

Encountering conflict

Psychology, Behaviorism



Conflict brings out the worst in people. STEP ONE: WHAT'S IT ASKING? The prompt asks you to consider a range of ideas and questions. Remember that all prompts are launching off points for a discussion about the ideas you have developed regarding Encountering Conflict. Although there is no formula for a Context essay, there are certain questions that you should ask about each prompt to help flesh out your understanding. These questions include: Who? What? Why? Where? When? Which? How and Why? In regards to this prompt, some of the questions you might consider include: * What does it mean by 'brings out the worst'? Does it mean appalling / disgusting / selfish behaviour? * Who are the people who react to conflict? Is it the perpetrators? The victims? The participants? All of these? Is it all people or only some? You should note that few topics are seldom TOTAL in nature; that is, we would be reluctant to argue that ALL people respond in ONE way. (I. e. we wouldn't normally argue that it ALWAYS brings out the worst in people or that it NEVER brings out the worst in people). Encountering Conflict is a complex idea and we would expect a variety of responses to it from people. It's your job to think deeply and profoundly about why people may react in the way that they do. Your discussion and explanation of this complexity will reveal the thought and consideration you have put into the topic. * Why might people react badly / well to conflict? What are these characteristics? What shapes an individual's response to this? * When do people behave badly? At all times? Under extenuating circumstances? When they feel trapped? When they feel powerful? When do these situations occur? * Where do we witness this? In real life? In history? In the texts that we are studying? What similarities and differences are there? How do you account for this?

You should note that examiners often reward students who are able to explain differences in behaviour with higher marks as these students have demonstrated a solid understanding of the complexities of the prompt. *

Which examples are you going to use? * How is this behaviour manifested? What are the consequences of it? STEP TWO: Brainstorming my Ideas Now I need to think about my examples and ideas about the prompt. It is often help to think about the following approach when we consider conflict: You should note that whilst this model is a helpful guideline, it is NOT the only way of approaching your prompts. Similarly, not all prompts lend themselves to this model. As you become more experienced with writing these essays, you will develop your own style. It is important, therefore, that you complete as many of these essays as you can. I will often start with the texts that I have studied: The individual in crisis THE QUIET AMERICAN Other Examples from Literature / History / Personal life etc. It is very important that your essay is NOT full of examples; rather your essay should be full of IDEAS. The examples simply illustrate the points that you are trying to make. You should be using your examples to think about the IDEAS about Encountering Conflict! OSKAR SCHINDLER * Chooses to obey his moral conscience and saves 1200 Jews during the Holocaust. At great personal risk / cost to himself he embarks on a commitment to saving them despite warnings and threats from the Nazis. * His moral compass determines how he will respond to the situation * Where others sit by or actively participate in the persecution, he is able to stand up. * How is he similar to / different to Fowler? Other collaborators at the time etc.? * His morally good actions stem from his moral conscience — perhaps this plays a part in people's actions? (Why is

that he was able to stand up where others weren't? Can I make links to other great people throughout history? Rosa Parks? Benazir Bhutto? Gandhi? Romero? What are the qualities that unite them? Conversely, what can I say about those who commit reprehensible acts?) Galileo * How do I account for his recantation and subsequent publication of his theories? Do you have to be a martyr for your cause to be considered 'morally good' or is his behaviour morally bad? CONFLICT BETWEEN PEOPLE The Quiet American * Both Pyle and Thomas are in conflict over a number of issues throughout the text. In particular some of this conflict stems from their ideological differences, particularly in regards to their views about Vietnam. Pyle is blind to the outside dangers present by sticking so blindly to his core beliefs. (How do a person's beliefs shape their responses to situations they find themselves in?) * Pyle and Thomas also come into conflict over Phuong. (what motivates their attitudes towards her? In what ways does she contribute to this problem?) Key ideas for me to consider: * What are the reasons behind conflict between people? Is compromise always the best solution? Can it bring out the best in people? Listening? Understanding? Resolving? Conflict can also be solved by 'winning' — when one person's wishes compromise another's. Conflict can be avoided as well. Paradise Road * There is conflict between the Dutch women and the other Allied women. Some of this is based on fear. The brawl in the shower brings out the worst in them as it is based on fear and suspicion. Conversely, some good emerges when the women find a common ground with the vocal orchestra. * Dr Verstak wishes to stay uninvolved (is she like Thomas Fowler?) and she 'lies' to the women by claiming to be a medical doctor; yet her actions help save

many of the women. Other ideas * If the desire to reach an understanding and resolution is paramount, then the conflict can often be resolved between people in a honourable, admirable way as the desire to stay mindful of the other person's dignity etc. ensures that the conflict can be addressed with consideration. * Sometimes our conflicts with others are so fraught with high emotions that this can cloud how we respond to it. We can be so indignant in our beliefs that we fail to think calmly and rationally about a situation. LARGE SCALE CONFLICT The Quiet American * Foreign involvement (the French and the American) in Vietnam smacks of imperialistic attitudes — for instance, the Americans in the House of 500 girls and the French war engagements in various villages. * The Saigon car bomb is a political stunt aimed at winning support in the American Senate for interference in Vietnam. (Do the ends justify the means?) Paradise Road * Does war make certain behaviour permissible? How do we account for the actions of some of the Japanese soldiers against the women in the camp? How do we account for the racist attitudes of the allied men and women at Raffles Hotel before the war? Other discussion points * Genocides, racism, war etc. are part of the human experience — this is evidenced by some of the devastating behaviours inflicted on humans by other humans * The Cronulla race riots demonstrate that Australians are not immune from these appalling behaviours; similarly, the treatment of Indigenous peoples in Australia is a cause for concern. * Peace movements, charities, rallies etc.; however, also indicate that people have the capacity to respond to crises in a positive way. Step 3: Developing a Contention and Plan In an Expository essay, your aim is to draw out the ideas of the prompt and to consider the various elements in depth. Rather

than rambling on, you should have a clear idea about what it is that you want to say. As I look back over these notes, it becomes clear to me that for each of the three elements — the individual in conflict; conflict between individuals and large scale conflict — that conflict brings out both the best and the worst in people. Whilst this may be my overarching belief — my contention — I still need to take the idea further as I need to be able to account for these differences. In this case, I am going to account for the array of opinions by looking closely at my essay plan and finding the common thread between the paragraphs: Body 1 — Individuals in conflict respond according to their own moral outlook. How they choose to respond is influenced by their moral beliefs. Body 2 — Conflicts between people will often bring out the best or worst in people depending on what they value and what they are trying to achieve. Body 3 — Our reactions to large scale conflicts is often influenced by others within our community. Whether the outcome is positive or negative comes down largely to the actions of the people it affects. CONTENTION: Now that I know what my paragraphs are going to be about, I can begin to look at the ideas that link them together. Essentially, it becomes clear that responses to conflict are determined by what we value and how we choose to handle it. Sample Introductions (1) Humans have an extraordinary capacity to do harm or good wherever they go. When conflict situations arise, how we deal with the situation has as much to do with our own code of ethics and behaviour as it does the opportunity that we have to act. Ultimately, how we respond to conflict is shaped by our moral compass and our commitment to the cause. (2) Whilst it is certainly true that it is often during conflict that we see the worst of

human nature; it is also true that sometimes conflict brings out the very best in people. Conflict, by its very nature, often inspires intense feelings in people. It is how these feelings and emotions are dealt with that often determines whether the actions of people are altruistic in nature or intensely selfish. It is this factor alone which is the most significant determiner in assessing human responses to conflict.

Sample Body Paragraphs

Individuals who find themselves in moral conflict are often forced to choose how they will react. It is their own moral compass that ultimately determines how they will behave. When a person is faced with a moral choice, they must always act in accordance with their conscience. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, "to believe in something, and not to live it, is dishonest." At times, this might manifest itself in a selfish manner where the person acts according to their own interests. Alternatively, a person may transcend their own self-interests and act according to the needs and wants of others. Oskar Schindler, for instance, after witnessing the massacre of the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto was faced with a moral crisis: either he could continue to profit from the loss of Jewish life and property or he could choose to act according to his own moral code and endeavour to save these persecuted people. For Schindler - like many other noble individuals such as Rosa Parks and Aung Suu Kyi - to act otherwise was unthinkable; at the very core of his soul was a commitment to fairness and justice which shaped the way that he acted in saving 1200 lives. An individual who is attuned to their morals and beliefs will always be compelled to act in accordance with them. How these moral beliefs manifest themselves, however, has an impact on the way in which we perceive whether these actions are good or morally reprehensible. In The

Quiet American, both Alden Pyle and Thomas Fowler are morally ambiguous and this affects the ways in which they act. Fowler's claims that he "is not involved" are called into question when he witnesses the car bombing instigated by Pyle in a busy Saigon street. Shaken out of his complacency by what he has witnessed, Thomas chooses to contribute to the assassination plot to kill Pyle. Fowler's actions stem from his horror at the death of innocents and his desire to prevent Pyle from committing any more harm. Likewise, Pyle's commitment to his cause and attachment to his ideological beliefs blinds him to defending those beliefs at all costs. In desiring to bring democracy to Vietnam, Pyle is prepared to do whatever it costs to ensure an American commitment to the cause. For him, the ends justify the means and this enables him to sacrifice the lives of innocent Saigon civilians in pursuit of a greater goal. Ultimately, how a person chooses to act is dependent on their moral fibre and their capacity to do harm or good stems from this factor. Conflict between people can also bring out either the best or worst in people as they attempt to resolve their point of difference. How each party approaches the problem will ultimately determine how the conflict is dealt with. By its very nature, conflict often arises between parties as a result of a desire to achieve particular outcomes. Whether it is as simple as fighting over television programming or long held grudges over land or property, whatever the source of the conflict, one thing is certain: both parties believe that they are right. It is this adherence to the cause that creates such a volatile situation. Sometimes, situations arise for people where they are not prepared to compromise at all. For them, the only way in which the conflict can be resolved is if they 'win' at all costs. It is in these situations that we

often see human behaviour at its worst. There is little demonstration of empathy for the other person and complete selfishness permeates their entire approach to the conflict. For instance, in *Paradise Road*, much of the conflict between the women in the camp stems from an intrinsically selfish desire to survive at all costs. Additionally, their prejudice and fear of the other women condemns them to act in hostile and aggressive ways. For instance, when some of the Australian nurses suspect that some of the Dutch women have stolen their soap, a brawl breaks out between them. Rather than dealing with the issue in a sensible manner, the women reveal their most primal sides by acting with hostility. It is only when the women are able to overcome their prejudices by spending time together in the vocal orchestra that we see a more positive side to their personalities. Indeed, it could be argued that it is only when people attempt to resolve their conflicts with others in a rational and calm way that we get to see the best of human behaviour. The desire to resolve the conflict with the other person shows a willingness to respect the dignity and rights of the other person. Rather than simply trouncing on the other person's feelings; the willingness to discuss and negotiate with the other person shows human nature at its finest. Whilst the outcome of this discussion may not always be a true compromise; this approach does at least go some way to restoring and maintaining relationships. For instance, at many schools there is an attempt to ensure that restorative practices are put in place whenever bullying situations have been reported. Whilst the act of bullying shows some of the worst elements of human nature when it comes to conflict, the way in which it is handled, conversely, shows human nature at its best. Clearly then it is the way in

which conflict between people is dealt with that determines how we judge human behaviour. Task: Using the plan above as well as any ideas of your own, write the third paragraph for this prompt! Good Luck!