It's Portion Distortion That Makes America Fat

***The Sacramento Bee*, January 5, 2003**
by Shannon Brownlee

1 It was probably inevitable that one day people would start suing McDonald's for making them fat. That day came last summer, when New York lawyer Samuel Hirsch filed several lawsuits against McDonald's, as well as four other fast-food companies, on the grounds that they had failed to adequately disclose the bad health effects of their menus.

2 One of the suits involves a Bronx teenager who tips the scale at 400 pounds and whose mother, in papers filed in U.S. District Court in Manhattan, said, "I always believed McDonald's food was healthy for my son."

3 Uh-huh. And the tooth fairy really put that dollar under his pillow. But once you've stopped sniggering at our litigious society, remember that it once seemed equally ludicrous that smokers could successfully sue tobacco companies for their addiction to cigarettes.

4 And while nobody is claiming that Big Macs are addictive—at least not yet—the restaurant industry and food packagers have clearly helped give many Americans the roly-poly shape they have today. This is not to say that the folks in the food industry want us to be fat. But make no mistake: When they do well economically, we gain weight.

5 It wasn't always thus. Readers of a certain age can remember a time when a trip to McDonald's seemed like a treat and when a small bag of french fries, a plain burger and a 12-ounce Coke seemed like a full meal. Fast food wasn't any healthier back then; we simply ate a lot less of it.

6 How did today's oversized appetites become the norm? It didn't happen by accident or some inevitable evolutionary process. It was to a large degree the result of consumer manipulation. Fast food's marketing strategies, which make perfect sense from a business perspective, succeed only when they induce a substantial number of us to overeat. To see how this all came about, let's go back to 1983, when John Martin became CEO of the ailing Taco Bell franchise and met a young marketing whiz named Elliott Bloom.

7 Using so-called "smart research," a then-new kind of in-depth consumer survey, Bloom had figured out that fast-food franchises were sustained largely by a core group of "heavy users," mostly young, single males, who ate at such restaurants as often as 20 times a month. In fact, 30 percent of Taco Bell's customers accounted for 70 percent of its sales.

8 Through his surveys, Bloom learned what might seem obvious now but wasn't at all clear 20 years ago—these guys ate at fast-food joints because they had absolutely no interest in cooking for themselves and didn't give a rip about the nutritional quality of the food. They didn't even care much

about the taste. All that mattered was that it was fast and cheap. Martin figured Taco Bell could capture a bigger share of these hard-core customers by streamlining the food production and pricing main menu items at 49, 59 and 69 cents—well below its competitors.

9 It worked. Taco Bell saw a dramatic increase in patrons, with no drop in revenue per customer. As Martin told Greg Critser, author of *Fat Land: How Americans Became the Fattest People in the World,* when Taco Bell ran a test of its new pricing in Texas, "within seven days of initiating the test, the average check was right back to where it was before—it was just four instead of three items."

10 In other words, cheap food induced people to eat more. Taco Bell's rising sales figures—up 14 percent by 1989 and 12 percent more the next year—forced other fast-food franchises to wake up and smell the burritos. By the late '80s, everybody from Burger King to Wendy's was cutting prices and seeing an increase in customers—including bargain-seeking Americans who weren't part of that original hard-core group.

11 If marketing strategy had stopped there, we might not be the nation of fatties that we are today. But the imperatives of the market place are growth and rising profits, and once everybody had slashed prices to the bone, the franchises had to look for a new way to satisfy investors.

12 And what they found was . . . super-sizing.

13 Portion sizes had already been creeping upward. As early as 1972, for example, McDonald's introduced its large-size fries (large being a relative term, since at 3.5 ounces the '72 "large" was smaller than a medium serving today). But McDonald's increased portions only reluctantly, because the company's founder, Ray Kroc, didn't like the image of lowbrow, cheap food. If people wanted more french fries, he would say, "They can buy two bags." But price competition had grown so fierce that the only way to keep profits up was to offer bigger and bigger portions. By 1988, McDonald's had introduced a 32-ounce "super size" soda and "super size" fries.

14 The deal with all these enhanced portions is that the customer gets a lot more food for a relatively small increase in price. So just how does that translate into bigger profits? Because the actual food in a fast-food meal is incredibly cheap. For every dollar a quick-service franchiser spends to produce a food item, only 20 cents, on average, goes toward food. The rest is eaten up by expenses such as salaries, packaging, electric bills, insurance, and of course, the ubiquitous advertising that got you in the door or to the drive-through lane in the first place.

15 Here's how it works. Let's say a $1.25 bag of french fries costs $1 to produce. The potatoes, oil, and salt account for only 20 cents of the cost. The other 80 cents goes toward all the other expenses. If you add half again as many french fries to the bag and sell it for $1.50, the non-food expenses stay pretty much constant, while the extra food costs the franchise only 10 more pennies. The fast-food joint makes an extra 15 cents pure profit, and

the customer thinks he's getting a good deal. And he would be, if he actually needed the extra food, which he doesn't because the nation is awash in excess calories.

16 That 20 percent rule, by the way, applies to all food products, whether it's a bag of potato chips, the 2,178-calorie mountain of fried seafood at Red Lobster or the 710-calorie slab of dessert at the Cheesecake Factory. Some foods are even less expensive to make. The flakes of your kid's breakfast cereal, for example, account for only 5 percent of the total amount Nabisco or General Mills spent to make and sell them.

17 Soda costs less to produce than any drink except tap water (which nobody seems to drink anymore), thanks to a 1970s invention that cut the expense of making high-fructose corn syrup. There used to be real sugar in Coke; when Coca-Cola and other bottlers switched to high-fructose corn syrup in 1984, they slashed sweetener costs by 20 percent. That's why 7-Eleven can sell the 64-ounce Double Gulp—half a gallon of soda and nearly 600 calories—for only 37 cents more than the 16-ounce, 89-cent regular Gulp. You'd feel ripped off if you bought the smaller size. Who wouldn't?

18 The final step in the fattening of America was the "up sell," a stroke of genius whose origins are buried somewhere in the annals of marketing. You're already at the counter, you've ordered a cheeseburger value meal for $3.74, and your server says, "Would you like to super-size that for only $4.47?" Such a deal. The chain extracts an extra 73 cents from the customer, and the customer gets an extra 400 calories—bringing the total calorie count to 1,550, more than half the recommended intake for an adult man for an entire day.

19 When confronted with their contribution to America's expanding waistline, restaurateurs and food packagers reply that eating less is a matter of individual responsibility. But that's not how the human stomach works. If you put more food in front of people, they eat more, as studies have consistently shown over the last decade.

20 My personal favorite: The researcher gave moviegoers either a half-gallon or a gallon bucket of popcorn before the show (it was *Payback,* with Mel Gibson) and then measured how much they ate when they returned what was left in the containers afterward. Nobody could polish off the entire thing, but subjects ate 44 percent more when given the bigger bucket.

21 The downside, of course, is that 20 years of Big Food has trained us to think that oceanic drinks and gargantuan portions are normal. Indeed, once fast food discovered that big meals meant big profits, everybody from Heineken to Olive Garden to Frito Lay followed suit. Today, says Lisa Young, a nutritionist at New York University, super-sizing has pervaded every segment of the food industry. For her Ph.D., Young documented the changes in portion sizes for dozens of foods over the past several decades.

22 M&M/Mars, for example, has increased the size of candy bars such as Milky Way and Snickers four times since 1970, Starbucks introduced the

20-ounce "venti" size in 1999 and discontinued its "short" eight-ounce cup. When 22-ounce Heinekens were introduced, Young reported, the company sold 24 million of them the first year, and attributed the sales to the "big-bottle gimmick."

23 Even Lean Cuisine and Weight Watchers now advertise "Hearty Portions" of their diet meals. Everything from plates and muffin tins to restaurant chairs and the cut of our Levi's has expanded to match our growing appetites, and the wonder of it all is not that 60 percent of Americans are overweight or obese, but rather that 40 percent of us are not.

24 Where does it end? Marketers and restauranteurs may scoff at lawsuits like the ones brought this summer against fast food companies, and they have a point: Adults are ultimately responsible for what they put in their own mouths.

25 But maybe there's hope for us yet, because it looks as if fast-food companies' "Omnipresence"—the McDonald's strategy of beating out competitors by opening new stores, sometimes as many as 1,000 a year—"has proved costly and self-cannibalizing," says author Critser. With 13,000 McDonald's units alone, most of America is so saturated with fast food there's practically no place left to put a drive-through lane. Now, fast-food companies are killing each other in a new price war they can't possibly sustain, and McDonald's just suffered its first quarterly loss since the company went public 47 years ago.

26 The obvious direction to go is down, toward what nutritional policymakers are calling "smart-sizing." Or at least it should be obvious, if food purveyors cared as much about helping Americans slim down as they would have us believe. Instead of urging Americans to "Get Active, Stay Active"—Pepsi-Cola's new criticism-deflecting slogan—how about bringing back the 6.5 ounce sodas of the '40s and '50s? Or, imagine, as Critser does, the day when McDonald's advertises Le Petit Mac, made with high-grade beef, a delicious whole-grain bun and hawked by, say, Serena Williams.

27 One way or another, as Americans wake up to the fact that obesity is killing nearly as many citizens as cigarettes are, jumbo burgers and super-size fries will seem like less of a bargain.

If You Pitch It, They Will Eat

***The New York Times*, August 3, 2003**
by David Barboza

1 The McDonald's Corporation wants to be everywhere that children are.

2 So besides operating 13,602 restaurants in the United States, it has plastered its golden arches on Barbie dolls, video games, book jackets, and even theme parks.

3 McDonald's calls this promotion and brand extension. But, a growing number of nutritionists call it a blitzkrieg that perverts children's eating habits and sets them on a path to obesity.

4 Marketing fast food, snacks, and beverages to children is at least as old as Ronald McDonald himself. What's new, critics say, is the scope and intensity of the assault. Big food makers like McDonald's and Kraft Foods Inc. are finding every imaginable way to put their names in front of children. And they're spending more than ever – $15 billion last year, compared with $12.5 billion in 1998, according to research conducted at Texas A&M University in College Station.

5 "What really changed over the last decade is the proliferation of electronic media," says Susan Linn, a psychologist who studies children's marketing at Harvard's Judge Baker Children's Center. "It used to just be Saturday-morning television. Now it's Nickelodeon, movies, video games, the Internet, and even marketing in schools."

6 Product tie-ins are everywhere. There are SpongeBob SquarePants Popsicles, Oreo Cookie preschool counting books, and Keebler's Scooby Doo Cookies. There is even a Play-Doh Lunchables play set.

7 While the companies view these as harmless promotional pitches, lawyers are threatening a wave of obesity-related class-action lawsuits. Legislators are pressing to lock food companies out of school cafeterias. And some of the fiercest critics are calling for an outright ban on all food advertising aimed at children.

8 "The problem of obesity is so staggering, so out of control, that we have to do something," says Walter Willett, a professor of nutrition at the Harvard School of Public Health. "The vast majority of what they sell is junk," Mr. Willett says of the big food makers. "How often do you see fruits and vegetables marketed?"

9 The increase in food marketing to children has closely tacked their increase in weight. Since 1980, the number of obese children has more than doubled to 16 percent, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

10 School districts in New York and Los Angeles have responded by banning the sale of sugary beverages and snacks in school vending machines.

11 Most big food companies, despite some promises to offer healthier foods and in some cases to limit marketing in schools, deny that they are to blame for the epidemic of excess weight. They insist that sedentary behavior, a lack of exercise, and poor supervision and eating habits are responsible.

12 Food companies say their commercials don't encourage overeating, that the foods they advertise are meant to be "part of a balanced diet," and that some foods are meant to be only occasional treats.

13 "We talk about offering carrot sticks," says Karlin Linhardt, the director of youth marketing at McDonald's. "And we have parents come in and say, 'We offer them carrot sticks at home. When we come to McDonald's we want a treat, french fries.'"

14 Why would companies take aim at children so energetically? Because they, increasingly, are where the money is.

15 "It's the largest market there is," says James McNeal, a professor of marketing at Texas A&M and an authority on marketing to children. "Kids four to twelve spend on their own wants and needs about $30 billion a year. But their influence on what their parents spend is $600 billion. That's blue sky."

16 In toy stores, children can become accustomed to food brands early by buying a Hostess bake set, Barbie's Pizza Hut play set, or Fisher-Price's Oreo Matchin' Middles game. And, for budding math whizzes, there is a series of books from Hershey's Kisses on addition, subtraction, and fractions.

17 Schools are also a major marketing site. With many school districts facing budget shortfalls, a quick solution has come from offering more profitable fast food from outlets like McDonald's, KFC, and Pizza Hut.

18 Some schools have contracts to sell fast food; others have special days allotted for fast food. The Skinner Montessori school in Vancouver, Wash., for instance, has "McDonald's Wednesdays" and "KFC Fridays."

19 There are McDonald's McTeacher's Nights in Jefferson City, Mo., and Pizza Hut Days in Garden City, Kan.

20 "It's awesome. They love it," Tracy Johnson, director of nutrition for the 7,500-student school district in Garden City, Kan., says of the Pizza Hut food. "We also serve vegetables. We try to make it into a healthy meal."

21 According to a survey by the CDC, about 20 percent of the nation's schools now offer brand-name fast food.

22 Vending machines now dominate school corridors. Coca-Cola and Pepsi-Cola have "pouring rights" contracts in hundreds of schools nationwide.

23 Lawyers and consumer advocates have harshly criticized educators for "commercializing the schools" and sending poor dietary messages to children.

24 "It seems very clear it's a breach of duty," says John Banzhaf, a professor of law at George Washington University in Washington and one of the lawyers pressing for class-action lawsuits against big food companies. "Schools get paid a kickback for every sugary soft drink or burger sold."

25 Some food companies heatedly defend their promotions and their products. "I think our communication with children is appropriate; we're not shoving it down their throat," says Ken Barun, director of healthy lifestyles at McDonald's, adding, "To make a general statement that McDonald's food is unhealthy is wrong."

26 Industry officials concur. "These foods and beverages are safe, and consumers—in some cases parents—have to be the one to make the decisions about how much should be eaten," says Gene Grabowski, a spokesman for the Grocery Manufacturers of America, which represents the nation's biggest food companies. "The industry is trying very hard to be responsible in the way it markets these foods."

27 Still, legislators and school districts are rethinking school marketing. There are more than 30 bills before state legislatures around the country proposing to ban certain snacks and beverages from school vending machines, according to the Commercialism in Education Research Unit at Arizona State University in Tempe.

28 Television, of course, remains the most powerful medium for selling to children. These days there is no shortage of advertising opportunities with the emergence of the Walt Disney Company's Disney Channel; Nickelodeon, which is owned by Viacom; and the Cartoon Network, a unit of AOL Time Warner's Turner Broadcasting.

29 Marketers know that children love animals and cartoon characters, and industry observers say they have used that knowledge not just to create new shows but to produce a new generation of animated pitchmen.

30 Some critics say children often can't differentiate the programs from the commercials and that food companies and producers of children's shows have helped blur the line by creating characters that leap back and forth, from pitchman to program character.

31 SpongeBob SquarePants has his own show. But he also sells Kraft Macaroni & Cheese, Popsicles, Kleenex, DVDs, skateboards, fruit snacks, and dozens of other products.

32 In fact, a series of big marketing alliances has bound food companies and television show producers like never before. Disney, for instance, has teamed up with McDonald's on movies and product tie-ins. Disney and Kellogg collaborate on a line of cereals that includes Disney Chocolate Mud & Bugs. And Nickelodeon has struck marketing deals with the Quaker Oats Company and General Mills Inc.

33 "The programs have become advertising for the food, and the food has become advertising for the programs," says Professor Linn of Harvard.

34 During Nickelodeon's "SpongeBob SquarePants" 30-minute cartoon last week, more than half the commercials were about food. The spots showed that children who consume "Go-gurt," the new yogurt-on-the-go, loved skateboards and danced on the walls.

35 A child who poured milk on his Post Honeycomb cereal was transformed into the raffish Honeycomb monster named the Craver. Children walked into walls after seeing other youngsters' tongues tattooed with Betty Crocker's Fruit Roll-Ups. And two others reveled in having so much sugar on their Kellogg's Cinnamon Krunchers cereal that even the tidal wave of milk that washed over their treehouse couldn't wipe off the sugary flavor.

36 But do these commercials really resonate with children? Marketing experts say yes; the children do, too. Nicky Greenberg, who is six and lives with her parents in Lower Manhattan, often spends her afternoons watching Nickelodeon. She can sing the theme song from "SpongeBob SquarePants," and she says her parents buy her Kellogg's Cinnamon Toast Crunch because she loves the commercials.

37 "On the commercial," she says, "There's a captain that goes on the submarine, and there's an octopus, and three kids. And then the girl says, 'Just taste this, pirate.' And the pirate says, 'Ayyy, yummy!'"

38 The reaction was no different last week at a supermarket on the South Side of Chicago.

39 Tatanisha Roberson, who is eight, was riding on the front of a shopping cart pushed by her mother, Erica, twenty-four, heading toward the cereal aisle.

40 The question was posed: What kind of food is Tatanisha interested in? "Anything that comes on the TV, she'll get," her mother said, rolling her eyes. "Rugrats Fruit Snacks; Scooby Doo Fruit Snacks; Flintstones' Jell-O."

41 In private, some company executives complain that when parents go to the grocery store they don't buy healthy products that are offered. Professor McNeal at Texas A&M says the companies are a scapegoat.

42 "I don't think they should be singled out," he says. "Mom blames everyone but herself. There's an abdication of the parents' role. You've got 70 percent of moms who are working, so when they're home they try to please their kids."

43 The big food companies say they follow a set of guidelines for television advertising enforced by the Children's Advertising Review Unit, which was set up and financed by advertisers to regulate themselves.

44 The companies say their ads don't show overeating or make false health claims.

45 Officials at the Children's Advertising Review Unit acknowledge that they don't look at the collective message food companies send to children. "We're not nutritionists," says Elizabeth Lascoutx, a spokeswoman for the unit. "We're not in the position to say this food item cannot be part of a healthy diet."

46 Sensing a backlash to advertising and promotion, especially in schools, Kraft said last month that it would end all in-school marketing efforts. And General Mills, the maker of Cheerios, says that in-school marketing is wrong.

47 "We just view it as inappropriate," says Tom Forsythe. "There's no gatekeeper; they're a captive audience."

48 Some marketing deals have come under pressure. For example, last week, the British Broadcasting Corporation said it would no longer allow its children's television characters to be used in fast-food sponsorships with companies like McDonald's after consumer groups criticized the public broadcaster for helping promote junk food.

49 Some companies deny that they even market to children. Both Coke and Pepsi insist that they direct their products only to teenagers and adults. And Yum Brands, which operates KFC, Pizza Hut, and Taco Bell, says it does not market to children or have operations in schools.

50 But sometimes the evidence would seem to contradict those statements. Coke signed a multimillion-dollar global marketing deal tied to the Harry Potter character in 2001, and many schools, like the one in Garden City, Kan., have contracts to serve food from Pizza Hut.

51 Amy Sherwood, a spokeswoman for Yum Brands, says, "That must be a local deal with the franchisees and those schools because we don't do that on a national level."

52 Kari Bjorhus, a spokeswoman at Coke, said, "We absolutely don't market to children. Our feeling with Harry Potter is it really appeals to the whole family."

53 Yet with regulators, lawmakers, and others mounting campaigns that seek to make big food companies look like big tobacco companies, which have been sued over marketing campaigns geared toward youths, something is bound to change, industry experts say. The World Health Organization and even Wall Street analysts are calling on big food companies to rein in their marketing campaigns and change the way they do business.

54 "The food industry will have to review its marketing practices and transform itself, in our view, regardless of potential regulation or litigation," Arnaud Langlois, an analyst at J.P. Morgan, wrote in a report last April.

55 There is a need to set specific standards on what is marketed to children, according to Professor Willett at Harvard. "We don't sell children guns, alcohol, or drugs, but we do allow them to be exploited by food companies."

56 Even some influential marketing experts are beginning to think their clients might come around.

57 Dan Acuff, a leading children's marketing consultant, says that when profits are at stake, companies listen.

58 "If it's going to hit the bottom line, they'll listen," he says. "You'd like them to have a conscience, but conscience and bottom line are not in the same paradigm in the corporate world."

The Battle Against Fast Food Begins in the Home

***The Sacramento Bee*, December 17, 2002**
by Daniel Weintraub

1 A public health group called last week for Governor Gray Davis to declare childhood obesity a state emergency and take immediate steps to reduce it. But while the California Center for Public Health Advocacy proposes some worthy ideas, the foundation might be aiming at the wrong target.

2 Parents, not state government, are in the best position to fight the epidemic of overweight children in our schools.

3 It is parents—not the government, not the fast-food companies, not the video-game manufacturers—who are responsible for teaching kids healthy eating and exercise habits. Can they use some help? Sure. But they are the ones who need to step up to the plate, so to speak.

4 Child fitness is getting more and more attention these days, and rightly so. But the danger in well-meaning studies and, even more, in lawsuits against the fast-food industry, is that they send a message to parents and kids alike that obesity is somebody else's fault.

5 It's not. It's the fault of parents who let their kids eat unhealthy foods and sit in front of the television or computer for hours at a time. The sooner we face up to the fact as a society, the sooner we are going to be able to do something about it.

6 Last week's report from the Center for Public Health Advocacy took data already published by the state Department of Education and crunched it to make it more relevant to politicians. The center presented the data by state Assembly district, so that members of the Legislature could see where their communities ranked on the fat index.

7 Statewide, the center said, 26 percent of schoolchildren are overweight. The numbers ranged from a low of 17 percent in wealthy Orange County Assembly district to a high of 36.8 percent in an inner-city Los Angeles district. More boys (32 percent) than girls (21 percent) were overweight. And more minorities than white children were overweight, though the study's authors said the data didn't allow them to draw any conclusions as to why that was so.

8 The center blamed the problem on the increasing consumption of fast food and soft drinks, larger portion sizes in restaurants, the availability of junk food on campus, advertising of junk food to children and their families, and the lack of consistent physical education programs in the schools.

9 The authors recommended that the state enforce an existing law requiring an average of at least 20 minutes per day of physical education,

implement a state law outlining nutritional standards for elementary schools, and ensure that water fountains are present and working on every campus.

10 Many of the report's long-term recommendations focused on the fast-food industry: hearings to examine the impact of advertising on kids; a study to examine the prevalence of fast-food restaurants and convenience stores near schools; and incentives for communities that ban fast-food outlets near schools or that ban advertising for junk food on campus.

11 Of the 20 recommendations put forward by the center, only one focused on parents. The authors suggest that schools be required to provide parents with fitness test results on their children and information about the importance of daily physical activity for learning and lifelong good health.

12 But none of the center's other ideas are likely to do much good until parents understand and accept their role in fighting the problem. We have laws against parents leaving a loaded weapon where their children can find it and use it to hurt themselves or others. But no one seems to want to tell parents that they need to protect their children from unhealthy foods and from sloth.

13 It's not easy, especially when both parents are working or there is only one parent in the home. Fast food is fast. It can also seem cheap, at least before you start adding the fries and sodas and desserts. And a television or video game can be like an opiate that quiets a restless child so a weary parent can get some rest of his own.

14 My own home is by no means a fast-food-free zone or a shrine to physical fitness. But we've tried to take a few modest steps to give our kids a fighting chance. We don't stock soda in the kitchen or serve it regularly at home; it's a treat saved for special occasions.

15 We try to cook as many meals at home as possible on the theory that even the least-healthy home-cooked meal is probably better for our children than the healthiest fast-food serving. We limit television time and encourage our boys to get out of the house, either to participate in organized sports or to ride their bikes, skateboards, or roller blades.

16 If the health-care foundations did more to encourage these kinds of simple policies in the home, they might make some progress against the purveyors of fat and cholesterol, whether they are pushing their wares on the street a block from the school, in the cafeteria, or even in the classroom. Before we start talking about banning fast food, let's do more to encourage personal responsibility.

Don't Blame the Eater

***The New York Times,* November 23, 2002**
by David Zinczenko

1 If ever there were a newspaper headline custom-made for Jay Leno's monologue, this was it. Kids taking on McDonald's this week, suing the company for making them fat. Isn't that like middle-aged men suing Porsche for making them get speeding tickets? Whatever happened to personal responsibility?

2 I tend to sympathize with these portly fast-food patrons, though. Maybe that's because I used to be one of them.

3 I grew up as a typical mid-1980s latchkey kid. My parents were split up, my dad off trying to rebuild his life, my mom working long hours to make the monthly bills. Lunch and dinner, for me, was a daily choice between McDonald's, Taco Bell, Kentucky Fried Chicken, or Pizza Hut. Then, as now, these were the only available options for an American kid to get an affordable meal. By age 15, I had packed 212 pounds of torpid teenage tallow on my once-lanky 5-foot-10 frame.

4 Then I got lucky. I went to college, joined the Navy Reserves, and got involved with a health magazine. I learned how to manage my diet. But most of the teenagers who live, as I once did, on a fast-food diet won't turn their lives around: They've crossed under the golden arches to a likely fate of lifetime obesity. And the problem isn't just theirs—it's all of ours. Before 1994, diabetes in children was generally caused by a genetic disorder—only about 5 percent of childhood cases were obesity-related, or Type 2, diabetes. Today, according to the National Institutes of Health, Type 2 diabetes accounts for at least 30 percent of all new childhood cases of diabetes in this country.

5 Not surprisingly, money spent to treat diabetes has skyrocketed, too. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that diabetes accounted for $2.6 billion in health care costs in 1969. Today's number is an unbelievable $100 billion a year.

6 Shouldn't we know better than to eat two meals a day in fast-food restaurants? That's one argument. But where, exactly, are consumers—particularly teenagers—supposed to find alternatives? Drive down any thoroughfare in America, and I guarantee you'll see one of our country's more than 13,000 McDonald's restaurants. Now, drive back up the block and try to find someplace to buy a grapefruit.

7 Complicating the lack of alternatives is the lack of information about what, exactly, we're consuming. There are no calorie information charts on fast-food packaging the way there are on grocery items. Advertisements don't carry warning labels the way tobacco ads do. Prepared foods aren't covered under Food and Drug Administration labeling laws. Some fast-food

purveyors will provide calorie information on request, but even that can be hard to understand.

8 For example, one company's Web site lists its chicken salad as containing 150 calories; the almonds and noodles that come with it (an additional 190 calories) are listed separately. Add a serving of the 280-calorie dressing, and you've got a healthy lunch alternative that comes in at 620 calories. But that's not all. Read the small print on the back of the dressing packet and you'll realize it actually contains 2.5 servings. If you pour what you've been served, you're suddenly up around 1,040 calories, which is half of the government's recommended daily calorie intake. And that doesn't take into account that 450-calorie super-size Coke.

9 Make fun if you will of these kids launching lawsuits against the fast-food industry, but don't be surprised if you're the next plaintiff. As with the tobacco industry, it may be only a matter of time before state governments begin to see a direct line between the $1 billion that McDonald's and Burger King spend each year on advertising and their own swelling health-care costs.

10 And I'd say the industry is vulnerable. Fast-food companies are marketing to children a product with proven health hazards and no warning labels. They would do well to protect themselves, and their customers, by providing the nutritional information people need to make informed choices about their products. Without such warnings, we'll see more sick, obese children and more angry, litigious parents. I say, let the deep-fried chips fall where they may.

Letters to the editor in response to "Don't Blame the Eater"

Fast Food Responsibility

David Zinczenko hits the nail on the head when he asks the rhetorical question, "Whatever happened to personal responsibility?" But then he misses his own point when he goes on to say that McDonald's and the other fast-food chains deserve to be sued because obese children don't have access to healthy alternatives and don't have calorie charts and warning labels to let them know how bad fast food is for them. Even children should understand what it means when they step on the scale and they, like Zinczenko, weigh 200 pounds at age 15.

Fast food is just like other hazards in life such as alcohol and cars. It's OK in moderation and it's dangerous when taken to extremes. And everybody, including kids, knows this even without a warning label to tell them, so let's put the responsibility back on the consumer and save the fast-food industry from frivolous lawsuits.

Pamela LaVerne
Elk Grove, California

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand the relationship between eating and activity. Eat a lot, do nothing, and get fat. Eat a lot, exercise a lot, and stay healthy. You don't need a warning label to tell you.

The lawsuits against McDonald's on behalf of two obese girls are just as ludicrous as the lawsuits against the tobacco industry. When people make bad choices, whether it's smoking two packs a day or eating a Whopper and fries, they should face their own consequences. Next thing you know, people will be suing GM because the car made them drive too fast and get into an accident or Caltrans because the highway let them go over the speed limit. They have no one to blame but themselves.

Americans have developed a victim mentality. They want to find someone to blame for everything that happens to them, and all the better if that someone has deep pockets. It's time they grow up and realize that they need to change their bad habits and take charge of their lives.

Mitch Jordan
Sacramento, California

I'd like to congratulate the two girls who are suing McDonald's. It's time the fast-food industry is called to answer for the deceptions that they have put over on our nation's kids. If you go into your local fast-food outlet, you'll see signs proclaiming super-size burgers and fries that cost only a little more than smaller sizes. You'll see kids' meals with toys designed to target children who are too little to understand nutritious eating. What you won't see is any nutrition information that's aimed at children. When did Ronald McDonald ever promote healthy eating?

Certainly, adults are responsible for making healthy choices, but children often have no choices. As Zinczenko says, latchkey kids often have to fend for themselves. At the same time they are easy targets for unscrupulous advertisers. So kudos to the kids' filing the lawsuits, and let's hope that McDonald's will see the error of its ways.

Carlyle Wong
Granite Bay, California

It's absolutely absurd that two young women can sue McDonald's for making them fat. And I even agree with Zinczenko that children may not be responsible for their own obesity when they eat too much junk food. But what Zinczenko is ignoring is parental responsibility. Where were the parents when their kids were eating all those burgers? How come parents these days aren't steering their kids to healthy food? Why aren't they teaching them that a steady diet of fat and sugar will make them fat and possibly diabetic? Why aren't they home-cooking them healthy food? Why aren't they sending them to school with fruit and vegetables in their lunch bags? Even parents who have to work can see to it that there's healthy food in the refrigerator for kids after school.

The real problem is not that McDonald's sells fattening food. The real problem is that parents don't want to take responsibility for their children. They sit them in front of the TV. They let them run wild on the streets. And they turn over the job of feeding them to a corporation that only cares about its profits. It's time that parents got back to their foremost duty, which is to give their children the time and care that they deserve.

Patricia Gonzalez
Davis, California

Fast Food: Who's to Blame?

Reading selections for this module:

Brownlee, Shannon. "It's Portion Distortion That Makes America Fat." *Sacramento Bee.* 5 Jan. 2003.
Barboza, David. "If You Pitch It, They Will Eat." *New York Times.* 3 Aug. 2003.
Weintraub, Daniel. "The Battle Against Fast Food Begins in the Home." *Sacramento Bee.* 17 Dec. 2002.
Zinczenko, David. "Don't Blame the Eater." *New York Times.* 23 Nov. 2002.
Ching, Roberta. Letters to the editor in response to "Don't Blame the Eater." 2003.

Reading Rhetorically

Prereading

Activity 1

Getting Ready to Read

Now that you have brainstormed words that you associate with french fries from a fast-food restaurant, write for 10 minutes on this topic:

Who's at fault for America's growing weight problem?

Activity 2

Surveying the Text

Before you read Brownlee's "Portion Distortion" and Barboza's "If You Pitch It," discuss the following questions.

1. What do the titles, "It's Portion Distortion That Makes America Fat" and "If You Pitch It, They Will Eat," tell you about the authors' positions on who is responsible for America's growing weight problem?
2. What do you think is the purpose of these articles?
3. "Portion Distortion" was published in *The Sacramento Bee,* and "If You Pitch It" was published in *The New York Times.* What similarities do you think the articles might have? What differences? Do you think they will be equally reliable?
4. What else can you tell about the articles just by looking at them?

When you read Weintraub, Zinczenko, and the letters to the editor, discuss the following questions.

Activity 2 (Continued)

1. On the basis of the title of his article, what do you think Weintraub's position will be? In what ways do you think his article will be like those of Brownlee and Barboza? In what ways do you think it will be different? What do you think his purpose is?
2. On the basis of the title of his article, what do you think Zinczenko's position will be? Which of the other authors do you think he might agree with?
3. What do you expect is the purpose of the letters to the editor written in response to Zinczenko? How will they be different from Zinczenko's article?
4. What else can you tell about the letters just by looking at them?

Activity 3

Making Predictions and Asking Questions

Discuss the following items about Brownlee's article, "Portion Distortion," and Barboza's article, "If You Pitch It."

1. Read the first three and the last paragraphs of Brownlee's article. What is the point of comparing burgers, fries, and cigarettes? What arguments do you think she will make?
2. Read the first three and the last paragraph of Barboza's article. According to Barboza, who is responsible for America's weight problem? What arguments do you think he is going to make?
3. Who is the intended audience for these articles? How do you know?
4. What information and ideas are the authors likely to draw on to convince you of their positions?
5. Reword the titles and subtitles and turn them into questions for you to answer after you have read the full articles.

Now discuss the following items about Weintraub's "The Battle Against Fast Food," Zinczenko's "Don't Blame the Eater," and the letters to the editor.

1. Read the first two and the last paragraphs of Weintraub's article. According to Weintraub, who is responsible for America's obesity problem? What arguments do you think he will make?
2. How do you think he will respond to the arguments raised by Brownlee and Barboza?
3. Read the first two and the last paragraphs of Zinczenko's article. Why does he bring up Jay Leno's monologue? According to Zinczenko, who is responsible for America's obesity problem? What arguments do you think he will make?
4. Zinczenko and Weintraub both argue in part from personal experience. How do their viewpoints differ?
5. Read the last paragraph of each of the letters to the editor. In each case, identify who the writer thinks is to blame. How do you know?

STUDENT VERSION

Activity 4

Introducing Key Vocabulary

Semantic Map

Your teacher will divide you into groups and assign a word to your group. Your teacher will give categories that relate to the word or ask you to create the categories. You will list specific examples for each category as a group.

Activity 5

Assessing Key Vocabulary

Vocabulary Self-Assessment Chart

Word	Definition	Know It Well	Have Heard of It	Don't Know It
Vocabulary from Brownlee's "Portion Distortion" and Barboza's "If You Pitch It"				
portion	*a serving of food*			
distortion				
manipulation				
revenue				
induce				
promotional				
marketing				
class-action				
proliferation				
Vocabulary from Weintraub's "The Battle Against Fast Food"				
epidemic				
step up to the plate				
face up to the fact				

STUDENT EDITION

Activity 5
(Continued)

Word	Definition	Know It Well	Have Heard of It	Don't Know It
Vocabulary from Weintraub's "The Battle Against Fast Food"				
crunched data				
implement				
prevalence				
incentives				
sloth				
opiate				
purveyors				
Vocabulary from Zinczenko's "Don't Blame the Eater" and the letters to the editor				
latchkey kid				
prepared food				
alternatives				
launching				
vulnerable				
litigious				
liability				
entitled				
defendant				
plaintiff				
clogging				
credibility				

STUDENT VERSION

Reading

Activity 6

First Reading

Read each article as your teacher assigns it. As you read, think about the predictions you made. You may notice words you worked with in the previous activities. As you look at the words, think about personal connections you can make with them and with the other words. Group them together if they relate.

Activity 7

Rereading the Text

Your teacher will divide the class into two groups. If you are in Group A, you are assigned Brownlee's "Portion Distortion." If you are in Group B, you are assigned Barboza's "If You Pitch It."

Group A

Now that you know what "Portion Distortion" is about, answer the following questions:

1. Think back to your original predictions. Which were right? Which did you have to modify as you read "Portion Distortion"?
2. What is the main idea of "Portion Distortion"? According to Brownlee, who is to blame for America's obesity problem? Underline or highlight the sentence that most clearly indicates who is to blame.
3. What does Brownlee think is the solution to the problem?

Group B

Now that you know what "If You Pitch It" is about, answer the following questions:

1. Think back to your original predictions. Which were right? Which did you have to modify as you read "If You Pitch It"?
2. What is the main idea of "If You Pitch It"? Underline or highlight the sentence that most clearly indicates the main idea.
3. What does Barboza think is the solution to the problem?

Activity 8

Annotating the Text

Group A

Reread Brownlee's "Portion Distortion," and annotate it as you go along. Underline, highlight, draw arrows, and write comments in the left-hand margin about the main ideas, questions or objections, and connections between the ideas. Write your reactions to what Brownlee says in the right-hand margin.

Compare your annotations with those of a classmate in Group A. Then, if you choose, revise your annotations.

NOT FOR RESALE

Activity 8 (Continued)

Group B

Reread Barboza's "If You Pitch It" and annotate it as you go along. Underline, highlight, draw arrows, and write comments in the left-hand margin about the main ideas, questions or objections, and connections between the ideas. Write your reactions to what Barboza says in the right-hand margin.

Compare your annotations with those of a classmate in Group B. Then, if you choose, revise your annotations.

Activity 9

Looking Closely at Language

Answer the following questions:

1. According to Zinczenko's "Don't Blame the Eater," why are kids suing McDonald's?
2. According to Zinczenko, what are the choices for American kids to get an affordable meal? Use the word "option" in your answer.
3. What causes 30 percent of the new cases of childhood diabetes in America?
4. Give an example of an alternative to fast food. How easy is it for kids to purchase that alternative?
5. Do people who buy fast food know how many calories they are eating? Use the word "consume" or "consumer" in your answer.
6. What do you think of kids who file lawsuits against the fast-food industry?
7. Do you agree with Zinczenko that the fast-food industry is vulnerable?
8. Do you make informed choices when you buy fast food?

Activity 10

Considering the Structure of the Text

Reread Zinczenko's "Don't Blame the Eater," and then do the following:

- Draw a line across the page where the introduction ends. Is it after the first paragraph, or are there more introductory paragraphs? How do you know?
- Draw a line across the page where the conclusion begins. Is it the last paragraph, or are there several concluding paragraphs? How do you know?
- Discuss in groups or as a class why the lines were drawn where they were. In this activity, think and reasoning about organizational structure is more important than agreeing on where the lines should be drawn.
- Further divide the body of the text into sections by topics (what each section is about).

STUDENT VERSION

Activity 10 (Continued)

- Write a short description of what each section is about, what it says about that topic, and why the writer put it there (the rhetorical function of the section).

Now answer the following questions:

- How does each section affect the reader? What is the writer trying to accomplish?
- What does each section say? What is the content?
- Which section is the most developed?
- Which section is the least developed? Does it need more development?
- Which section is the most persuasive? The least persuasive?
- On the basis of your chart of the text, what do you think is the main argument? Is that argument explicit or implicit?

Make a map of the ideas in the article by doing the following:

- Draw a circle in the center of the page and label it with the text's main idea.
- Record the text's supporting ideas on branches that connect to the central idea.
- Ask yourself how the ideas are related to one another.

Compare your map with a partner's. Make any changes needed to make your map reflect the ideas of the article more accurately.

Activity 11

Revisiting Key Vocabulary

Discuss the denotations (literal meaning) and connotations (the feelings or ideas a word suggests) of these words from Barboza's "If You Pitch It":

- blitzkrieg
- perverts (verb)
- assault
- threatening
- lock out

What does the use of these words imply about the author's view of fast-food marketing?

If you are in Group A, work with a Group A member to identify "loaded" words in Brownlee's "Portion Distortion."

If you are in Group B, work with a Group B member to identify other "loaded" words in Barboza's "If You Pitch It."

Now share with the class the words you have found.

Activity 12

Refining Key Vocabulary

Getting Ready to Write

This exercise is designed to help you become aware of not only the word meanings but of word forms as well.

1. Some critics of the fast-food industry _____ that it intentionally tries to make us eat too much.
2. Increasing _____ sizes while keeping costs down induces customers to eat more.
3. Parents are _____ for making sure their children eat nutritious food and get enough exercise.
4. The lack of physical education in the schools is contributing to the epidemic of childhood _____.
5. It's the fault of parents who let their children eat _____ food.
6. We shouldn't _____ junk food until we encourage more personal responsibility for one's own health.
7. _____ for fast food should carry warning labels such as those for tobacco and alcohol.
8. Fast-food restaurants need to _____ nutrition information to consumers.

Postreading

Activity 13

Summarizing and Responding

Group A

Write a summary of Brownlee's "Portion Distortion," following the guidelines in the Peer Response to Summary form. Then write your response to Brownlee's views.

Now exchange your summary/response with a partner from Group B. Use the Peer Response form to evaluate your partner's summary/response to "If You Pitch It."

Group B

Write a summary of Barboza's "If You Pitch It," following the guidelines in the Peer Response to Summary form. Then write your response to Barboza's views.

Now exchange your summary/response with a partner from Group A. Use the Peer Response form to evaluate your partner's summary/response to "Portion Distortion."

Activity 13
(Continued)

Peer Response to Summary

1. Does the writer include the author's name in the first sentence of the summary? Yes _____

Writer: Include the author's name. No _____

2. Does the writer include the title of the essay in the first sentence of the summary? Yes _____

Writer: Include the title of the essay. No _____

Is the title in quotation marks? Yes _____

Writer: Punctuate the title using quotation marks. No _____

3. Does the first sentence clearly state the main idea of the article? Yes _____

Writer: State the main idea in the first sentence. Make sure it is clear and accurate. No _____

You can improve your first sentence by _____

_____

_____

4. Does the writer include all of the important ideas or supporting points from the essay? Yes _____

Writer: You left out an important point (specify which): No _____

_____

_____

_____

5. Does the writer use his/her own words? Yes _____

Writer: You used the author's words instead of your own. (Indicate where—give paragraph or line number.) No _____

6. Does the writer keep his/her own opinions *out* of the summary? Yes _____

Writer: You mentioned your *opinion in the summary.* (Indicate where—give paragraph or line number.) No _____

Remember to save your opinion for your response!

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Activity 14

Thinking Critically

Think about the following questions, and then write your answers.

Questions about Logic (Logos)

1. Which article is the most convincing?
2. What are the major claims presented in that article?
3. Are there claims in the article that are weak or unsupported? What are they?
4. What other counterarguments could the author consider?
5. Has the author left out an argument on purpose?

Questions about the Writer (Ethos)

1. What is the author's background?
2. Is this author knowledgeable? Smart? Successful?
3. What does the author's style and language tell you about him or her?
4. Do you trust this author? Why or why not?
5. Do you think this author is deceptive? Why or why not?
6. Do you think this author is serious? Why or why not?

Questions about Emotions (Pathos)

1. How does the article affect you? Which parts?
2. Do you think the author is trying to manipulate your emotions? How?
3. Do your emotions conflict with your logical interpretation of the arguments?
4. Does the author use humor? How does this affect your acceptance of his or her ideas?

Writing Rhetorically

Prewriting

Activity 15

Reading the Assignment

On-Demand Writing Assignment

You will have 45 minutes to plan and write an essay on the topic below. Before you begin writing, read the passage carefully and plan what you will say. Explain Weintraub's argument and discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with his analysis. Support your position by providing reasons and examples from your own experience, observations, or reading. Your essay should be as well-organized and carefully written as you can make it.

> As Americans add pounds, critics are increasingly blaming the fast-food industry. Teenagers have filed lawsuits blaming McDonald's for their health problems, and a public health

STUDENT VERSION

Activity 15 (Continued)

group in California has asked the governor to declare childhood obesity a state of emergency. But parents—not the fast-food companies, not the government—are in the best position to fight the epidemic of overweight children. Parents are responsible for teaching kids healthy eating and exercise habits. Parents are to blame if they let kids eat unhealthy foods and sit in front of the television or computer for hours at a time. We have laws against parents leaving a loaded weapon where children can find and use it to hurt themselves or others. It's time to get parents to take the same responsibility to protect their children from unhealthy foods and lack of exercise.

Adapted from Daniel Weintraub's
"The Battle Against Fast Food Begins in the Home"
The Sacramento Bee, December 17, 2002

Explain Weintraub'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.

Take the following steps for this exercise:

- Read the assignment carefully.
- Decide which issue you are going to discuss.
- Discuss the purpose of the assignment. What will you try to accomplish in your essay?

Activity 16

Getting Ready to Write

As you think about what you will write, answer the following questions about the passage included in the writing assignment.

1. What are the author's major claims?
2. Which claim is the strongest? The weakest? Has he or she left any out?
3. How credible is the author on this topic?
4. How does the argument affect you emotionally?
5. Has the author tried to manipulate your emotions? How?

Activity 17

Formulating a Working Thesis

Writing down a tentative thesis at this point is a good habit to develop in your writing process. Your thesis should be a complete sentence and can be revised several times. But a focused thesis statement will keep your writing on track.

Record your responses to the following questions in preparation for writing your tentative thesis statement:

Activity 17 (Continued)

- What specific question will your essay answer? What is your response to this question? (This is your tentative thesis.)
- What support have you found for your thesis?
- What evidence have you found for this support? For example, you can use facts, statistics, quotes from authorities, personal experience, anecdotes, stories, scenarios, and examples.
- How much background information do your readers need to understand your topic and thesis?
- If readers were to disagree with your thesis or the validity of your support, what would they say? How would you address their concerns (what would you say to them)?

Now draft a possible thesis for your essay.

Writing

Activity 18

Composing a Draft

When you write an argument essay, choose an approach to the subject that matters to you. If you have strong feelings, you will find it much easier to gather evidence and convince your readers of your point of view. Keep in mind, however, that your readers might feel just as strongly about the opposite side of the issue. The following guidelines will help you write a good argument essay.

1. **State your opinion on the topic in your thesis statement.** To write a thesis statement for an argument essay, you must take a stand for or against an action or an idea. In other words, your thesis statement should be debatable—a statement that can be argued or challenged and will not be met with agreement by everyone who reads it. Your thesis statement should introduce your subject and state your opinion about that subject.

   Daniel Weintraub's thesis is the third line of the passage: "But parents—not the fast food companies, not the government—are in the best position to fight the epidemic of overweight children." This is Weintraub's position, and it is a debatable thesis. Some other statements about fast food and the epidemic of overweight children would not be debatable and therefore would not be effective theses.

   Not debatable: The number of obese children has more than doubled since 1980.

   Not debatable: Many people blame the fast-food industry for making them fat.

   The first example is a statistic (a fact based on research). It is not an opinion and cannot be used as a thesis. The second example is a statement about other people's opinions, but it is not the writer's opinion.

STUDENT VERSION

Activity 18 (Continued)

2. **Take your audience into consideration as you write your essay.** When you write your essay, assume that your audience is well-informed generally but may not have the specific knowledge that you have gained by reading and discussion as you moved through the Fast Food unit. You need to provide your readers with information and your sources for that information whether you are citing statistics or paraphrasing someone else's argument. In a true timed-writing situation, you will not have access to sources, but you can still refer to information you learned in a class, read in an article, or found on a Web site. Just be sure to mention where you found it (not a formal reference but an acknowledgment that it comes from another source).

   You may also want to let your readers know who you are. Think about the information that Zinczenko provided about his development from "a typical mid-1980s latchkey kid" to a writer for a health magazine. That information helped us to decide how credible his opinions were. In the same way, you can let your readers know, for example, that you are a high school student so that when you talk about the easy access you have to junk food at school, they know you are in a good position to know this.

   You also need to assume that some of your readers will disagree with you (remember, your thesis is going to be debatable). If you acknowledge some possible alternative positions and explain why they are not as strong as your own, that will strengthen your argument. For example, Weintraub acknowledges that some people blame fast-food companies and other people blame the government for America's weight problem. He gets those arguments on the table before he goes on to his own argument that parents are the ones who bear the greatest blame.

3. **Choose evidence that supports your thesis statement.** Evidence is probably the most important factor in writing an argument essay. Without solid evidence, your essay is nothing more than opinion; with it, your essay can be powerful and persuasive. If you supply convincing evidence, your readers will not only understand your position but may agree with it.

   Evidence can consist of facts, statistics, statements from authorities, and examples or personal stories. Examples and personal stories can be based on your own observations, experiences, and reading, but your opinions are not evidence. Other strategies, such as comparison/contrast, definition, and cause/effect, can be particularly useful in building an argument. Use any combination of evidence and writing strategies that supports your thesis statement.

   In the readings for the Fast Food assignment, you can find several different types of evidence. Here are some examples:

Activity 18 (Continued)

Facts

As early as 1972, McDonald's introduced its large-size fries (Brownlee, paragraph 13).

An existing law requires an average of at least 20 minutes per day of physical education (Weintraub, paragraph 9).

Statistics

Since 1980, the number of obese children has more than doubled to 16 percent (Barboza, paragraph 9).

About 20 percent of the nation's schools now offer brand-name fast food (Barboza, paragraph 21).

Diabetes accounts for $100 billion a year in health-care costs today (Zinczenko, paragraph 5).

Statements from Authorities

Statement by Lisa Young, a nutritionist at New York University (Brownlee, paragraph 21).

Quote by Susan Linn, a Harvard psychologist who studies children's marketing (Barboza, paragraph 5).

Statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Barboza, paragraph 9).

Examples and Personal Stories

Zinczenko's personal story (Zinczenko, paragraphs 2–4)

4. **Anticipate opposing points of view.** In addition to stating and supporting your position, anticipating and responding to opposing views are important. Presenting only your side of the argument leaves half the story untold—the opposition's half. If you acknowledge that there are opposing arguments and answer them, your argument is stronger.

   In paragraph 13 of "The Battle Against Fast Food Begins at Home," Weintraub acknowledges the argument that busy parents, especially single parents, don't have the time to cook healthy meals or the energy to restrict TV and video games. He counters the argument in the next paragraph where he describes the strategies used in his own home. By acknowledging the argument (more fully developed in Zinczenko's opinion piece), he increases his own credibility.

5. **Find some common ground**. Pointing out common ground between you and your opponent is also an effective strategy. Common ground refers to points of agreement between two opposing positions. For example, one person might be in favor of gun control and another strongly opposed. But they might find common ground—agreement—in the need to keep guns out of teenagers' hands. Locating some common ground is possible in almost every situation. When you state in your essay that you agree with your opponent on certain points, your reader sees you as a fair person.

STUDENT VERSION

Activity 18
(Continued)

Weintraub advocates making individuals responsible for their children's health rather than having government intervene, but he suggests a middle ground between individual responsibility and government intervention. He advocates having health agencies do "more to encourage these kinds of simple policies in the home" (paragraph 16).

6. **Maintain a reasonable tone.** Just as you probably wouldn't win an argument by shouting or making mean or nasty comments, don't expect your readers to respond well to such tactics. Keep the "voice" of your essay calm and sensible. Your readers will be much more open to what you have to say if they think you are a reasonable person.

   Weintraub maintains a reasonable tone throughout his article. He believes that parents are endangering their children's health and makes the analogy to leaving a loaded gun where children can use it, but he doesn't say parents are stupid or lazy. Instead, he suggests that they are uninformed, and he acknowledges the difficulties they face in raising healthy children. We are more ready to accept his conclusion that more education is needed because he makes a reasonable argument rather than a strident appeal.

7. **Organize your essay so that it presents your position as effectively as possible.** By the end of your essay, you want your audience to agree with you. So you want to organize your essay in such a way that your readers can easily follow it. The number of your paragraphs will vary depending on the nature of your assignment, but the following outline shows the order in which the features of an argument essay are most effective:

   Introduction
   Background information
   Introduction of subject
   Statement of your opinion

   Body Paragraphs
   Common ground
   Lots of evidence (both logical and emotional)
   Opposing point of view
   Response to opposing point of view

   Conclusion
   Restatement of your position
   Call for action or agreement

   The arrangement of your evidence in an argument essay depends to a great extent on your readers' opinions. Most arguments will be organized from general to particular, from particular to general, or from one extreme to another. When you know that your readers already agree with you, arranging your details from general to particular or from most to least important is usually most effective. With

Activity 18 (Continued)

this order, you are building on your readers' agreement and loyalty as you explain your thinking on the subject.

If you suspect that your audience does not agree with you, reverse the organization of your evidence and arrange it from particular to general or from least to most important. In this way, you can take your readers step by step through your reasoning in an attempt to get them to agree with you.

Weintraub's essay follows the general outline just presented. Here is a skeleton outline of his essay.

Introduction

Background about the recommendations of the California Center for Public Health Advocacy's recommendations to reduce childhood obesity.

Weintraub's own position that parents, with some help, can and should teach their children healthy eating and exercise habits.

Body Paragraphs

The Center's report

- Data on childhood obesity
- Analysis of causes: fast food, portion sizes, junk food at school, advertising of junk food, and lack of PE
- Recommendations: required PE, nutritional standards for schools, working water fountains

Recommendations ineffective unless parents accept their roles:

- Loaded gun analogy
- Reasons parents resort to fast food and TV
- Strategies used in the Weintraub home: limit junk food at home; eat home-cooked meals, limit TV time; encourage organized sports and outdoor activities

Conclusion

Organizations such as the Center for Public Health Advocacy need to encourage parents to take an active role in monitoring their children's eating and exercise habits.

STUDENT VERSION

Activity 19

Organizing the Essay

The following items are traditional parts of all essays:

- An introduction (usually one or two paragraphs) that "hooks" the reader and provides a thesis statement or road map for the reader
- The body (as many paragraphs as necessary), which supports the thesis statement point by point
- A conclusion (usually only one paragraph) that summarizes the main points and explains the significance of the argument

The number of paragraphs in an essay depends on the nature and complexity of your argument.

Activity 19 (Continued)

Here are some additional hints for helping you organize your thoughts:

Introduction

- You might want to include the following in your introductory paragraphs:
  - A "hook" to get the reader's attention
  - Background information the audience may need
  - A thesis statement, along with some indication of how the essay will be developed ("forecasting"). *Note:* A thesis statement states the topic of the essay and the writer's position on that topic. You may choose to sharpen or narrow the thesis at this point.

Body

- Paragraphs that present support of the thesis statement with topic sentences supported by evidence. (See "Getting Ready to Write.")
- Paragraphs that include different points of view or address counter-arguments.
- Paragraphs or sentences where you address those points of view by doing the following:
  - Refuting them
  - Acknowledging them but showing how your argument is better
  - Granting them altogether but showing they are irrelevant
- Evidence that you have considered the values, beliefs, and assumptions of your audience as well as your own values, beliefs, and assumptions. Evidence that you have found some common ground that appeals to the various points of view of readers is also necessary.

Conclusion

- A final paragraph (or paragraphs) that includes a solid argument to support the thesis and indicates the significance of the argument—the "so what" factor

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Activity 20

Developing the Content

Here are a few highlights about developing your essay:

- Most body paragraphs consist of a topic sentence (or an implied topic sentence) and concrete details to support that topic sentence.
- Body paragraphs give evidence in the form of examples, illustrations, statistics, and so on and analyze the meaning of the evidence.
- Each topic sentence is usually directly related to the thesis statement.
- No set number of paragraphs makes up an essay.
- The thesis dictates and focuses the content of an essay.

Revising and Editing

Activity 21

Revising the Draft

You now need to work with the organization and development of your draft to make sure that your essay is as effective as possible.

Peer Group Work

In groups of three or four, each of you should read his or her essay aloud to other members of the group. Then complete Part I of the Evaluation Form for each essay.

Paired Work

Work in pairs to decide how you want to revise the problems that group members identified.

Individual Work

Revise the draft based on the feedback you have received and the decisions you have made with your partners. Consider these additional questions for individual work:

- Have I responded to the assignment?
- What is my purpose for this essay?
- What should I keep? What is most effective?
- What should I add? Where do I need more details, examples, and other evidence to support my point?
- What could I get rid of? Did I use irrelevant details? Was I repetitive?
- What should I change? Are parts of my essay confusing or contradictory? Do I need to explain my ideas more fully?
- What should I rethink? Was my position clear? Did I provide enough analysis to convince my readers?
- How is my tone? Am I too overbearing or too firm? Do I need qualifiers?
- Have I addressed differing points of view?
- Does my conclusion show the significance of my essay?
- Have I used key vocabulary words correctly to represent the ideas from the article? Have I used words that refer to specific facts from the text?

Activity 22

Editing the Draft

You now need to work with the grammar and mechanics of your draft to make sure that your use of language is effective and conforms to the guidelines of standard written English.

Individual Work

Edit your draft based on the information you have received from your instructor or a tutor. Use the editing checklist provided by your teacher. The suggestions below will also help you edit your own work.

STUDENT VERSION

Activity 22 (Continued)

Editing Guidelines for Individual Work

- If possible, set your essay aside for 24 hours before rereading to find errors.
- If possible, read your essay out loud so you can hear your errors.
- Focus on individual words and sentences rather than overall meaning. Take a sheet of paper and cover everything except the line you are reading. Then touch your pencil to each word as you read.
- With the help of your teacher, figure out your own pattern of errors—the most serious and frequent errors you make.
- Only look for one type of error at a time. Then go back and look for a second type, and if necessary, a third.
- Use the dictionary to check spelling and confirm that you've chosen the right word for the context.

Activity 23

Reflecting on the Writing

When you have completed your own essay, answer these six questions.

1. What was most difficult about this assignment?
2. What was easiest?
3. What did you learn about arguing by completing this assignment?
4. What do you think are the strengths of your argument? Place a wavy line by the parts of your essay that you feel are very good.
5. What are the weaknesses, if any, of your paper? Place an X by the parts of your essay you would like help with. Write any questions you have in the margin.
6. What did you learn from this assignment about your own writing process—about preparing to write, writing the first draft, revising, and editing?

Fast Food: Who's to Blame?

On-Demand Writing Assignment

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 carefully written as you can make it.

> As Americans add pounds, critics are increasingly blaming the fast-food industry. Teenagers have filed lawsuits blaming McDonald's for their health problems, and a public health group in California has asked the governor to declare childhood obesity a state of emergency. But parents—not the fast food companies, not the government—are in the best position to fight the epidemic of overweight children. Parents are responsible for teaching healthy eating and exercise habits. Parents are to blame if they let their kids eat unhealthy foods and sit in front of the television or computer for hours at a time. We have laws against parents leaving a loaded weapon where children can find and use it to hurt themselves or others. It's time to get parents to take the same responsibility to protect their children from unhealthy foods and lack of exercise.
>
> Adapted from Daniel Weintraub's
> "The Battle Against Fast Food Begins in the Home"
> *The Sacramento Bee,* December 17, 2002

Explain Weintraub'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.

The sample student essays that follow reflect the EPT Scoring Guide's criteria.

Sample student essay with a score of 6:

Daniel Weintraub, in "The Battle Against Fast Food Begins in the Home," states that parents are responsible for the increasing epidemic of child obesity. Parents need to be responsible enough to teach their children healthy eating & exercise habits. In our world today, children sit around & play video games all day, if they are allowed to. Weintraub argues that parents need to "step up to the plate" and get children involved in some type of exercise. I agree that parents need to take more responsibility for child obesity, but schools, fast food companies & the government also need to take that same initiative.

Parents have a lot of influence on their children from the day that child is born. Children learn how to talk from their parents, how to respect their elders and they *should* learn healthy eating & exercising habits from their parents. There are many steps to take in showing a child what is healthy & unhealthy. A parent could make sure that a child receives a serving of fruits or vegetables at lunch & dinner, eliminate soda from the house and even eliminate all junk food from the house. From a young age, my parents taught me to have an apple for a snack instead of a cookie & that I should be getting 5 servings of fruits or vegetables a day. This lesson has influenced me even until today when my friends & I will go and eat a salad at lunch instead of pizza or chips. I have also eliminated all soda from my diet.

Parents need to show their children that exercise is not a bad thing. At a young age, parents need to show children that there are other things to do, like playing tag or playing at the park, than just watching t.v. Parents could introduce their children to different sports until the child finds one that he or she is interested in. My parents entered me in dance class & were lucky in finding that that was what I enjoyed. I have been dancing since I was three years old & I also played soccer for 8 years. It isn't very difficult to turn off a t.v. and send your children outside to play.

Parents are not solely responsible for child obesity; schools, fast food companies & the government also need to take action against child obesity. Schools today do not provide a great selection of healthy food. My student body is luck that we have an off-campus lunch but even then it is difficult to find healthy food. Fast food companies definitely need some blame. With advertising that appeals to children, it is no wonder that America is fat. Through whining for that toy that a child can get with a kid's meal, the parent is pressured to go to a fast food place.

Daniel Weintraub argues that parents are responsible for child obesity. I agree with Weintraub but schools & fast food companies also need to help in the fight against child obesity.

6

Commentary

This essay illustrates the EPT Scoring Guide's criteria for a score of 6. The superior response indicates that the writer is very well-prepared to handle college-level reading and writing.

- The writer clearly explains Weintraub's argument regarding childhood obesity in the first paragraph and takes a thoughtful position, contending that Weintraub is right to a degree but that "schools, fast food companies & the government also need to take that same initiative."
- The writer skillfully restates Weintraub's argument in the first paragraph and makes a further connection in the second paragraph by saying, "they *should* learn healthy eating & exercising habits from their parents." However, the emphasized "should" suggests that the writer questions whether this always happens. The conclusion again refers back to Weintraub.
- The essay demonstrates "quality and clarity of thought" with its careful analysis of both the strengths and weaknesses of Weintraub's somewhat overstated position.
- The essay reflects an effective use of topic statements and strong personal examples to both support Weintraub's argument that parents are responsible for childhood obesity with respect to eating and exercise habits and make the case that others are responsible as well.
- Sentence structure is varied and word choice is precise.
- The essay has few errors.

Sample student essay with a score of 5:

America is now known as the fattest country in America. Many of our country's people blame the fast food industry for over-advertising, selling unhealthy food, and selling oversized portions. However, others feel that America's obeisity is a matter of personal responsibility. In his article "The battle against fast food begins in the home," Daniel Weintraub explains that parents need to take responsibility for the eating habits of their kids, and I agree with his opinion in this matter.

As Americans, we are given the freedom of choice, however, before we become adults, it is our parents that have to teach us how to make the right decisions. This is Weintraub's point. If parents are not willing to teach their kids the dangers of eating too much fast food and not getting enough exercise, then those kids have no way to make the right choices. Kids learn best at an early age, therefore, teaching them good habits will allow them to make the correct decisions later.

I agree with Weintraub's opinion that parents are responsible. Obviously, fast food companies are going to market towards kids; they are more impressionable. Because of this, if parents would start teaching kids early on, they could use that impressionable quality to their advantage. The benefits of education are apparent in almost everything we do. For example, a better educated person can solve problems quickly and easily. The same goes for someone educated in terms of health habits. They can make the best choices because they have been taught to do so. Fast food companies provide a service. It is up to us, or our parents if we are not yet of age, to decide how much of that service we should use.

In conclusion, Daniel Weintraub is correct in his assesment of one of the causes of America's obeisity. The truth is that no child can grow up to be

an intelligent human being without a proper education, wether it be in mathematics or eating habits. Fast food companies are always going to compete for customers and try to make money, but they cannot control our decisions. The only people that can make choices for us our ourselves, and we cannot make the right choices without proper education from our parents. We cannot blame others for our own problems. Only when parents and the population of American in general are educated and choose to live healthy lifestyles will the country's obeisity cease.

5

Commentary

This essay illustrates the EPT Scoring Guide's criteria for a score of 5. The clear competence of the essay indicates that this writer is quite ready to handle college-level reading and writing.

- The writer addresses the topic of childhood obesity clearly, summarizing and then agreeing with Weintraub's position. Further references to Weintraub in the body and conclusion maintain a clear focus on the argument.
- The essay presents a well-reasoned response, indicating that various factors contribute to childhood obesity but finally siding with Weintraub in placing the responsibility on parents: *"We cannot make the right choices without proper education from our parents."*
- The essay shows some depth of thought in making the case that adults are responsible for making their own sound choices while parents are responsible for the choices their children make. However, the writer simply dismisses the responsibility of the fast-food industry without analysis.
- The essay is fairly clearly organized around the ideas that parents are responsible for their children's choices and that the best way to counter fast-food advertising is through education; however, some repetition and a lack of strong examples weaken the writer's argument.
- The sentences are varied and word choices are generally precise and effective.
- The essay has only a few minor errors: failure to use a semicolon with "however," misspelling of "obesity," and the distracting repetition of "America" in the first line.

Sample student essay with a score of 4:

Obesity Can Be Stopped Within the Home

The article titled, "The battle against fast food begins in the home," is the author's Daniel Weintraub, point of view on the rising obesity problem in America. Mr. Weintraub wrote this particular piece with one intention; to educate the readers with his own views. Mr. Weintraub doesn't blame the Government, or advertising for American's weight problem. But, instead he feels that parents are the sole component. He not only blames parents for

their children's poor eating habits, but also for they lack of exercise, and physical activity. I strongly agree with Mr. Weintraub because of the dynamics and regimne of parent's lives today and parents wanting to blame everyone and thing but themselves.

I strongly agree with Mr. Weintraub because of the dynamics and regimne of parent's lives today. Mr. Weintraub makes the point in his article that, "Fast Food is fast.", and "It can also seem cheap." (Weintraub) This is just what parents who work all day want. They want to feed their children, not cook but feed, and relax after a hard days work. They may not mean to, but they are already to blame for their child's eating habits. However, taking the easy route, they have already put their children at risk. The dynamics of their daily regimne naturally allow them to feed their child "junk".

Not only do I believe that Mr. Weintraub is correct because of the dynamics and regimne of parent's lives today, but I also strongly Agree with Mr. Weintraub because of parents wanting to blame everyone and thing but themselves. First off, in an article written by Shannon Brownlee titled, "Its Portion distortion that makes America fat," a mother who was suing McDonalds stated, "1 always believed McDonalds food was healthy for my son." (Brownlee) This statement shows a parent who is willing to blame a company, whose sole purpose is making money, for her child's obesity. All the while parents eat, themselves, the exact same food as their child. They don't hold any responsibility that maybe their child will mimic these same habits. In the "Letters to the Editor" section a woman, Patricia Gonzalez, poses a good question; "Why aren't they (parents) home cooking them (children) healthy food?" (Letters to Editor) Instead of parents complaining about how companies made their kids fat, or how advertising hooked their kids, why don't they eliminate these factors and cook their children a meal they know is healthy?

I strongly agree with Mr. Weintraub because of the dynamics and regimne of parent's lives today and parents wanting to blame everyone and thing but themselves. Mr. Weintraub expressed the right point. As Americans, we need to take responsibility ourselves and not just blame other people. Parents could eliminate obesity before it became a problem in their child's life. That is why I strongly agree with Mr. Weintraub.

4

Commentary

This essay illustrates the EPT Scoring Guide's criteria for a score of 4. This adequate response to the topic suggests that the writer should be able to handle college-level reading and writing.

- The writer clearly addresses Weintraub's argument that parents are responsible for the epidemic of childhood obesity but fails to explain why the fast-food companies, "whose sole purpose is making money," do not share responsibility.
- The writer generally understands the passage and develops a sensible, if somewhat simplistic, response: "why don't they . . . cook their children a meal they know is healthy?"
- The essay has a clear organization around the issues of parents' lack of time—"dynamics and regimne of parent's lives"—and parents' desire to

shift blame to others. However, well-chosen examples would strengthen the support for this argument.

- The essay demonstrates adequate use of syntax and language; however, word choice is sometimes imprecise. For example, "The article . . . is the point of view . . ." and "hold any responsibility." "Dynamics" and "regimne" are used both imprecisely and repetitively.
- The writer has general control of grammar and usage; however, errors in punctuation and capitalization are frequent and distracting.

Sample student essay with a score of 3:

Who is to blame the parents, fast food companies, the government or yourself? People now a days are so quick to sue fast food companies for making them fat but its all about self control. One should know his or her own body and watch what they eat. Fast food places are on almost every corner but doesn't mean their making you eat there.

In New York a teenager is sueing McDonald's for making her fat. He weighs in at 400 pounds. His mother says "I always believed McDonald's food was healthy for my son". How is this possible? Two patty cheeseburgers, deep fried potatoes, and a large cup of soda is clearly not healthy. This kid probably ate at McDonald's majority of the time but I doubt he ate there everyday for every meal so how is McDonald's fully to blaim. Whatever happen to exercising, if this teenager was getting the required exercise there is no way he could way in at 400 pounds.

Don't get me wrong I'm not just on the fast food companies' side. Yes McDonald's super-sizing most of their meals is a little extreme. Having good deals like dollar nugget Tuesdays is also a big temptation. Fast food companies could cut down on the location of there restuarants. Being that its so convinent that it's close to your house, cheap and fast is another way that makes Americans so addicted.

In conclusion, Both Americans and Fast Food Companies can change for the better. Americans start taking some responsibility for what you put into your own body. Fast Food Companies think of how many lives are at risk because of what your feeding them and cut back on expanding your franchises.

3

Commentary

This essay illustrates the EPT Scoring Guide's criteria for a score of 3. Although the essay indicates a developing competence on the part of the writer, it is flawed in significant ways that suggest the writer needs additional practice before being able to succeed in college-level reading and writing.

- The writer does not arrive at a thesis until the conclusion, which states, "In conclusion, Both Americans and Fast Food Companies can change for the better." Even if this thesis had been presented in the introduction, however, it would need to be made more specific.
- The writer does not summarize or explain Weintraub's argument and fails to respond to the argument that parents are primarily responsible for their children's eating and exercise habits.

- The writer does not use Weintraub's argument about the role of parents to develop the response; as a result, the essay is not focused on Weintraub's argument but instead focuses entirely on the responsibility of the individual and the fast-food industry.
- The essay demonstrates simplistic thinking. It ignores the socioeconomic and developmental issues that can impede children and parents from making wise decisions about what they eat. It also ignores the imperative for businesses to make money when it suggests that McDonald's "could cut down on the location of there restaurants."
- A skeletal organization is present, with the two body paragraphs each addressing a single idea that is summarized in the conclusion.
- The paragraphs are underdeveloped; they need additional specifics and analysis. In addition, the role of parental responsibility needs to be explored. The paragraphs need effective topic sentences relating back to a controlling idea or thesis.
- The writer's language is highly informal, relying on a series of rhetorical questions and colloquial comments ("Who is to blame . . .?" "How is this possible?" "Whatever happen to exercising?" "Don't get me wrong.") in place of analysis.
- The writer uses vague or incorrect pronoun reference ("one should know . . . and watch what they eat"; "but doesn't mean their making you eat there"), and sentence structure is weak ("Being that its so convinent . . . is another way that makes Americans so addicted."). The main errors, however, are in the mechanics, with numerous errors in punctuation, spelling, and capitalization.

Sample student essay with a score of 2:

Bigger isnt always better

Last year a Bronx teenager who weighted in at a wooping 400 pounds sat in a confrence room while their mother tryed to file a suit againt McDonald's for make her kid fat. When ask why she replyed "I always believed McDonald's food was healthy for my son." More and more american's are trying to blame fast food for the reason they are fat, but is it what they eat or how much. Shannon Brownlee asked this question and this is what she found.

Portion sizes has been creeping up ward science 1972. That when McDolands introduced it's large size fries. (which now was smaller than a medium today.) And now they make more money then ever, they do it by consumer manipulation. Example 7-Eleven can sell the 64-ounce Double Gulp for only 37 cents more the 16-ounce 89 cent regular Gulp. "You'd feel ripped off if you bought the smaller size." And thats just the way I feel when I go to fast food why not get the bigger size your pay just as much as a regular. After reading Shannon Brownlee's article I understand and agree that people arn't getting fat from the food but from how much they eat. So maybe all those mom's should stop getting mad that their kid are getting fat and be mad at their kid for eating so much and throwing away money on food that 70% of the time they don't finish!

2

Commentary

This essay illustrates the EPT Scoring Guide's criteria for a score of 2. The serious flaws here indicate that this writer will need considerable additional practice before being able to succeed in college-level reading and writing.

- The writer does not summarize or respond to Weintraub's argument, instead lifting portions from another article by Shannon Brownlee about fast food.
- The writer does not use the passage at all.

Sample student essay with a score of 1:

Many people blame the fast food industry for making them obese. But it's not their fault it is the fault of the parents. It is theirs for not teaching the person how to eat right. It is the parents responsibility to teach their children o eat right and to excise at lest once a day.

Americans have taken the blame of obesity and put it one that fast food industry. Many parents have filled lawsuits against McDonalds for their health problems.

1

Commentary

This essay illustrates the EPT Scoring Guide's criteria for a score of 1. The fundamental deficiencies of this essay clearly indicate that the writer needs much additional practice to be ready to succeed at college-level reading and writing.

- The essay's length—six sentences—is insufficient to respond to the question.
- The writer misunderstands the passage and fails to refer to it.
- The essay is repetitive. The first and fifth sentences repeat each other, as do the second, third, and fourth sentences.
- The writer culls the idea of parental responsibility from the passage but offers no support, reasons, or examples as the prompt instructs.
- The essay appears to be incomplete. It ends with a (misstated) statement of fact from the passage that either belongs in the summary portion of the essay or should be omitted in lieu of the writer's own opinions and support—the better option.
- The writer lacks basic control of syntax and vocabulary.
- The writer has serious and persistent errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics that severely interfere with meaning. Pronoun confusion ("It is theirs . . . "), preposition misuse ("blame of obesity"), and punctuation errors are profound.