



EST I – Essay

Student's Name _____

National ID _____

Test Center: _____

Duration: 50 minutes

Instructions:

- Read the directions carefully before writing your essay.
- Use the first 2 pages as a draft, anything written on these pages will not be taken into consideration.

Directions: The following task will assess your skills in critically analyzing a text and reporting your findings in an organized essay. In your essay, you should demonstrate an effective use of the English language with a clear and well-structured analysis. Off-topic essays will not be scored.

You have 50 minutes to read the source text, analyze it and write an organized response.

Read the following passage and take into consideration how the author uses the following aspects:

- Evidence, such as relevant examples, to justify the argument
- Reasoning, such as rhetorical questions, to show logical connections among thoughts and facts
- Rhetoric, such as sensory language and emotional appeals, to give weight to the argument

You can imagine standing there for the first time, staring out over a sea of chairs, some empty and the rest filled with expecting eyes. You utter your first line, stumble over the second and take a deep breath. Your hands begin to sweat and the lights are too strong. Your heart beats faster—THUMP, THUMP. Any second now, you imagine you may faint. This is a common reaction elicited from many students studying theater or participating in a play. But, what if I told you that theater actually soothes social anxiety and the symptoms attributed to mental health diseases?

Social anxiety disorder is characterized by the fear of performing or simply being watched by others. This could be as basic as standing in front of your classmates to present the research topic you so meticulously practiced and planned, or raising your hand to answer a question you are confident you know the answer to. And yet, despite your confidence and mastery of information, you begin to sweat and your heart begins to palpitate. These symptoms can lead to negative effects on a person's life such as self-induced isolation and a considerable drop in confidence. Some traditional forms of therapy have trended in the past to tackle social anxiety, including one-on-one sessions or group counseling. However, with social anxiety on the rise, new and novel solutions emerge to replace conventional approaches.

Beginning in the 1920s as psychodrama, and experiencing a revolution in the 1960s as drama therapy, improvisational theater has become a form of intervention for those who suffer from social anxiety disorder. As of recently, many studies have been done to assess the extent improvisation and drama actually aid in reducing social anxiety disorder. Improvisation is when characters, plot, and dialog are acted out on the spur of the moment. Schwenke, Dshemuchadse, Rasehorn, Klarhölter, and Scherbaum (2020) stated in their article, "Improv to Improve: The Impact of Improvisational Theater on Creativity, Acceptance, and Psychological Well-Being," that drama improvisation facilitates well-being in three different categories: self-esteem, self-efficacy, and resilience. Their research involved a six-week intervention with a total of 12-hour sessions consisting of improvisational exercises and games. Upon finalizing their research, they found that the "findings indicate that improv helps to develop a mindset that welcomes and embraces possible failures or shortcomings and enhances an attitude toward self-respect and self-acceptance, as expected" (p. 11). A beneficial effect on self-esteem and self-efficacy is apparent. In the intervention group, self-esteem and self-efficacy rose by approximately 4.5% whereas the control group only experienced an approximate 0.3% rise. That is to say that the very act that causes anxiety could actually be its remedy. Can you imagine that?

Second City of Detroit also designed a 10-week improvisational theater intervention for students in middle and high school. They engaged in exercises such as “Zip, Zap, Zop”, where students would “stand in a circle and pass the focus around using eye contact, a clap and point gesture, and verbal cues” (Felsman, Seifrat, & Himle, 2018, p. 8). Just as in the previously mentioned research, there was a noticeable positive increase in self-efficacy by the end of the program: “43% of students who screened positive for social phobia at week 1 no longer screened positive in the final week of the program” (p. 18). It would be naïve to disregard the facts presented and reject the influence improvisational theater as therapy has on individuals who suffer from social anxiety.

Now, take a deep breath and think. If this is only a recent contemporary model of therapy and has already had such drastic effects on various participants, what more does the future hold? Regardless of whether or not I have managed to elicit from you a proactive response, I am confident that there is no denying the profuse value improvisation possesses on the various aspects of one’s mental health and the vital role it plays.

Write a response that demonstrates how the author makes an argument to persuade readers that improvisational theater is positively related to alleviating mental health. In your response, analyze how the author develops a logical and persuasive argument. Use an aspect from the essay directions such as evidence, reasoning or rhetoric or one of your own in your analysis. Make sure that your response directly cites relevant features of the source text.

The focus of your response is not on the quality of the source text, but rather on how the author makes an argument to persuade readers.

