

Temple University Japan Placement Test Topics (Test I)

Directions

Each of the topics below quotes a writer's position on some issue. Choose one of the two topics assigned by the exam proctor. In an organized essay of 350-500 words or more, (1) explain in your own words what the writer is saying AND (2) take a position on the writer's argument.

Issues you might wish to address include: Do you agree, partly agree or totally disagree with the writer's opinion? Is the evidence used to support the writer's argument convincing or weak? If weak, can you offer a better argument? Can you cite any cases or events that either support or refute what the writer says?

As you write your essay, you should periodically refer to statements that occur in the passage you are discussing. However, everything that you write should be in your own words, except, perhaps, for a phrase or two from the passage that you may wish to quote.

Choose only one topic from the two assigned by the exam proctor. Write on every other line.

1. One of the most important issues in the Japanese education system is the introduction of English education into primary schools. Although the government started teaching English to first-grade students in primary school from 2002, I think we should still reconsider this project. For primary school students, it is too early to study a foreign language. Currently, the degradation in their ability to use Japanese, their mother tongue, is getting to be a serious problem. Having this problem, it is absurd to turn to English and not Japanese. I think the students' Japanese language skills are still unformed; for example, they do not know kanji and grammatical concepts well, so it is important that they spend their time studying Japanese more deeply instead of trying to absorb a new language. A satisfactory system, including curriculum and teachers, is not ready. For instance, primary schools do not have a sufficient number of teachers who are well trained in the teaching of English. Without a proper education system and the appropriate environment, this project will not work well and will only confuse the children. There is also the danger that the extra material will be used just to practice for entrance examinations. On the basis of these points, we should not introduce the English education system into primary schools now. First of all, we need to consider the present conditions. We have so many problems currently with the curriculum besides English, so is this a good time for primary schoolers to study it?

Adapted from "Primary School" by Tomoe Takeshita

2. A survey of pre-school teachers has found that the teachers strongly believe that both children and parents have changed in a number of ways. Children, they said, are acting in a more self-centered way and have become verbally violent. They said parents no longer seem to be providing the fundamental training that children need for daily life. Nor do parents seem to allow their children enough play-time, the teachers said. In the rapidly changing society, classroom chaos cannot be understood without paying attention to family influence. Indeed, the chaos may be a sign of family collapse, especially in Japanese parent-child relationships. Teachers report that classroom chaos is usually instigated by a few children, then followed by the easily affected ones before it becomes totally uncontrollable. It seems particularly important to take a deep look at the inner working of the instigating children's minds. Some of their restless and disturbing behavior traits can be manifestations of serious conflicts and stresses at home. It may be that their basic needs for love and security are not being sufficiently addressed.

Adapted from "New Perspective needed on 'classroom chaos'" by Yuko Kawanishi

3. According to Japan Tobacco's website - if you can believe it - of Japan's 127 million people, 48% of men and 14% of women smoke. In a country as populated and cramped as Japan, that's a lot of people with a nasty habit generating a lot of secondhand smoke. Smoking is going to catch up with them faster than an OL (Office Lady) can say "A pack of Mild Sevens (a cigarette brand), please." So what is being done about tobacco overuse here? Very little, if the warning on cigarette packets is any indication. In many other countries, the warning clearly says that smoking can kill you or is hazardous to your health. In Japan, it simply says that there is a risk of endangering your health by smoking, so you should be careful about smoking too much. And what of the Japanese nonsmokers? I'd say their heads are planted firmly in the sand next to the smokers. The almost complete absence of nonsmoking establishments, even the lack of any real nonsmoking sections, leads me to believe that the interest just isn't there. Restaurants, bars, cafes (office buildings, post offices, even hospitals!) only became nonsmoking as a result of public pressure and government regulations, both sorely lacking in Japan, where dissension and confrontation are avoided. Nonsmokers have to stop complying with the smoking section of society and have enough self-respect to demand that their health not be jeopardized by it. It's time this country acknowledged the very real health risks posed by tobacco use and stopped the denial and understatement. Japan Tobacco can put that in its pipe and smoke it!

Adapted from an editorial by Iris T Wassek

4. In Elizabethan England, criminals were branded on the face or palm. Colonial Massachusetts was home to the infamous scarlet letter—A for adulterer, F for forger, R for robber. Shame has always been a powerful public tool to enforce norms of behavior. Yet today shame seems to be fleeting, if experienced at all. Janet Jackson may have shamed herself with her Super Bowl stunt, but her public flogging didn't last long, with her speedy appearance on the talk-show circuit. Immoral behavior rarely results in the life sentence it once routinely exacted. Half a century ago, actress Ingrid Bergman fled the country when it was revealed that she, although unmarried, was carrying the child of her director. Now celebrities from Madonna to Jodie Foster give birth as single women, and it seems only to bolster their fame. But beyond these examples, a serious discussion about the appropriateness and effectiveness of "shaming punishments" to deter criminal behavior and reduce the number of people in prison is occurring among those who want to employ this ancient social weapon constructively. In some districts, judges have begun sending drug offenders to stand on busy streets wearing signs that read "I got caught possessing cocaine." Drunken drivers have been forced to affix bumper stickers to their cars proclaiming "CONVICTED DWI." Names of convicted sex molesters have been posted on the "cyber-pillories" on the Internet or shown on local news. Similarly, now advocacy groups are using aspects of shame to combat such social ills as teen pregnancy, with the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy putting up billboards branding teen parents with words like "NOBODY" and "USELESS" across their photos. While some think such measures have crossed the line, these initiatives actually represent the most constructive use of shame—not simply to revenge or humiliate, but to bring about a powerful recognition of the harm one's behavior causes. Unlike guilt, a private feeling, shame demands a public. As a society, we must begin to use the power of our collective disapproval more forcefully.

Adapted from an editorial by Jane Eisner

BRING THIS SHEET WITH YOU ON THE DAY OF YOUR PLACEMENT TEST.