

Advantages & Disadvantages ①

Being a "Freeter"

In Japan, a "freeter" is a person who chooses to work part-time instead of full-time. There are both advantages and disadvantages to this lifestyle. One of the main advantages is that you have a lot of free time, so you can pursue hobbies and interests that are not career-related. For example, young people who want to become musicians can use their free time to practice, play gigs, or take lessons. In a similar way, people who are interested in travel can work for a short period and then go on a trip when they have saved enough money. Another benefit to not having steady work is that you can try different jobs until you find one that suits you.

Of course, there are disadvantages to being a freeter as well. Most of these concern money. Without a regular income, it is almost impossible for a freeter to get a bank loan to buy a house. For men, this means that it may be difficult to get married, let alone support a family. In addition, freeters do not have job security, and they can easily be fired with little or no notice. A final disadvantage is that freeters tend to have very low status in Japanese society, and many people look down on them. All in all, I believe that the disadvantages of being a freeter outweigh the advantages, so I am going to try to get a full-time job when I graduate.

(242 words)

A sort of 'thesis statement' topic sentence that shows the org. of the whole comp.

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Words & Phrases

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Advantages & Disadvantages 2

Living with Your Parents as an Adult

In Japan, it is common for young people to live with their parents until they get married. In contrast, young people in many other countries usually prefer to move out and live by themselves or with friends after they finish full-time education. One argument in favor of living with your parents is that you can save time and money. For instance, you do not have to worry about cooking, cleaning, or doing the laundry. In addition, you do not have to pay for food, electricity, or rent. Another benefit is that you always have someone to take care of you if you get sick or injured. Similarly, if your parents are unwell, you will be there to help them.

However, living with your parents when you are grown up also carries a number of drawbacks. For example, you may never learn how to do basic household chores. As long as you live at home, you will find it difficult to learn to stand on your own two feet because you depend on your parents in more ways than you realize. Another problem is that you cannot spend time at home with your friends in private. It may also be difficult for you to stay out late at night, and you may even have a curfew. On balance, I think that living with your parents is a good idea for university students, but everyone should become independent after they graduate and start working.

(242 words)

no real topic sentence; instead, the first two sentences tell what the whole comp is about.

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Words & Phrases

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Advantages & Disadvantages ③

The Pros and Cons of Car Ownership

It is somewhat surprising that so many young people in Japan today are choosing not to own a car. If you have a car of your own, you can go anywhere you like, anytime you like. There is no need to waste time walking to train stations and bus stops, and no need to check timetables or wait around for buses and trains. Another plus is that you can carry heavy things, such as camping, fishing, or skiing equipment. In fact, it is very difficult to enjoy these kinds of activities without a car. When you look at it like this, owning a car seems to be a passport to joy and freedom for you, your friends, and your family.

Of course, there are also some downsides to owning a car. First and foremost is the fact that a car costs a lot of money to buy and maintain. After buying your vehicle, there are still many other costs to consider, such as insurance, gasoline, parking expenses, car tax, and regular safety checks. Furthermore, there are many risks associated with driving. Every year, thousands of motorists are killed or seriously injured in traffic accidents. A third problem is that by driving a car you contribute to global warming. Before you buy a car, you should make sure you can afford both the purchase and the maintenance, and you should think hard about road safety. If you decide that you want one, buy an eco-friendly car to limit the damage you do to the environment.

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Advantages & Disadvantages 4

The Smart Choice

In 2012, it was estimated that the number of smartphone users in Japan had surpassed the number of people using the older feature phones. It is easy to understand why more people are choosing to use smartphones when you consider the number of incredibly useful functions they offer. The main advantage that smartphones have over feature phones is their ability to run "apps," or programs made by third-party developers. These can perform a huge range of tasks from converting currencies and calculating stock prices to playing games and drawing pictures. Owning a smartphone means that you can install as many of these apps as you want, and many of them are free.

Interestingly, however, there are still a large number of people who refuse to give up their old phone. They claim that smartphones are too complicated and difficult to use, especially for children and older people. They also point out that smartphones have a much shorter battery life than feature phones. Whereas a feature phone can be used for several days without charging, most smartphones need to be recharged every night. There is also the problem of cost. Smartphones require an Internet connection, and when combined with the cost of phone calls, this can result in a bill of more than 10,000 yen per month. In the long run, however, lower costs and improvements in battery technology will make it inevitable that feature phones will become obsolete.

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Advantages & Disadvantages 6

Should English Teachers Speak Japanese?

Do you think it is better to have an English teacher who speaks your language or one who does not? Some ~~people~~ would argue that if your English teacher does not know your language, your speaking skills are likely to develop more quickly because you will have to use English to communicate with him or her. A lot of students might be tempted to use Japanese if they know that their teacher can speak it, but that will not be an option if the teacher cannot. There is also the worry that bilingual teachers might end up using Japanese a lot in the classroom simply because it is quicker and easier for them to do so. This will lead to an overall reduction in the amount of English the students hear.

If your teacher cannot speak Japanese at all, however, you may encounter some problems. The most obvious of these is that explanations of grammar and vocabulary will take much longer. Your teacher will also be less likely to know which points are going to be difficult for you, and you will not be able to ask questions in Japanese. You might also have problems understanding your teacher's explanations. A final point to consider is that having a teacher who does not speak your language can be quite demotivating and frustrating if you cannot understand anything despite having studied English for six years in junior high and high school. Overall, it is difficult to decide which kind of teacher is more effective. In an ideal world, it would probably be best to learn English from both monolingual and bilingual teachers.

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Advantages & Disadvantages 6

Going to a Cram School

Cram schools are private schools that offer classes for children after regular school hours and during the holidays. Millions of Japanese children attend these schools in the hope of improving their test scores and their grades. There are several advantages to attending a cram school. To begin with, if you study at a cram school, you can spend much more time studying the subjects on which you need to focus. What is more, the teachers can offer you good advice on which high schools or universities to try for, and how to pass their entrance examinations. With perseverance and expert guidance from the teachers, you may be able to enter a prestigious university.

There are also a number of drawbacks to studying at a cram school. For instance, you will have less time to take part in club activities and develop friendships at school. On top of that, you may become too tired to study effectively, either in the daytime or in the evening. While you sacrifice many hours of the best days of your life, your parents have to pay for the lessons with their hard-earned money. They may feel disappointed if you do not get good results. In other words, you may end up wasting your free time, and your parents may end up wasting their money. Before you decide to go to a cram school, you should think about it carefully and talk it over with your family.

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Love-Hate Relationships 1

My Part-Time Job

There are two things I love about working part-time, and two things I hate about it. The first thing I love about having a part-time job is that I can get a lot of experience doing different jobs, such as working in convenience stores and cafés. I am sure this experience will be useful when I start job-hunting. Second, working has taught me the value and importance of money. Now, when I go shopping and find something I want to buy, I tend to think of the price of things in terms of the number of hours I would have to work to buy it.

On the other hand, I sometimes hate doing my part-time job and wish I could quit. My job takes up a lot of my free time, as I have to work three or four hours a day. It leaves me feeling exhausted, and I have no time to study or go out with friends. Another issue is that I sometimes have problems with my co-workers because I have to work with many different kinds of people. Some of them are really difficult to get along with, but I have to put up with them regardless. Generally speaking, I enjoy working part-time, but I sometimes wonder if it is really worth the time and effort.

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Love-Hate Relationships 2

Snowboarding

There are two reasons why I think snowboarding is the greatest sport in the world, and two reasons why I have mixed feelings about it. To begin with, snowboarding is a fantastic way to enjoy a day out with friends or family. You can have a good, long chat in the car on the way up to the ski grounds and on the ski lifts. Second, snowboarding helps you appreciate nature and the great outdoors. When the sky is blue, nothing compares with the view of the mountains and the thrill of zooming down the slopes in the fresh air.

One thing I do not like about snowboarding is the cold. When you are snowboarding, you might not feel too bad at first because you are having such a good time. However, if you get caught in a cold wind when riding on the lifts, it can be very uncomfortable. A second reservation I have about snowboarding is that it is dangerous, and you can easily get hurt. Because I have only been snowboarding for three years, I am still not very good at it. I often fall over and end up with bruises all over my body. Also, I sometimes crash into other snowboarders and skiers, especially when the slopes are crowded on weekends. If I can improve my snowboarding skills, I think I will enjoy it more.

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global thesis statement

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Love-Hate Relationships ③

Is Swimming the Best Way to Keep Fit?

Is it possible to love something and hate it at the same time? That is how I feel about swimming. There are two reasons I adore swimming, and two reasons I cannot stand it. The main reason I love it is that I usually feel relaxed and refreshed after I go swimming. If something is worrying me, I usually forget all about it the moment I get into the pool. Another thing I love about swimming is that it keeps me in good shape. It is a simple way to stay fit, and you will not need to worry about putting on weight if you go to the pool regularly. I often notice how good the bodies of other swimmers look.

Having said that, there are times when I cannot face going to the pool. One reason is that the temperature of the water is usually very cold. Even though I eventually get used to it, there is no way to avoid the shock when I first step into the water. It is such an unpleasant feeling. Another reason I hate swimming is that my hair gets badly damaged by the chlorine in the water. I had my hair dyed black two weeks ago, but it has already faded to its former color. As much as I love swimming, I am thinking about looking for some different ways to keep fit.

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Good Dog, Bad Dog

There are two things I love about my dog and two things I wish I could change. The best thing about her is that she makes me feel happy. Just looking at her lovely, sparkling eyes cheers me up instantly. When I stroke her fluffy coat, it is like therapy, and I forget all my troubles. Second, taking her for a walk every day helps me keep fit and healthy. Walking along the river with her on cool summer evenings gives me the energy I need to study or do housework at the end of the day.

Naturally, however, keeping a dog also has its challenges. One problem with my dog is that she barks a lot. Whenever she sees cars, strangers, or other dogs, she starts to howl. It is difficult to get her to stop, and this leaves me feeling frustrated sometimes. The second issue is that her fur falls out all over the house. I know it is only natural and not her fault, but I sometimes tire of having to vacuum the house every day. Occasionally, we find dog hair in our meals, and I find this absolutely disgusting. In spite of these problems, however, I will always love my dog, so I will try not to worry too much about her barking and her hair.

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A Time of Joy?

Generally speaking, I love Christmas, but I sometimes feel down around this time of year. To begin with the positive points, Christmas is a great family event because we do so many things together. For example, we decorate the Christmas tree and the living room. We also put colored lights outside the front door of our house and in our garden, and we enjoy the family tradition of making and eating a massive cheesecake. Another reason I love Christmas is that many stores have sales, so I often buy clothes at discount prices.

However, there is also a downside to Christmas. For example, I think it is a very wasteful time because people use so much electricity. When I walk around town and see all the colored lights, I wonder how it will affect the environment in the future. When I return home and see my own house lit up, it makes me feel guilty. Another reason I sometimes dread the Christmas season is that I see so many young couples walking arm-in-arm around town. If I see them when I do not have a date, I feel left out and lonely. Having said all of that, even though I have a love-hate relationship with it, Christmas will always be the most important event of the year for me.

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Love-Hate Relationships 6

Learning English

It is probably fair to say that I have a love-hate relationship with English. I began learning the language with my mother when I was only five years old. She used to show me pictures and tell me the names of things in English. She also used to play me English songs and show me English DVDs. Of course, I did not think of this as study, and I really enjoyed making the sounds of English. After I entered elementary school, I started going to an English conversation school once a week. The teacher was from Australia, and we had a lot of fun. If anyone ever asked me what I thought of English, I always replied, "I love it!"

Unfortunately, my experience of learning English in junior high and high school was not so positive. In our classes, we just studied grammar and translated English sentences into Japanese. We never did any speaking, and we never had any fun. Of course, I understand now that our teacher was trying to prepare us for the high school and university entrance exams, but those classes changed the way I felt about English. By the time I reached high school, I hated English and never wanted to study it again. Now that I am in university, I am enjoying some of my English classes, but I still don't like the ones where we just study for tests. Consequently, I find it difficult to answer now when people ask me whether I like English.

(251 words)

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Thesis statements

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Compare & Contrast 1

Same Country, Different Worlds

For the first twelve years of my life, I lived in Sapporo in the northern part of Japan, but after that I moved to Tokyo because of my father's job. Of course, being Japanese cities, Sapporo and Tokyo have a lot in common. Both of them have a busy downtown area where you can see the same stores and restaurants. Naturally, you will also see the same brands and advertisements for the same companies. There are a lot of cars and people around the centers of both cities, and both also have subways and train systems that are convenient, cheap, and easy to use.

In spite of these similarities, however, there are some important differences. The most noticeable of these is that Sapporo is laid out in a grid pattern, so it looks like an American city, with wide roads and a "block" system for addresses. Tokyo, on the other hand, is a very old city, with narrow roads and a very irregular street pattern. Another major difference is that the subway in Tokyo gets much more crowded than the subway in Sapporo. In fact, the Tokyo subway can get so packed in the mornings that people have to be pushed onto the trains! Although Sapporo and Tokyo are both in Japan, I sometimes feel as though they are in different countries.

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Compare & Contrast 2

A Tale of Two Cities: Tokyo and London

~~Tokyo and London are both capital cities, and they have a great deal in common.~~
 First of all, they are both rated among the world's most important financial centers. For example, Tokyo has the world's third largest stock exchange, and London has the fourth. Another similarity is that they are often ranked among the world's most expensive places to live. Thirdly, both cities are home to famous monarchies. In Tokyo, the Imperial Palace and surrounding gardens occupy more than three square kilometers of land. Similarly, Buckingham Palace, the official residence of the British royal family, covers a large area of central London. Finally, both cities were severely damaged in air raids during the Second World War. About twenty thousand people died in London during the Blitz, and more than five times that number died in the bombing of Tokyo.

However, there are several key differences between the two cities. First, London has a much longer history than Tokyo. Indeed, it was founded as a capital city by the Romans more than two thousand years ago. In contrast, Tokyo did not become the capital of Japan until 1868. A second difference is that London has significantly more public park space than Tokyo. Although there are many beautiful parks in Tokyo, London is less densely populated and has around twenty times more parkland. Finally, while both cities are international, London is more cosmopolitan than Tokyo. Over fifty percent of young Londoners have at least one parent who was born overseas. In spite of their differences, both cities are undoubtedly great places to live or visit.

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Compare & Contrast 3

Two Popular Characters

There are two key similarities between Hello Kitty, the fictional character cat, and the cartoon dog Snoopy. They are both small white animals that symbolize friendship, happiness, and a carefree life. Because they are so cute, they have been immensely popular in Japan, the USA, and many other countries for several decades. Another thing they have in common is that both of them are extensively used in advertising. For example, Snoopy has tied up with MetLife, a life insurance company, and Mister Donut. Similarly, pictures of Kitty can be found on countless Japanese products such as bags, pencil cases, and even laptop computers.

Nevertheless, there are three significant differences between Kitty and Snoopy. The first is that their paths to fame were very different. Whereas Kitty was originally designed as a character to boost sales of consumer goods, Snoopy started his career in the cartoon series "Peanuts." Second, Kitty lives in a world where there are no humans, only small animals such as cats and rabbits. In contrast, Snoopy is Charlie Brown's pet, and he lives in a world with fictitious humans. Third, Kitty and Snoopy are popular with different groups of people. Kitty tends to be liked by girls, but boys do not normally buy Kitty goods. Snoopy, on the other hand, is loved by a wide range of age groups, and by both sexes. Despite their differences, the points they have in common make it easy to understand why both characters are so popular.

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Compare & Contrast 4

Red Wine and Sake

There are two key similarities between red table wine and sake, or Japanese rice wine. First, both wine and sake have very long histories, dating back centuries. As a result, they each hold an important place in the cultures, and even the religions of the countries where they are brewed. For example, red wine is central to many Christian and Jewish religious ceremonies. Similarly, sake is drunk by the bride and groom at traditional Shinto weddings. Second, although both wine and sake are usually drunk cold, both can also be enjoyed as warm beverages. While mulled wine is famous in Christmas markets throughout Germany, "atsukan," or hot sake, is a very popular drink in winter in Japan.

However, there are four important differences between wine and sake. Firstly, the fermentation process for sake is much more complicated than the fermentation process for wine. For example, no additives are required for winemaking. Secondly, although both wine and sake are stored in wooden barrels, Japanese sake brewers prefer cedar because it gives a special flavor. In most western countries, oak is used. Thirdly, unlike sake, it is customary to mix wine with other things. For instance, herbs are added to mulled wine, and fruit and lemonade are added to wine to make "sangria," a Spanish beverage. The only things ever added to sake are gold flakes. Finally, while red wine is made in many different countries, most rice wine is made in Japan. Despite their differences, red wine and sake are both culturally important in the countries where they are drunk.

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Compare & Contrast 5

Two Styles of Wrestling

When you hear the word "wrestling," what type of wrestling do you think of? Two of the most popular types are sumo and pro-wrestling. There are four key similarities between sumo and pro-wrestling. The first is that, unlike Greco-Roman wrestling, neither is an Olympic event. The second is that the purpose of both sports is to dominate your opponent, either by throwing him to the ground or by pushing him out of the ring. The sports also share a number of common rules. For example, while slapping is allowed, punching is forbidden. Finally, unlike other sports such as boxing, video can be used in both sumo and pro-wrestling to decide the outcome of a bout when the referee is unsure.

However, there are important differences between these two styles of wrestling. First, although there is a women's world sumo championship, women do not generally take part in the sport. In contrast, there have been many female pro-wrestling superstars, such as the Canadian Trish Stratus. A second difference is that in sumo, wrestlers must follow a formal code. For example, they have to wear their hair in a topknot and wear a traditional belt called a "mawashi," whereas pro-wrestlers can wear whatever they like. A third difference is that a sumo bout usually lasts only a minute or two, whereas a pro-wrestling contest can continue for more than thirty minutes. Although they are different in some respects, it is easy to see why fans of one are often also interested in the other.

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Words & Phrases

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Compare & Contrast 6

Two Warlords

There are several similarities between the warlords Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582) and Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-1598). First and foremost, historians generally agree that they were two of the most influential figures in the unification of Japan as we know it today. A further similarity is that neither of them ever achieved the title of "shogun." They both rose to power due to their excellence on the battlefield, and there are plenty of examples of their military genius. Nobunaga built dummy soldiers made of straw and dressed them well enough to confuse and defeat his enemies, and Hideyoshi diverted a river to flood and capture Takamatsu Castle.

Despite their similarities, there are three key differences between these two great men. The first concerns their background. Whereas Nobunaga was the son of a warlord, Hideyoshi was born into a peasant family. The second difference was their attitude to Christianity. Nobunaga accepted the Christian religion and deepened diplomatic ties with European countries. Hideyoshi, however, saw Christianity as a threat to his regime and put twenty-six Christians to death in Nagasaki in 1597. The final difference is in the way they died. Hideyoshi died of illness, but Nobunaga committed "seppuku," or ritual suicide, following betrayal by one of his generals. Despite their differing backgrounds and ideologies, experts agree that both are extremely influential characters in Japanese history.

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The Taste of Broccoli

For most of my life, I hated broccoli. I could not stand either its smell or its taste. When I was in kindergarten, my mother would often put some in my lunchbox. I used to hate finding it there when I opened the box at lunchtime. Since there was a rule that we could not play outside until we had finished our lunch, I sometimes ended up going out with my mouth full of this horrible vegetable. My mother wanted me to eat broccoli because she knew it was good for me, so she decided to cover it with mayonnaise. Unfortunately, this did not help, and I could not eat broccoli no matter how it was disguised.

Time went by, and I became a university student and moved from Kyoto to Sapporo. I loved the taste of the local food in Hokkaido, such as "ramen," "kaisen don," and barbecued lamb. My favorite, however, was soup curry. There are plenty of soup curry restaurants in Sapporo, and I visited as many as I could. Finally, I came across one that I really liked, and I asked a waitress what the best topping was. "It's broccoli," she replied. Obviously, I was in two minds about this recommendation, but I ordered it anyway. It was delicious. Since that day, I have never had a problem with broccoli. Thanks to soup curry, I now enjoy the vegetable that I used to hate.

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(last sentence is a common secondary position for a topic sentence--it summarizes the info that went before it. Like drawing a conclusion.)

The Old Me and the New Me

Looking back at my life, I realize that I did not change very much until I was sixteen years old. In my childhood years, I used to be negative and unsociable. Because both my parents were teachers and worked all day, I spent a lot of time alone. When I was not at school, I just stayed in my room and read hundreds of books and comics. When I was ten, my parents decided that they wanted me to be more cheerful and active, so they persuaded me to join a baseball team. Although I later also joined the baseball club in junior high school, my personality did not change at all.

The turning point came in high school when I visited Toronto and New York on a short holiday. Although it was a real challenge to communicate in English, it was an exciting experience. Everything was fresh and interesting—the people, the culture, the buildings, and the history. After I returned, I knew I would probably not go abroad again for a long time, so I began to seek excitement and stimulation in my daily life in Japan. As a result, I became more positive, and perhaps even more assertive. With this new outlook, I find I enjoy life now much more than I used to.

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My Hometown

The area around my house in my hometown has completely changed. When I was a child, there were not many houses in my neighborhood. There was a strong sense of community, and we knew our neighbors very well. It was a great place to grow up because there were lots of places to play. In particular, the playground equipment in the elementary school ground was wonderful. I used to make secret bases there with my friends. For older children, there was a fantastic athletics field. There was also a lot of wildlife. In the summer, I used to spend hours and hours on the footpaths between the rice fields catching big bullfrogs. In the fall, I would run around the vacant land chasing dragonflies with a net.

Now, though, everything has changed. New houses are being built one after another, and the new residents hardly seem to know each other at all. Most of the playground equipment has been taken away because it was considered too dangerous, so the children no longer have anywhere to play. Even the track and field facilities slowly deteriorated and were finally pulled down. What is more, you hardly ever see any wildlife these days. Although my hometown has developed and become a more convenient place to live in many ways, the changes have made me feel a little sad.

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My Relationship with My Mother

When I was a child, my mother was incredibly strict. As soon as I did something wrong, she would yell at me. One day, when I was five years old, I hit my friend and made her cry. I was worried that I was going to be in trouble, so I ran away from kindergarten. My teacher soon found me and brought me back to the school, where my mother was already waiting. I will never forget the way she screamed at me. This is not to say, however, that she was always angry. Although it often seemed to me as if she did not like me very much, I do remember that she occasionally praised me affectionately as well. It made me so happy when she smiled at me.

Now that I am nineteen years old, my relationship with my mother has changed a lot. This may be partly because she is busy taking care of my brother, who is six years younger than me. Whatever the reason, she is generally much calmer than she used to be. She no longer gets angry or flies into a rage. Although I feel relieved about this, I also feel slightly guilty about my feelings towards her when I was young. Looking back now, I think it was because she was so strict with me that I became strong-willed and independent, and I am sorry for causing her so much trouble. However, there is one way in which my mother has not changed at all. She still has a very nice smile, and it still makes me happy to see it.

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Changing Attitudes towards Nuclear Power

Before March 11, 2011, many people in Japan considered nuclear power to be safe, clean, and cheap. Despite the accident in 1986 in Chernobyl, governments around the world continued to develop nuclear power generation because they believed that this accident was caused by problems with Soviet technology. Compared with the damage caused to the environment by the burning of fossil fuels, the nuclear option was an attractive one. In addition, people were told that uranium was cheaper than the coal, gas, and oil used in traditional power stations. In Japan, nuclear power plants also brought many benefits to the local communities that hosted them, with many of them becoming rich.

When the tsunami struck the Fukushima nuclear power plant in 2011, the public's attitude to nuclear power changed overnight. People came to realize that it was neither safe nor clean. They also realized that it was not even cheap when the costs of storing used fuel and cleaning up after an accident were taken into consideration. As a result of the disaster, the governments of Germany and France decided to review their policies and scale down their dependence on nuclear power. In contrast, the Japanese government has not yet stated a clear policy on power generation. Following the disaster at Fukushima, all nuclear power plants were shut down, but some were started up again one year later. One thing that is abundantly clear is that many more Japanese people are opposed to nuclear power than ever before.

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The Changing Status of Women in Japan

Compared to that of men, the social status of women in Japan was very low at the end of the Second World War. While their husbands worked, women were expected to stay at home and take care of their children, their parents, and even their husband's parents. Very few women had full time, paid employment. Furthermore, women were not allowed to vote, and they had no opportunity to appeal against injustices. However, thanks to the efforts of individuals such as Raichou Hiratsuka and Fusae Ichikawa, and thanks also to the influence of the United States, women were given suffrage in 1945. From this point on, their status began to improve. Women gradually started to establish themselves not only in politics, but also in the professions.

Today Japanese women are much closer to achieving the goal of equality with men. Many companies now allow women to come back to work after they have had children, and both men and women can take paid vacation for childcare. Also, more fathers are willing to spend time with their children than ever before. Furthermore, the percentage of women who go on to higher education is far higher than before the war. This has resulted in more women assuming leadership roles in a variety of academic and professional fields. Although there is still a long way to go, Japanese women of today unquestionably have a higher status in society than their mothers or their grandmothers did.

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The Problem of Urban Crows

In Japan, whatever the season, you may be woken up very early in the morning by the loud, harsh cawing of crows in your garden, or even on your balcony. Later on, when you make your way along the street to work or school, you may notice pieces of household garbage lying all over the sidewalk. Nearby, you will see these huge birds fighting over the scraps they have stolen from your garbage bags. If you disturb them, they may attack you with their sharp claws. To make matters worse, their numbers are increasing year by year. Is there anything that can be done about the crow problem?

To date, three solutions have been suggested. The first strategy is to attach blue nets to utility poles at garbage collection points so that garbage bags can be covered. Unfortunately, this does not work very well because crows can eat trash directly through the nets. The second solution is to remove their nests. This is effective, but nest removal is a slow and time-consuming operation, and there are thousands of crows in every city in Japan. A third solution is to offer cash rewards to people who shoot crows. While this may be a good method in the countryside, it is not a suitable way to deal with the problem in cities, for obvious reasons. The most effective strategy would be to make sure that all household garbage is placed inside secure containers at trash collection points. This way, crows would not be able to eat domestic food waste, and their numbers would surely decline.

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Problems & Solutions 2

Anyone for Breakfast?

According to a survey conducted by one Japanese university, 30 percent of its students skip breakfast almost every day. Indeed, this seems to be a problem with university students all over Japan. There are three main reasons for this unhealthy lifestyle. First, students often oversleep and do not have time to eat anything before going to class. Second, since a lot of students live by themselves, they have difficulty managing their own eating habits. Third, most college cafeterias do not open until late in the morning. This trend is a problem because students who attend morning lectures on empty stomachs are unlikely to have the energy to concentrate and study properly.

There are three potential ways to deal with the problem. The first is to encourage students to get up earlier. Even ten or twenty minutes would be enough time to eat a light breakfast. The second possibility is to educate students through courses in diet and nutrition. The third solution is to open the school cafeterias earlier in the morning. This third way of tackling the problem would be, in my opinion, the most likely to succeed, especially if events were organized in the restaurant. For example, concerts or comedy shows could help to draw in customers and make breakfast time an exciting social occasion. If more students began the day with a good meal, they might become livelier and more productive in their morning classes.

(237 words)

Words & Phrases

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Problems & Solutions ③

Stopping the Illegal Fossil Trade

Today, large numbers of dinosaur fossils are being illegally excavated all over the world. In China and Mongolia, where scientists have been discovering many important new dinosaur sites, illegal digging is a serious problem. Every year, hundreds of precious fossils are smuggled out of the country and sold to private collectors. A complete Tyrannosaurus skeleton can sell for several million dollars. Although the trade is illegal, it is not always possible to prove where a skeleton came from. To make matters worse, it may not be possible to prove that the bones were exported after bans on exports were imposed. Museums and scientific groups sometimes raise money to buy fossils in auctions, but the fossils usually have limited scientific value because there is no data from the excavation site. What can we do to protect dinosaur fossils?

Experts have suggested two ways to deal with the problem. First, existing laws against the illegal fossil trade need to be enforced more effectively. To do this, there must be more cooperation, both local and international, between law enforcement agencies, customs officials, and auction houses. Although providing the necessary training might be difficult, and corruption is a major obstacle, these problems are not insurmountable. The second approach is to encourage volunteers to protect fossils at the sites. For example, at one big dinosaur site at Tanba in Hyogo Prefecture, volunteers organize patrols to discourage illegal digging. This is effective because it raises awareness about the problem among the public. It is to be hoped that the volunteer group system will spread to other important sites around the world in the future.

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Words & Phrases

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Dealing with Coastal Erosion

In my hometown, the amount of sand on the beach is decreasing year by year due to coastal erosion. There are two reasons for this. The first is that fine gravel is being taken from the beach for use in the manufacture of concrete. The second reason is the construction of dams that stem the supply of sands from the mountains to the lower reaches of the rivers. In the past, this supply of fresh sand from the rivers was enough to replace sand washed away by tidal currents or blown away in storms. At present, the problem is so bad that the beach is no longer open to swimmers in the summer. This has resulted in a decline in the number of tourists, which has badly affected the local economy.

There are four possible solutions to the problem. First, gathering gravel from the beach for concrete making must be banned. Second, barriers need to be built at regular intervals along the beach. These are walls that run down the beach and into the sea. Although they do not look very nice, they prevent sand from being washed away, which is why they are used in beach resorts all over the world. The third solution is to bring in sand from other areas to replace the sand that has been lost. The final solution is to build sand dunes behind the beach. These would act as wind breaks to prevent the sand from being blown away. However, bringing in new sand and building dunes will not make any difference unless barrier walls are built first. In other words, it is clear that solving this problem will require a combination of effective strategies.

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First two sentences work together as a topic sentence

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Problems & Solutions 5

Kicking Bullies out of Schools

In October 2011, a thirteen-year-old middle school student in Shiga Prefecture committed suicide following severe bullying by at least three of his classmates. The case threw the problem of bullying at schools in Japan under the spotlight, but not for the first time. In February 1986, a Tokyo schoolboy of the same age took his own life as a result of constant harassment. Despite huge media attention, the 2011 case showed that nothing has been done about the problem in the intervening years. Furthermore, with 144,054 cases of bullying at schools reported to the Ministry of Education between April and September 2012, the problem appears to be getting worse.

Commentators in the media have suggested a number of ways of dealing with the issue. For example, the idea of sending bullies away to special farms has attracted some interest. School troublemakers would be given a taste of hard work and a chance to reflect upon their bad behavior. Recently, there has also been a great deal of enthusiasm for a new website where school children can report cases of bullying. The root of the bullying problem, however, probably lies in the fact that, with forty students in one classroom, class sizes in Japan are much too large. In this situation, teachers cannot be expected to know what is going on between their pupils, let alone deal with their problems. Currently, Japan spends less money per head than any other developed country on education. With smaller classes and more teachers, children could be supervised more effectively, and the number of bullying cases would decline.

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Paying for NHK TV

In Japan, like in the UK, all households with televisions are required by law to pay for a TV license. In Japan, the national broadcaster is called "Nippon Hoso Kyoku," or "NHK." About 96 percent of NHK's revenue comes from the sale of these licenses, which cost about 2,300 yen a month for the right to view both satellite and terrestrial channels. The problem is that since there are no fines for non-payment, around a quarter of households with TVs do not pay. This represents a massive loss of income for the state-owned TV corporation. As it stands, some people who do not watch NHK still pay, while others watch the channel but refuse to purchase a license. It is clear that this system is flawed, and that something must be done about it.

In order to deal with the problem, two approaches have been suggested. The first is to introduce penalties for viewers who do not pay. The idea is based on a system used in the UK where television detector vans catch people who are watching without a license. First time offenders have to pay a fine, but repeat offenders can be jailed. However, many people complain that this system is too severe. The second idea is to ask viewers to buy access codes instead of licenses. This method would certainly be more effective because it would be impossible to view NHK programs without paying. The only obstacle is the principle of public broadcasting and NHK's mission to broadcast as widely as possible. Nevertheless, the fee collection system is not working, so surely it is only a matter of time before pre-paid access codes are introduced.

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For & Against 1

Arguments For and Against Introducing Daylight Saving Time

Since the accident at the Fukushima nuclear power plant, lawmakers in Japan have been discussing ways to save energy. One suggestion has been to introduce daylight saving time (DST), and put the clocks forward one hour in the summer. This system has been adopted in most major industrialized countries, so many feel that it is now time for Japan to follow suit. What are the arguments for and against increasing the amount of daylight in the evening in summertime?

Proponents of DST claim that the system would bring several benefits to the country. First and foremost, they say that the amount of energy used in the evening could be cut significantly by reducing the need for artificial light. They also claim that the economy would be boosted if more people went out to shops and cafés to take advantage of the extra hour of daylight after finishing work or school. Finally, they suggest that the number of traffic accidents among both drivers and pedestrians would decrease if it got dark one hour later.

Opponents of the scheme argue, however, that introducing DST would not make any difference. First, they argue that putting the clocks forward would not save much power because artificial light is used even during the daytime in schools, offices, and shops. Second, they claim that people would be unlikely to change their lifestyles much with just an extra hour of daylight. In fact, most salaried workers would probably not want to be seen leaving work while it is still light outside, and many would choose to remain at their workplace. Finally, while they concede that there would be fewer traffic accidents in the evening, they point out that there would be a corresponding increase in fatalities in the dark early mornings. In conclusion, although the idea of DST is attractive in some respects, it would probably be better to look for other ways to save energy

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Words & Phrases

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For & Against 2

Changing the Start of the School Year

Japan is one of only seven countries that starts its school year in April. Recently, however, there have been calls to move the beginning of the academic year to September to bring Japan into line with most of the rest of the world. Indeed, of Japan's 744 universities, 200 already provide opportunities for students to enroll in September. Although some experts in education oppose the plan, many argue that there are good reasons for changing the academic calendar.

Supporters of the change have put forward three arguments for a fall start. The first is that a fall start would mean universities in Japan could organize one-year exchange programs with universities in other countries more easily than is possible at present. The second is that it may benefit thousands of high school students who fail the January entrance examinations. Under the new system, these so-called "ronin" would have another chance to take the exams in June or July. Finally, high school graduates could gain useful experience during the "gap" time between graduating high school and starting university. For example, they could travel, study, or work abroad.

In contrast, opponents have voiced a number of concerns about the proposed change. To begin with, very few students have chosen to enroll in September at colleges where it is already possible to do so. Added to this, there is no proof that the change would attract more international students. The vast majority of Japanese universities have very low numbers of foreign students and no courses in English for students with no Japanese language skills. Finally, critics say that delaying the date of university entrance would simply mean that students would waste a year of their lives. As a result, parents might have to support their children for five years instead of only four. On balance, it would probably be prudent to study the effects of the change at a small number of universities before adopting it on a national basis.

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Words & Phrases

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Topic 6

Topic 6

The Use of Cell Phones in Schools

These days, ownership of a cell phone is common among young people, even elementary school students. Indeed, it has become acceptable to use them almost anywhere. However, one issue that troubles both parents and teachers is the question of whether schoolchildren should be allowed to bring their phones to school, and in particular, whether they should be allowed to use them in the classroom.

Many people are in favor of free access to mobile technology at school for the following reasons. First, cell phones can be used to prevent crime. For example, youngsters can call the police or someone they know if something happens to them on their way to school. Also, some cell phones have GPS functions, so parents can know where their children are at all times. In addition, since most cell phones can access the Internet, they can be a valuable source of learning, giving children access to a wealth of information from countless sources.

However, many people, particularly teachers, are against allowing children to bring cell phones to school. The main argument is that children would use their phones for sending and receiving text messages, playing games, or social networking during lessons. Children have also been known to use their phones for bullying or sending hate mail to their classmates. Another reason teachers think cell phones should be banned is that students can use them for cheating on class assignments and tests. Finally, because cell phones have cameras, students can make videos of their teachers in secret and upload them to YouTube. For these reasons, many people believe that children should be allowed to take their phones to school, but that they should be required to keep them in their lockers during school hours.

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The Tattoo Taboo

Tattoos in Japan have long been associated with organized crime groups known as "yakuza." In order to exclude members of these criminal gangs, many spas and sports clubs in Japan refuse entry to customers with tattoos. Despite this negative association, however, tattoos are becoming more popular, especially among young women. At the same time, discrimination against people with tattoos appears to be on the rise. For example, it may be difficult for them to find employment, get a bank loan, or take out life insurance policies. Is it time to end the tattoo taboo?

It is widely argued that barring people with tattoos from public baths and swimming pools is unfair. For one thing, many people with ink artwork on their bodies are decent, law-abiding citizens. Added to this, as taxpayers they contribute to the funding of the public swimming pools in which they are not allowed to swim. Besides, Japan seems to be the only nation in the world that tolerates this form of discrimination. It seems strange that a country would be willing to deny its citizens the right to follow an exciting global fashion, and to copy the lifestyle of celebrities such as David Beckham.

On the other hand, there are many arguments for maintaining the ban. With regard to spas and sports clubs, private businesses may find that without a ban, they would lose customers. This is understandable because some people may find it uncomfortable to be sitting in a bath next to someone who might be a criminal. Second, there is evidence in cities like Osaka that criminal gangs are using their connections to find jobs for their members in the public sector. In other words, barring people with tattoos is an acceptable way to limit the influence of the yakuza in public life. Although there are strong arguments for removing the ban, I believe that it should be maintained, as the fight against organized crime is clearly a more important consideration than fashion.

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Should Universities Enforce the Attendance Rule?

Universities in Japan generally have a rule that students must attend at least two thirds of the classes in order to receive credit for a course. In practice, this means that a student must attend a minimum of ten out of fifteen classes in a semester or risk automatic failure. However, while some professors keep a record of attendance, it seems that others turn a blind eye to their absentee students.

There are several reasons why some students disagree with strict attendance policies at college. To begin with, they say that they are too busy working at their part-time jobs or taking part in club activities to attend class regularly. Others complain that their lectures are boring, and that there is no point in attending.

Additionally, they point out that strict attendance rules force students to come to class even when they are sick, so these people end up spreading diseases to the rest of the class. The final argument is that many universities are in big cities where there are often problems with public transportation in winter, so it may be simply impossible for a number of students to get to class on time.

Nonetheless, other students feel that attendance rules should be strictly applied. The most common reason they give is that those who miss classes usually do not have a good excuse for being absent. Most students who cut class do so simply because they oversleep. Furthermore, if a large number of students are absent every week, it makes it difficult for teachers to provide continuity in the course. Finally, those who support strict attendance rules point out that students who skip classes do not learn the material, so they are wasting their time at university. All things considered, I believe that students who skip too many classes should not be allowed to receive credit for courses at university.

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Is Space Exploration Worth the Money?

According to one source, a total of 35 billion dollars is spent every year on space exploration in the world today. The money covers the costs of both manned missions, such as the International Space Station, and unmanned missions like NASA's latest Mars rover. Although the latter project appears to have been a success, it follows decades of failure. For example, in 1999, NASA lost contact with an unmanned spacecraft that cost 165 million dollars to build.

Critics of space exploration argue that these expeditions should not be continued for three reasons. First, they claim that it is extremely unlikely that scientists will ever find anything in space that could be useful for mankind.

Although some scientists believe that Mars could support life, opponents say that there is nothing on the planet except rocks. Second, they feel that the money should be spent on more important projects on Earth, such as reducing global poverty. Finally, they point out that many countries only spend money on space exploration in order to enhance national prestige. It seems absurd that a country like India, with 30 percent of its population living on about fifty cents a day or less, has plans to launch its own Mars mission.

In contrast, others strongly disagree with these viewpoints. To begin with, they say that we need to continue exploring in order to answer important questions. For example, even if there is no life on Mars or other planets, we should try to find out if there ever was. Furthermore, the amount of money spent on these missions is quite small as a percentage of national budgets. To put the sum in perspective, Americans spend much more money on alcohol and gambling every year than NASA spends on its space programs. Also, they argue that the problem of global poverty could not be solved simply by abandoning space exploration. Taking all of these arguments into consideration, I believe that we should continue to explore our universe.

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whole first para is intro material, with no clear topic sentence. Title actually functions as one

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