

HUNTER COLLEGE READING/WRITING CENTER
Writing Across the Curriculum: The CPE Examination
Sample Descriptive Outline 1

The following is an outline of the major ideas and their sub-points in Philip Slater's "Engagement and Detachment: Getting Involved."

(From *The Pursuit of Loneliness*, by Philip Slater. Copyright © 1970, 1976 by Philip Slater)

Thesis: Americans tend to avoid chronic social problems.

I. The American tendency to look for quick, short-term solutions exacerbates social problems rather than solving them.

A. We engage in self-deception about this irrational approach.

B. The highly visible "gesture" wins out over genuinely pragmatic solutions.

II. People who point to the inefficacy of our solutions to social problems are considered extremists.

A. Once any action is taken, the problem is considered to have been sufficiently addressed.

B. The majority of Americans are impatient when confronting complex social problems.

III. The tendency to avoid such problems is part of the essential American character.

A. This country was founded by people who were unsuccessful at dealing with social problems in their home countries.

B. What is often seen as the positive side of American ambition and mobility actually has negative outcomes of selfishness and materialism.

IV. The severe contrast between our wealth and care of the needy results from and also reinforces our avoidance tendencies.

A. No larger cooperative community exists that would face social problems together.

B. The onus for solving the problems is put on the family unit.

Conclusion: Our irrational, quick-fix approach to America's social problems degrades the overall quality of our lives.