

**sample CPN 101 assignment:
argumentative synthesis essay**

Writing Assignment
CPN 101, section 081

Argumentative Synthesis Essay

Synthesizing information from at least three readings in section four of Robert K. Miller's textbook, develop an argumentative essay that presents a clearly stated thesis, explores competing hypotheses, and explains the relationship between your position and opposing views. You may well use personal experience and/or general knowledge; however, you must also use specific material (facts, examples, cases, reasons, etc.) from three or more readings in Miller's textbook.

To document your source, include MLA-style parenthetical citations and a "Works Cited" page.

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The Tragedies of Competition

Imagine a girl driven to resent and despise a beautifully developed talent that she had treasured and valued for many years. The pressure that caused this tragedy derived from competition. Mariah Nelson's essay "Who Wins? Who Cares?" argues that competition acts as a ¶1 "unifying factor" between players (379), but how does competition affect athletes when coaches and parents enter the scene? Katherine Martin, D. Stanley Eitzen, and Thomas Paetsch each discuss the negative outcomes that stem from placing on children too much pressure for winning. Although competition is deeply woven into the tapestry of the American lifestyle and we like to think of it as good, the negative results it imposes, both mentally and physically, are more common than we might like to believe.

Whether it be our capitalistic socioeconomic structure or our fondness for baseball as the all-American pastime (and for sports in general), Americans have taken to the idea that competition is a natural and beneficial element of life. And how can we not believe this when ¶2 we see fathers and sons tossing footballs back and forth around backyards before dinner? Or when we observe football players hugging and patting each other's backs as they come in off the field after winning a game? Or as we watch two friends going at each other on a tennis court, each one giving it his all to make the other play harder and think faster (Nelson

essay heading: does not include instructor's name (according to portfolio guidelines)

essay title: uses key terms to clarify the focus of essay (see Troyka 53-54)

opening strategy: writer engages readers by identifying a situation and providing relevant background (see Troyka 104-06)

writer introduces sources: stating names of authors, title of a source

brief indication of writer's thesis

use of specific, vivid detail (see Troyka 79-81)

writer fully develops relevant background information by using paraphrase—with MLA-style parenthetical citation (see Troyka 528-32, 580-87)

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writer paraphrases to develop synthesis of information from various sources—with MLA-style parenthetical citations (see Troyka 528-32, 580-87)

writer continues to paraphrase other important points in reading sources—with MLA-style parenthetical citations (see Troyka 528-32, 580-87)

in addition to paraphrasing, the writer directly quotes important passage in reading source—with MLA-style parenthetical citations (see Troyka 522-32, 580-87)

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379)? These scenes result from truly successful competition: when a parent understands the process of competition rather than its outcome; when competition acts as a natural motivator for improvement (Nelson 379); when a person is the one winner as opposed to the numerous losers (Eitzen 398); when a game is seen purely as a game and competition is understood as sport rather than as motivation for killing the enemy. But these occasions are as spectacular as they are rare and, like many events in nature, competition has a dark side. If we take off our rose-colored glasses, competition's true colors can be seen.

Excessive emphasis on winning can foster some very damaging mental effects on children. Eitzen, in his article "The Dark Side of Competition in America," asks what the effect on self-esteem is when a child is cut from the team or rarely gets to play (398). How terrible a child must feel when the people he trusts and admires the most, his parents, are the ones criticizing and shouting insults from the sidelines! Martin remarks that parents have to walk a very fine line between caring and creating pressure, between enthusiasm and going overboard (375). The problem is that many parents stumble over this line; the consequences go beyond damaging the child's self-worth to causing stress and even resentment of the parents. Children get involved in sports to have fun, but when adults try to manipulate the sport and push children to win and do nothing but win, the joy of the game is lost (Eitzen 400). Success can be exhilarating, but for every competition that has one winner, there will be many losers; and as Eitzen comments, "[w]hen winning is

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everything, losers are just that" (398). Some people see competition as motivating, yet when children are knocked down time and time again, and their self-esteem becomes damaged, are they more likely to prepare themselves for another possible rejection--or just give up their goals entirely?

It is around this topic specifically that Thomas Paetsch writes "Competition: An Abused Privilege." Paetsch describes how he came to the point of almost hanging up his wrestling shoes for good because his parents and coach were putting too much pressure on him, leading him to put added pressure on himself, which finally caused him to burn out (416). Sadly, these pressures cause many young athletes to relinquish what pleasures they might have experienced in their sports. This was true of my cousin, the girl I mentioned earlier in the introduction. For nine years, ice-skating was my cousin's passion. Due to pressure placed upon her by her coach and parents, however, that passion became a nightmare; her resentment towards her parents eventually turned towards the ice and even towards the talent she had hoped to make the basis of a career. It is upsetting to think how many potentially great athletes never achieved their goals because they were deterred in younger years by such unnecessary anxieties (Paetsch 416).

The politics involved in winning in children's sports is another area where one can find corruption of both the mind and the body. Recall the image of the father and son playing football and compare it to the more realistic views described by Martin of a young boy afraid of batting, being forced to stand at home plate while his father deliberately throws pitches

*transition: writer starts paragraph
with link to preceding paragraph
(see Troyka 82-84)*

*writer draws on personal
experience in responding to ideas
in reading sources*

*writer uses paraphrase in relating
personal experience to source—with
MLA-style parenthetical citation
(see Troyka 528-32, 580-87)*

*writer builds coherence by
returning to examples of specific,
vivid detail
(see Troyka 79-81)*

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writer paraphrases to develop synthesis of information from various sources—with MLA-style parenthetical citations (see Troyka 528-32, 580-87)

concluding strategy: asking provocative questions and calling for awareness (see Troyka 107-09)

conclusion: writer fully develops essay's thesis

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that hit him, or of a father beating his exhausted son to keep him running around a track (373). Do actions such as these promote a caring relationship between a father and his son? Is it worth destroying such a precious bond in the name of winning? Over the past ten years, stories of kids injured, paralyzed, or driven to dehydration have been reported (Martin 374). Martin goes on to tell of one coach who reportedly injected oranges with amphetamines to get his players up for the game (374). If the physical torture such competition can cause is not bad enough, then what can one say about the moral wrongs that are taught to our youngsters through competition in sports? In college sports especially, Eitzen observes that using steroids, exploiting athletes, falsifying transcripts, providing illegal payments, and hiring surrogate test-takers are more common practice than colleges would like us to think (399). Generally speaking, too much emphasis on competition is unhealthy physically, mentally, and morally.

How can we call something unifying when it separates individuals on the basis of athletic ability and drives wedges between parents and children? How can we view as good, clean fun something that hurts our children both mentally and physically? How can we call something a relaxing pastime that causes so much stress and anxiety that athletes would give up their goals just to get out from underneath that stress? From the lowering of one's self-esteem, to the added anxiety and stress, to mental and physical damage, competition has many more negative outcomes than our competitively minded American society would like to believe.

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Works Cited

- Eitzen, D. Stanley. "The Dark Side of Competition in American Society." Miller 395-402.
- Martin, Katherine. "Is Winning Everything?" Miller 373-76.
- Miller, Robert K. *The Informed Argument*. 2nd ed. New York: Harcourt, 1992.
- Nelson, Mariah B. "Who Wins? Who Cares?" Miller 377-79.
- Paetsch, Tim. "Competition: An Abused Privilege." Miller 415-18.

MLA-style "Works Cited"
(see Troyka 588-607)

*writer follows procedure for citing
multiple selections from anthology*
(see Troyka 595-96)

