



American University of Sharjah

Department of Writing Studies

ENGLISH PLACEMENT TEST

Semester: -----

Name _____

ID Number _____

Date _____

Check One:

_____ New Student

_____ AABP Student

_____ Returning / Former IEP Student

Check (School / College):

College of Arts and Sciences

School of Architecture and Design

School of Engineering

School of Business and Management

Undeclared Major

Do not write below this

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line

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R1

R2

R3

Total

Instructions

Carefully read the article on the next page by Geeta Pandey titled “The Disappearing Tribe of India’s Letter Writers.” Pandey discusses how technological development has affected letter writers in India.

Write a well-developed essay (4-6 paragraphs) in which you discuss 2-3 possible advantages and/or disadvantages associated with technological advancements of the recent decades.

Tips

- Remember to include the following:
 - Introductory paragraph with a thesis statement
 - Topic sentences (for all body paragraphs)
 - Conclusion
- Develop body paragraphs using details and examples from your personal life and Pandey’s article
- Use transitions to link your ideas
- Use standard English grammar and punctuation
- Revise and proofread your essay so that you can submit your best effort!

Formatting Requirements

- Indent the first line of each paragraph

The Disappearing Tribe of India's Letter Writers- By Geeta Pandey

BBC News - March 21, 2014

For centuries, professional letter writers have helped millions of illiterate Indians, but many have long disappeared from the cities – but not in Delhi, where one man claims to be the last letter writer left in the country's capital.

A remaining memory of my childhood years in the Indian city of Calcutta is of my mother writing letters for our domestic help, Kailash. The letters contained all his news and instructions on how to spend the money he was sending to his family. For millions of others like Kailash, who traveled regularly from rural India to the big cities for work, there have been professional letter writers who succeeded for centuries but are now on the edge of disappearing.

Jagdish Chandra Sharma is perhaps the Indian capital's last surviving professional letter writer. And even he hasn't written a letter in the last 10 years. I find him outside the busy Kashmere Gate post office where, he says, he has been sitting for the past 31 years. The tools of his trade are simple – a command over the language, a legible handwriting and an imaginative mind. "People would tell me what they wanted to write, I would hear their stories and then summarize it and write it in my own nice words. Then I would read it back to them and they would be so impressed," he recalls. Until a few years ago, Sharma used to be accompanied by several other writers who sat alongside him. "Every day, long queues would form in front of us and we would write letters, fill up money order or telegram forms, pack parcels and write addresses on them." In those days, he says, he would service "70 to 80 customers in a day" and "some days I won't even find time for lunch." Sometimes, his clients would bring letters to him to read for them.

Historian Najaf Haider, professor of medieval Indian history at Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University, says letter writers have been an integral part of Indian city life for centuries. "In the Mughal era (16th to 17th century), there were Munshis who were employed in the courts of the kings and nobles and composed letters for aristocrats," he says. "Then, there were Katibs or scribes who copied documents and books and also wrote letters for the common people." After the British set up India's modern postal network in 1854, they formalized the system of professional letter writers in the post offices. "The British started the service sometime in the 19th century because the literacy rate was very low in the country," says Brig YPS Mohan, former deputy director general of postal operations. The rising literacy rates and a telecom revolution

sweeping the country – which has ensured that even the poorest are able to afford cheap mobile phones – over the last decade, the profession has been in steady decline. And in July 2008, Brig Mohan signed the letter which sounded the death knell for the service.

Sharma says even before the 2008 order, their profession had been on the decline. As the pickings began to get slimmer and slimmer, most of his colleagues moved on to other jobs or took retirement. But Sharma has persisted – every day of the week, except on Sundays or other postal holidays, he can be found outside the Kashmere Gate post office because, he says, “he has nowhere else to go.”

One afternoon as I catch up with him, he is sitting in a quiet corner near the post office building, packing in a parcel of baby clothes for a woman client. Taking out a needle and thread, he meticulously stitches the white muslin and writes the address of the recipient and the sender’s name on the package. Then, he lights a candle to warm the official seal and mark the parcel. His client, a shy lady named Rekha Kumari who works nearby, says she has been coming to him for at least 10 years now. Sharma says she is his first customer that day. I ask Rekha, who is illiterate, if she is going to ask Sharma to write a letter for her too. She shows her cheap plastic mobile phone and says: “No, I will call and speak to them.”

**Disclaimer: This text was modified/edited for exam purposes*

Duration of Exam: 90 minutes









