10% chance of survival, under utilitarianism you would give the ventilator to the patient with the higher chance of survival. If you are consistent in this approach, for every 10 people, 9 would be saved as opposed to just 1 person. This example, however, is a simplified model and does not accurately represent how someone's predicted survival plays out because, as the name suggests, it is a prediction and is not guaranteed that one person will survive or another will die.

visualize theoretical concept in concrete example

introduce limitations One might wonder how a framework that works to save the maximum number of lives can be unethical in its motives. It is in fact the very basis of the utilitarian ethical framework that leads to this objection. What the utilitarian approach fails to consider is how likely a patient is to develop score-raising comorbidities or what factors are contributing to their shortened prognosis

for long-term survival. If this approach does not address systemic inequalities, it will perpetuate those same inequalities.

Triage From a Justice Perspective

anchor in philosophical framework; define your terms

While one might consider a justice approach to hinge on equality, it instead focuses on equity, meaning social determinants of health are taken into account in order to give proportional care to individuals who are disadvantaged. There are no strictly justice-centered triage systems in place now, but if they were to be instituted they would be determined on the basis of health equity and maximizing justice outcomes.

offer an alternative perspective in response to limitations in the current system

Let's consider an example of two patients. One is 55 years old with an average life expectancy and who is in good health, can work from home, and lives in a spacious house in the suburbs. The second patient is 55 who works an essential worker job, shares a crowded home and lives in the city where they must take public transportation. There is a greater chance the second person, who is at a greater risk for contracting the virus, is also a member of a racial minority. A justice triage would take these factors into account and give more priority to the individual facing greater systemic inequalities because their focus, unlike the utilitarian approach, would be on mitigating inequalities and maximizing justice outcomes, no matter the outcome of their health assessment (Tolchin et al.).

visualize theoretical concept in concrete example

introduce limitations Many argue taking into account social justice concerns is not easily determinable for the limited timeframe in a public health crisis. In this approach, there are potentially fewer lives saved if scarce resource allocation is no longer (primarily) driven by projected survival, e.g., if a member of a disadvantaged population who has a lower projected chance for survival is given priority.

Comparison of Utilitarian vs. Justice Frameworks

The utilitarian approach of saving the most lives often conflicts with a justice framework, and it is difficult to determine where to draw the line between saving the most lives and mitigating existing inequalities. On the one hand, disregarding the save-the-most-lives goal of utilitarian triage results in an obvious outcome: more lives will be lost. But on the other hand, disregarding the framework of justice leads to an perpetuation of racial inequities and systemic injustices, creating an even larger divide in health equity.

discuss nuances; not one or the other, but limitations and strengths to both

why is considering these nuances important? what is the point of all of this?

In the words of bioethicists Ruth Faden and Madison Powers, from the Kennedy Institute of Ethics at Georgetown and the Berman Bioethics Institute of Johns Hopkins University, the goal of public health ethics is "to improve human well-being by improving health and related dimensions of well-being and to do so in particular by focusing on the needs of those who are most disadvantaged"(Faden and Powers)(White and Lo). In a crisis, hospitals must choose between many deserving candidates, and some will inevitably be neglected. However, it is the goal of public health to determine "who will benefit the most" in a fair and just way, which cannot exclude the most disadvantaged.

The pandemic has heightened racial inequities in the Black and Hispanic communities in particular, and in my opinion, this has made it clear there is no 'best' time to make efforts towards reducing the strain of inequities in healthcare. What the utilitarian approach fails to consider is how likely a patient is to develop score-raising comorbidities or what factors are contributing to their shortened long-term survival. This is why I believe more of a justice-centered lens needs to be adopted into the already existing utilitarian framework.

offer a new perspective **My Suggestion For An Ethical Triage**

My suggestion for an ethical triage would keep aspects of the utilitarian approach while also increasing the priority of systematically disadvantaged individuals. I believe correction factors should be added to the existing SOFA score to take into account comorbidities that disproportionately affect Black and Hispanic individuals and significantly increase one's mortality rate with the addition of a Covid-19 diagnosis (Galiatsatos et al.).

specific with your recommendations and cite sources/leverage existing frameworks

Another factor I would take into account is the area in which each patient lives and the degree of poverty, education, and environmental factors in that area. Dr. White and Dr. Lo from The University of Pittsburgh Department of Critical Care Medicine suggest using the Area Deprivation Index (ADI) because it ranks areas by socioeconomic disadvantage and takes little time to calculate. It has been proven that living in an area with a high ADI score correlates to developing certain health conditions like cardiovascular disease and diabetes (Neighborhood Atlas). Taking into account the environmental and socioeconomic considerations that impact a given area would make it less likely for individuals living in the same area to continue to be deprioritized.

Finally, I believe patients in disadvantaged populations should be granted more time with a life-saving resource if the race or ethnicity they identify with has been proven to need a longer recovery period. Evidence shows that to reach the same rate of mortality as white patients, Black patients need a longer recovery in the ICU (Galiatsatos et al.). This suggestion would reduce the times a life-saving resource was taken from a patient before they had enough time to use it, and most likely prevent their need to use the scarce resource again if they had too little time with it previously.

expand on suggestions: moving beyond the SOFA index (rating level of care), how should patients be cared for?

Cite sources properly and formally   Works Cited

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