**Sample Final Exam English 1B** This student’s final exam was judged a “6,” which means excellent. You’ll notice that it isn’t grammatically perfect, but it is very well developed, well organized, well expressed, and thoughtful. In normal-sized handwriting, not skipping lines, it stretched to 4 and ¼ pages. The two passage it responds to are pasted in below.

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Today’s American culture leads people to a cycle of constantly upgrading their technologies and goods. Each time I shut down my PC at night, it asks me if I would like to install the newest updates. Apple releases a new iPod or some other, entirely similar, product, such as an iPhone or iPad, biannually. As my parents and I are looking for a new apartment for next Fall, we have to consider new cabinets, flooring, appliances, and furnishings with each new condo we walk into. People today cannot abide by being behind the times in their iPods, computers, and other material goods, similar to how a clothing designer cannot fall behind in their patterns, textures, and styles. The constant consumerism of America has led to people who cannot bear to not have the newest thing, from iPads to Furbys, to Tickle-me-Elmos to stainless steel kitchen appliances. Juliet B. Schor and Philip Slater each analyze a different take on why people cannot fall behind in this consumerist fashion, and lend to a conclusion that our middle-class American society has bred people who have become addicted to having the newest trend-setting “thing.”

In her book “The Overspent American,” Schor analyzes why people feel inclined to upgrade constantly. She states “The new consumerism is also built on a relentless ratcheting up of standards.” She explains that, whoever you are, each person is always expected to get the newest “thing,” using the examples of air conditioning in cars and travelling to Europe, because that has become the newest standard. American society believes that people should constantly be upgrading, and on the cutting edge of the newest trends. She then states that this constant upgrade leads “to a general expansion of the list of things we have to have,” in that being part of these trends becomes a necessity to who each person is, and that “what we want grows into what we need.” People become so dependent on the shift in popular trends that falling behind alienates a person from his more advanced counterparts.

Philip Slater tackles the mentality of “I must have this new thing to be normal” in a slightly different way than Schor. Slater’s article “Want-creation Fuels American’s Addictiveness” talks about the greed bred into Americans. He states, “In our society, we spend billions each year creating want.” Slater argues that America is an addictive society, and through this addiction to be the center of attention or “the first at something,” young children are being taught greed from a very early age. Slater then goes on to state that this addictiveness is fed through the mentality that people “can only be made whole by the addition of something external,” and that this “something” makes people feel completed.

Now the question come to me, asking how each of these views, Schor’s thoughts on upgrading and Slater’s conviction on greedy, addicted Americans, written in 1998 and 1984 respectively, really shows what American consumerism has become in the year 2011. I found it surprising how true both of their claims are towards today’s “modern” world. For example, at least twice a year, Apple, Inc.’s CEO Steve Jobs announces some kind of new and improved product. When looking at these new products, the “new” features almost don’t justify buying such a product. Let’s take the iPad 2 for example. The iPad is not a terribly old product, having only been released a short time ago, and yet people are clamoring for the second generation. The differences between the two products are dismal at best, and when comparing the iPad to it’s predecessor, the iPod, its functionality becomes questioned. So why would a person buy this “new” product? The answer comes from both Schor and Slater. People want the iPad 2 for the same reason that Schor implies, that people want to be cutting edge, and, as Slater said, feel that having an iPad 2 will make them better and let them do things and be people they otherwise would not be.

The sad realization that modern American culture is so gullible and greedy to believe that an iPad 2 will give them more meaning in their lives will make them happier is heart breaking. The consumerist culture in America has led to a sad realization that people are fools who compare the quality of their own lives against the lives of the few. Slater was right in his thinking that Americans are bred greedy, addicted to whatever the newest and greatest “thing” is.

**Passage 1)**

The new consumerism is also built on a relentless ratcheting up of standards. If you move into a house with a fifties kitchen, the presumption is that you will eventually have it redone, because that’s a standard that has now been established. If you didn’t have air conditioning in your old car, the presumption is that when you replace it, the new one will have it. If you haven’t been to Europe, the presumption is that you will get there, because you deserve to get there. And so on. In addition to the proliferation of new products (computers, cell phones, faxes, [iPads etc.]), there is a continual upgrading of old ones—autos and appliances—and a shift to customized, more expensive versions, all leading to a general expansion of the list of things we have to have. The 1929 home I just moved into has a closet too shallow to fit a hanger. So the clotes face forward. The real estate agents suggested I solve the “problem” by turning the study off the bedroom into a walk-in. (Why read when you could be buying clotes?) What we want grows into what we need, at a sometimes dizzying rate. While politicians continue to tout the middle class as the heart and soul of American society, for far too many of us being solidly middle-class is no longer good enough. --Juliet Schor, *The Overspent American* (1998)

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**Passage 2)**

In our society we spend billions each year creating want. Covetousness, discontent and greed are taught to our children, drummed into them. Not only though advertising, but in the feverish emphasis on success, on winning at all costs, on being the center of attention through one kind of performance or another, on being the first at something—no matter how silly or stupid. We are an addictive society.

Addiction is a state of wanting. It is a condition in which the individual feels he or she is incomplete, inadequate, lacking, not whole, and can only be made whole by the addition of something external.

This need not be a drug. It can be money, food, fame, sex, responsibility, power, good deeds, possessions, cleaning—the addictive impulse can attch itself to anything, real or symbolic. You’re addicted to something whenever you feel it completes you—that you wouldn’t be a whole person without it.

–Philip Slater “Want-Creation Fuels American’s Addictiveness” (1984).