

TOPIC II: *Scofflaws*

Directions: You will have 45 minutes to plan and write an essay on the topic assigned below. Before you begin writing, read the passage carefully and plan what you will say. Your essay should be as well organized and as carefully written as you can make it.

"It is painfully apparent today that millions of Americans who would never think of themselves as lawbreakers, let alone criminals, are taking increasing liberties with all sorts of 'minor' laws that are nonetheless designed to protect and nourish society. When it comes to tax codes, or laws against littering or speeding or noise pollution, more and more ordinary citizens are becoming scofflaws [people who casually break the law]. The slogan of the day seems to be, 'You're a fool if you obey the rules.' Americans are used to thinking that law-and-order is threatened mainly by violent crime. But the foundations of social order are more profoundly shaken when ordinary law-abiding citizens take to skirting the law."

---Adapted from Frank Trippett's "A Red Light for Scofflaws"

Explain Trippett's argument and discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with his analysis. Support your position, providing reasons and examples from your own experience, observations, or reading.

Sample student essay with a score of 6:

Frank Trippett is one of the few American citizens that is able to see what has happened to our society. In the remarkable passage from his, "A Red Light for Scofflaws," he makes some excellent points on Americans and how they have become accustomed to breaking the law and, even worse, thinking that it is okay to do so. From a young teenage girl's perspective, I myself can say that I strongly agree with him and that things are getting worse in American society; it all starts right where I am now: the adolescent years.

Teenagers are very impressionable and their young minds can be easily influenced by society. It doesn't mean that they don't know right from wrong, but they do look to others for answers and guidance so that they will know how to survive in this sometimes seemingly cold world. When teenagers get their driver's license, it is exciting and somewhat scary being a first time driver. I remember the first time I got onto the road by myself. I was a little scared with all those cars zooming around me. I noticed, though, as I got more comfortable, little by little I would go a little faster to keep up with the flow of traffic. My mom one time noticed I was going 60 in a 45 mph zone, and needless to say was less than thrilled. It seems, though, that if you don't go that speed you'll get eaten alive by others. People will ride your behind or flip you off and it shouldn't be that way. As a society, we've made it okay for people to do that to us and not suffer any consequences. Everyday people get away with road rage and unsafe driving. Sometimes it is very scary to be on the road when you constantly feel that someone is going to get mad at you because you aren't going fast enough or that they think you cut them off. In high school, if you go the speed limit you apparently drive like a grandma and are considered a loser. How did we come to these conclusions? Who is making this stuff up?

Another big problem here in society is littering. My biggest pet peeve in the whole wide world is stepping on gum. To me, it is the most disgusting and revolting thing to step in someone else's gum. I don't think that I should have to constantly look down at my feet just so I can avoid stepping in gum. My aunt once went to Singapore and said it was the most beautiful country she had ever seen. Do you know why? It is spotless. There is not a single piece of trash on the ground or any signs of gum stains on the sidewalks. Why do you think that this is? Singapore has laws that if you litter you will be fined \$1000. If you get caught more than once, you could be sent to jail. Let me tell you, that is reason enough to not even think of littering. Singapore jail cells make America's prison cell's look like day spas. They are dirty, small, and have no lighting. All people have to do is see that and instead of throwing something on the ground, they'll walk to the trash can. But kids at my school spit out their gum all the time and there are no consequences for it. Without consequences for disobeying minor laws our social order is weakened, as Trippett suggests.

Not only is there a problem with gum, but with littering trash in general. I get so infuriated taking my dog for a walk because there is trash she can pick up, or, even worse, broken glass that she can step on. I feel I can't even take a leisurely walk with her because I'm constantly steering her away from the trash and broken glass. If everyone obeyed the littering laws, our environment would be a much better place to live.

When it comes to noise pollution, the nosiest kids seem to be the high school and college kids. I personally think that most kids are arrogant in that they play loud music and don't care if anyone wants to hear it or not. These kids blast their music 24/7, and if someone asks them to turn it down, they become the bad guys. Adults also like to play their music loud at parties and don't really care if it is disturbing the neighborhood or not. Again, the social order is affected when we don't have respect for the rights and comforts of our fellowmen.

I think the reason so much of this is happening is because as a whole American society has grown soft when it comes to social conduct. We've become so wrapped up and worried about the violent crimes that everyone forgets about the other laws that are being broken. All it takes is a little effort and things will improve. Recently, a bunch of cops staked out a street that kids, and adults as well, speed down. About 150 people from my school got tickets, including teachers. How cautious do you think they are now? Everyone is so afraid that the police will be there randomly, so they actually go the speed limit on that street. See? That is all it takes to putting a stop to all these problems. If we were strict like they are in Singapore, that would eliminate the littering problem, and if we were firm and laid down rules for noise pollution, with significant punishment for violations, that would slow down too. As I said, all it takes is some effort and rules that are strictly enforced and we could have our American society in shape again. I want my kids to grow up in a nice, clean, and safe country with a slogan that says, "It's cool to follow the rules." Hopefully, that will change in time. As long as our attitudes change and our rules are stricter, than I believe a change is possible. I believe in America and I believe we can do this.

Comments on the "6" essay: *In a 45-minute, first draft essay, this student demonstrates superior writing. She clearly understands the topic and responds effectively. With carefully chosen supporting examples, she explores the issues thoughtfully and in depth. She has an effective, fluent style marked by syntactic variety and a command of language. She is clearly engaged with her writing. The essay is not perfect: in a second draft, the writer would probably have weeded out some of the colloquial language ("bunch of cops," "stuff," etc.) and repetition, but for first draft writing this is a remarkable accomplishment.*

Sample student essay with a score of 5:

Imagine a place where everything is perfect, no crime, no violence, just a perfect world where nothing ever goes wrong. It would be our ultimate utopia, but living in today's society isn't such a perfect utopia. There are many crimes, murder, drugs, insubordinate teenagers rebelling against their parents, and all for what, just to be another person labeled as a law breaking citizen. Today, more and more people are lowering their values and believes and giving into the false impressions of being a "bad person." Even though there are some genuine people out there with beliefs that can't be broken, but on the other hand, I agree with Trippett's argument against the slogan, "You're a fool if you obey the rules."

Now a days, more and more teenagers are getting into the habit of breaking the law. Teenagers, ordinary, young citizens that someone wouldn't think of them committing a crime, does. Why is that? In todays world, teenagers are being egged on with the help of peer pressure. There are many times in which I have gone to parties and seen people call a person, "chicken" or "stupid" just because they don't want to drink or do anything. Peer pressure is helping young adults commit crimes and break the law only because "Its the cool thing too do." I am almost sure that parents know their children drink, and I believe children drink only because they had to, or they wanted to look cool. Young adults would rather ruin and harm their body, rather than have the courage and guts to say no to breaking the law.

Its understandable that people in todays society want to have fun, and they want to party once in a while, but at the same time, too much partying can lead to unwanted and devestating consequences that shouldn't have to be in the first place. Just recently, a boy from a nearby university jumped off a bridge, right above a beach with mothers and children. How could anybody know of such an unforeshadowed death? I realize, he just wanted to have fun, but on the other hand, he broke the law and ended up paying the consequences. Most teenagers don't realize the consequences, but they would rather be cool than protect themselves. Breaking the law, and breaking the rules can give you a harder consequence than pleasure.

I believe breaking the law today is becoming more of an addiction than anything. When ordinary people see movie stars, or our idols, breaking the law, we automatically assume that its ok for us, using them as an excuse for our behavior. Breaking the law of speeding or polluting or even littering has become more of an ordinary part of our lives that we automatically do it. We always figure, "I can't get caught, it won't happen to me," so we keep on doing it because everybody else is doing it. When we realize more ordinary people are helping corrupt our world, we begin to see a little more of our what-was-known-as-utopia fade away.

The saying shouldn't be "You're a fool if you obey the rules." It should be "You're a fool if you don't." Its easy to see that teenagers are going to do whatever their friends are going to do, and one should realize that people are going to eventually run a red light, or speed, but people shouldnt be making excuses for their actions, or as to why they decided to break the law. The social order in our society is depleting more and more everyday because of peoples careless behavior and insubordinate actions. The values that our parents had and have tried to pass on to us are slowly fading always into our own corrupt thoughts and beliefs. Life is a complicated journey that involves many unwanted and unseen obstacles. Its only our choice as to how to solve and get through those obstacles is how we shape ourselves. Breaking laws, and committing crimes can only foreshadow harder times coming your way. So, in the end, when your behind bars, killed, or even facing the wrath of your parents, you can simply ask yourself the question, "Who's the fool now?"

Comments on the "5" essay: *This essay demonstrates clear competence in writing. The student addresses the topic clearly and shows his understanding of Trippett's position by providing appropriate examples of how wrong it is to say or think "You're a fool if you obey the rules." The essay is well developed. The writer thoughtfully provides reasons why people become scofflaws which he goes on to develop and support: we are influenced by peer pressure to break laws, we don't think about possible consequences of unlawful behavior, and we are so used to breaking the law that it's become an addiction. The style of the essay is fluent; the writer has control over complex structures, and his sentences show syntactic variety.*

The essay has occasional errors in spelling, some commas are omitted, and some contractions and possessives are not appropriately punctuated. These errors are typical of first draft writing, and they are not serious enough to distract or confuse the reader.

Sample student essay with a score of 4:

I agree with Frank Trippett's analysis on Americans breaking the law, written in "A Red Light for Scofflaws." I do believe that ordinary law-abiding citizens are breaking more and more laws, somewhat flirting with the concept of rebellion. I disagree however with Frank Trippett's argument that "...the foundations of social order are more profoundly shaken when law-abiding citizens take to skirting the law," as opposed to the violent criminals.

It is very obvious that most Americans break minor laws on a day-to-day basis. If one does not believe they will get caught, it feels they are free to do whatever they want. The speed limit, is really no such limit anymore. Knowing that most officers of the law will not distribute tickets for driving a few mph over the speed limit, us Americans speed to discover how much we can get away with; 5 mph over, 10, 15, etc. Everyday offenses go far beyond the roadways. Americans seems to think that they can do anything in the privacy of their own home, and issues of underage drinking and illegal substances provide little threat to today's teenagers. Many citizens think that their small offenses are not considerable compared to major criminals and without punishment, they will probably not stop committing them.

Although I do believe that local authorities should spend some time on enforcing the small offense laws, I do believe that most of their effort should go to preventing major life-threatening and violent crimes from taking place. Trippett refers to the harm of noise pollution in his argument from "A Red Light for Scofflaws." Personally, I would much rather live in a neighborhood with a high noise level than a high crime level. It is when a citizen feels threatened or in danger, that is most important for the local authorities to be available.

Frank Trippett's statement, "You're a fool if you obey the rules," is definitely the way most Americans view life these days. I think we need to try to follow the law, so police officers can work on bigger issues.

Comments on the "4" essay: *The writing in this essay is adequate, but not as fully or clearly developed as in a 5 paper. The writer slights some aspects of the task: he states a fundamental disagreement with Trippett, but fails to develop the reasons for her disagreement.*

The essay has some errors, but generally the writer demonstrates control of grammar, usage, and mechanics.

Sample student essay with a score of 3:

Many Americans today break the law. The numbers are increasing every year. People break laws everyday at every minute. Sometimes people don't even know that they are breaking the law. There are a lot of people who break the law simply by speeding or littering. Frank Trippett's argument is a strong point, that many people may agree or disagree to.

I agree with Franks statement. He states clearly that millions of Americans, like criminals are committing more crimes. Many laws are broken, even the ones that we don't think we are breaking. Everyone litters. You know that you are not suppose to litter, but people still do it anyway. Same with speeding, now many people haven't went a few miles more?

In the slogan "You're a fool if you obey the rules," is sometimes true. In observing classmates, I hear many things. I hear people saying that they want to drink over the weekend, and someone may say that they would rather not. Everyone gets all worked up about it and bugs the one who doesn't want to drink. They are basically saying to break the law and drink. Many times you can be made fun of if you obey the rules. I don't agree with "You're a fool if you obey the rules." Many people do agree with it, but everyone has their own thoughts and feelings. It's your decision on whether you want to break the law, but remember the consequences.

In conclusion, people break laws everywhere. There is an increase in laws that have been broken. Little things like speeding or littering are laws that most people don't really care for. Americans think that law and order are due to violent crime.

Comments on the "3" essay: *In this essay the student demonstrates the lack of focus and simplistic thinking that characterize a "3" paper. He agrees with Trippett that there are many scofflaws in our society, but his thinking does not go beyond this agreement.*

He demonstrates some understanding of the passage, but he makes limited use of it in developing a weak response.

Sample student essay with a score of 2:

As trippett mentions, "You're a fool if you obey the rules," this really is the belief of most of the Americans nowadays. People do not feel bad for breaking laws besides criminal laws. There are few of people ever consider the importance, as Trippett concludes, of those "minor" laws. However, I, as one of the "foolish" people in others' eyes, totally agree with Trippett's claim. "Minor" laws are just as important as criminal laws to a society.

Although a "minor" law violation does not get the same level of penalty as a criminal committee, violating "minor" laws can also cause serious harm. For instance a murderer kills an innocent person while a speeder may cause more injuries or deaths. Even though they have different motives, planned and accident, they both have serious outcomes.

In addition, "minor" codes are the base of laws to a society. People who without understanding and obeying the "minor" laws, show.

In addition, if all people not obey those "minor" laws, they will end up living in a chaos condition. Try to imagine a society in which people ignore traffic rules, tax codes, and noise pollution controls. Then even walking across streets will be life-risked acts, and the government will have nothing to pay for any public goods.

Even though people call most of the laws besides criminal laws, they are not minor indeed. If people think about the reasons and purposes behind these "minor" laws, they would find how great the benefits are for obeying them.

Comments on the "2" essay: *This essay is seriously flawed. It lacks focus and coherence, and it demonstrates a very poorly developed response to the Trippett passage. Because the writer has inadequate control of syntax, the reader must complete, or guess, the meaning of many of the sentences. The essay is marred by numerous errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics.*

Sample student essay with a score of 1:

Frank Trippett claims in this part that millions of Americans would never think of themselves as lawbreakers. He thinks that Americans are used to think that law and order are threatened by violent crime. Every day, laws are broken. It doesn't matter if those are minors or not.

Americans break laws as if a daily task like eat, do shopping, work... They become lawbreakers unconsciously for minor laws against littering, speeding or noise pollution. If minor laws are not broken, life will be the same. Human beings are not machines which are programmed to be lawbreakers.

But by another way, violent crime which implies human beings' life (murders...) would be prohibited. Frank Trippett thinks that Americans become more and more scofflaws.

Laws were created but we don't now if those are right. Minor laws are the daily tasks which change a life.

Comments on the "1" essay: *This essay is "unfocused, illogical, incoherent, and disorganized." The writer's command of English is so slight that he is unable to respond meaningfully to the topic.*