

**GRE sample item  
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**Analytical Writing  
Issue Task**

Scandals are useful because they focus our attention on problems in ways that no speaker or reformer ever could.

Write a response in which you discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the claim. In developing and supporting your position, be sure to address the most compelling reasons and/or examples that could be used to challenge your position.

**Essay Response — Score 6**

Scandals have destroyed the lives and livelihoods of public figures throughout the world. They have soiled reputations, ruined corporations, and compromised the careers of employees who worked for those companies. Even people who decry the inevitable exhibition can't help but pay attention – if only because they cannot avoid it. Once news of a scandalous nature breaks, it is invariably exploited by the media and others far beyond its point of usefulness. Sensationalist journalism exaggerates the importance of the issue of the day, facts and opinions become obscured, and accusations are levied that can have both varying degrees of accuracy as well as extensive destructive effects.

Scandals prey on society's fears and emotions and are fueled by people who thrive on spectacle. Like those who spread rumor and gossip, the people who give life to these stories focus on the salacious details which are likely to incite the greatest amount of fear, anger, or disgust. To be sure, there is a place for bona fide muckrakers who expose wrongdoings and highlight problems about which the public should know. However, the extensive interest and disquiet generated are often disproportionate to the importance of the problems being exposed.

The word scandal can be loosely defined as irreparable damage to one's reputation caused by real (or alleged) immorality, but it also carries a wider meaning that a judgement has been rendered, fairly or not, based on the the deliberations of capriciousness public. In other words, the very nature of the act invites abuse. Unfortunately, quite often, many people choose to leverage these circumstances for self-serving purposes and sometimes with even more malicious intent.

Scandals provide fodder for pundits, give people cause to malign their competitors, and extend to broadcasting networks and publishers an opportunity to enrapture more viewers, more readers, more attention, and even more press. Social media and the blogging explosion exacerbate the problem. Yes, the public should know about companies that scam their customers and about government leaders who violate the public trust. Responsible journalists can (and some do) report these issues without elevating them to monstrous proportions. All too often, however, the real issues become obscured and people resort to nitpicking and character attacks. If a corporate executive was embezzling company funds, for example, the public should be aware of it. Does the public need to know that that person was arrested for drunk driving when he was 18 years old?

By nature, scandals are shocking and outrageous, exposing disreputable acts and shameful behavior. Those who commit these acts should be held accountable for them, but some people tend to have a perverse interest in seeing others disgraced in the court of public opinion. Furthermore, the more outrageous the story, the more people are seemingly entertained. Perhaps that is human nature. But perhaps this is also the point where the usefulness of scandals is called into question. Whether the subject of the alleged wrongdoing is guilty of an abuse or not, scandals are likely to provide entertainment at another's expense.

Rater Commentary for Essay Response — Score 6

The author of this essay takes a clear position on the issue and outlines reasons why he/she disagrees that scandals are useful. The essay begins by noting that scandals escalate through sensationalist journalism and destroy the lives and careers of many people, including people who may have no personal involvement in wrongdoing. The author equates scandal to rumors and gossip in the way they are transmitted and in the motivations of the people who propagate them. The essay emphasizes the point that scandals are often fueled by the media, and the ensuing frenzy often obscures the important issues and results in the magnification of the slightest concern to outrageous proportions.

The essay addresses counterarguments, explaining why people might consider scandals useful for highlighting problems in society of which the public should be aware. The essay then refutes the usefulness of scandals, clearly and cogently explaining the nature of scandal and the problem with media hype. The essay is well written, an example provided is persuasive and well-formed, and the reasoning behind the arguments posed is logically sound and supported.

The author of this essay uses precise language to explain ideas that help support her argument (malign, spectacle, sensationalism, hype). The author connects the ideas in the essay with effective transitions within each paragraph and between each paragraph. There is a clear thesis statement that is supported throughout the text. The sentence structure is varied, the text flows well, and the author uses grammatically correct English. Thus, this essay meets all the requirements for receiving a top score, a 6.