



CPE Writing Practice

A Review

Here is an example of a question for Part 2 of Paper 2 (Writing) which asks for a review of a TV show.

Your college magazine has asked for contributions from students for a special feature entitled “Television at its Best”. Write a review of a television programme that you think is worthy of inclusion in such a feature. (300-350 words)

The model answer below will give you some idea of the kind of text you should be aiming at, in terms of length and organisation.

Mad Men – an ironic look at the Sixties

The popularity of “Mad Men” is not hard to fathom. Nor is the almost hysterical reaction of critics, who have almost to a man hailed this story of 1960s Madison Avenue advertising executives as the best American series since “The Sopranos”.

To begin with, it is visually stunning, with its faithful recreation of early-sixties fashions when all men wore hats and suits and the women dressed to please the men. The cast is composed of firm-jawed men and hourglass-shaped women, almost universally easy on the eye. The dialogue is snappy and witty and cleverly reveals the hidden depths of pain beneath the characters' elegant veneer. This is an era at once recent and remote from our own, and the show does a wonderful job of drawing us into its world.

Then there is the guilty pleasure we experience at watching these people who are so blissfully oblivious to our modern hang-ups, whether it is the way they smoke and drink incessantly, with never a thought for the hazards of liver disease or passive smoking, or their unrepentantly Neanderthal views on race and sex.

It is these opportunities for dramatic irony inherent in such a setting that the show seizes with both hands. A couple of examples will suffice. In the first the main characters drive out into the country for a picnic, at the end of which they leave their rubbish to litter the beautiful spot without a second thought. In the second, the small daughter of perfect mother Betty Draper rushes to her mother swathed in polythene to announce that she is “playing spacemen”. Without blinking her mother, rather than fainting on the spot at the prospect of her precious child suffocating, calmly tells her that she'll “catch it” if her mother's dresses have been crumpled.

Although some of the more carping critics have slated the show's stately pace and incredible plot devices, it remains true that few TV shows offer the variety of pleasures of “Mad Men” and I am sure it will long be remembered as a classic piece of TV.