

# Sample Passing Proficiency Exam

## with instructor comments

### The Dance is Still Danced

Men and women approach everyday life completely differently, whether in social situations, home, work, or in communications throughout the day. Deborah Tannen's "Sex, Lies, and Conversation" and Anna Quindlen's "Between the Sexes, a Great Divide" illustrate this point. Both authors use different means to illustrate their ideas, but each essentially supports the same argument about men and women. Although both authors reason that men and women are inherently distinct kinds of communicators from childhood, they still find ways to live and grow together.

Both Tannen and Quindlen open up their arguments with personal narratives, though Tannen's is about a specific situation and Quindlen's is more general. This is effective in that this strategy draws the reader into the argument in hope of striking a personal memory, belief, or idea in the reader. Tannen then continues dramatically by delivering the reader a statistic about "a virtual epidemic of failed conversation" (Tannen 1). This introduction of quantifiable data also appeals to the reader, as its authority is undeniable and not personal.

Tannen explains that when she wrote this article the current divorce rate was "nearly 50 percent" (Tannen 1). After this statistic, she mentions that in her own research the complaints from women were not from "tangible inequities" between men and women but instead based on communication or lack thereof (Tannen 1). Quindlen, although in a less statistical, more relaxed fashion makes the same point. She does so after writing about her personal memory: "The gap" (Quindlen 1). She creates a picture for the reader to imagine the gap on the dance floor between girls and boys at a first boy-girl party attended, but like Tannen, she is not speaking about a "tangible" thing. Quindlen argues that the "gap" is always there because "men are the other." (Quindlen 1). But just as this is the case for both authors, for women are an "other", too, which both authors recognize. To be an "other" is not tangible, most do not want to recognize this, because then the difference will have to be recognized and that can be, for lack of a better word, scary. Both authors appreciate this. The difference that "simply is," as Quindlen puts it, is what creates communication problems between men and women, and Tannen agrees. But one might ask him/herself, where do these "gaps" and differences begin? Both Tannen and Quindlen consider this as well.

Both authors discuss how this gap between men and women that affects their communication in adulthood starts: childhood. Tannen cites Stanford University's

**Comment [EDL1]:** Using a title, even on the p.e., can help the writer and the reader understand the direction the argument is heading.

**Comment [EDL2]:** In the opening sentence, the writer makes a broad connection between the two articles.

**Comment [EDL3]:** Note how this writer specifically includes both authors' names and both readings. This kind of locating is extremely important for the reader. After this, it is sufficient to reference the authors by LAST NAME only (as in this essay), by the reading's title, or by some combination.

**Comment [EDL4]:** This writer is making an effort to vary word choice. For example, if you find yourself overusing a basic term like "different," check your dictionary for variations. Readers appreciate this kind of attention to detail.

**Comment [EDL5]:** Note that every paragraph of the p.e. ideally will reference both readings.

Academic writing involves a writer's responsible response to other writers.

**Comment [EDL6]:** Following a specific observation about the texts, it is often useful to include an explanation of WHY you have included this observation. In this case, the writer explains the significance of her observation. You might also try this type of responsive writing:

This is significant because . . .  
or  
This fact is particularly relevant in that . . .

**Comment [EDL7]:** Note that the writer has included carefully selected quotations from each reading. Aim to sub-select your included matter. Use all that you include, and be sure to comment directly on all included matter.

Eleanor Maccoby's research report about how "children's development is most influenced by the social structure of peer interactions. Boys and girls tend to play with children of their own gender . . ." (Tannen 2). These differences which start during such a young age with their peers creates what Tannen parallels to "cross-cultural communication." It is as if men and women, beginning as boys and girls, as quoted from a popular title, inhabit different planets. Although the whole Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus title is not meant to be interpreted literally, both authors support that sometimes it seems that way. Quindlen supports this idea about where these differences stem and grow from: "In children you can see the beginnings . . . children try to nail down the world, and themselves, in a very primitive and real way," (Quindlen 2). Quindlen recalls when one of her sons began recognizing these physical differences between males and females and that "it helped him classify the world" (Quindlen 2). Certainly, such categorization can be useful but only if it does not prevent understanding.

While Tannen and Quindlen discuss the "gap," the differences, and the beginnings of the communication problems between men and women, they do not finish by leaving the reader without solution. Despite all of these inherent differences in men and women which cause problems, both authors show that men and women still find ways to live and grow together. To illuminate this "bottom line," both authors end in the same way: with their own personal insights for solution. Tannen, having more formal research, offers a solution of "cross-cultural understanding" that does not cast blame on either men or women for the differences. By viewing men and women's communication as cross-cultural, Tannen claims that improvement in relationships, marriage and in general will occur. Quindlen seems to agree, even if it is in a less formal way, as she alludes to her boy-girl dance floor example: "I must never forget, I suppose, that even in the gym, with all that space between us, we still managed to pick partners and dance. It's the dance that's important, not the difference," (Quindlen 2). Quindlen's reference to "dance" essentially is Tannen's solution of "cross-cultural understanding." Quindlen's "dance" is how men and women have and will continue to interact, hopefully, as both authors stated, to make step towards improvement in communication and in everyday life.

Deborah Tannen and Anna Quindlen have differences in their writing, one based more on research and study and the other from personal perspective. Nonetheless, their points support each other's about the communication distinctions between men and women. Ultimately, both concede that despite these oppositions between male and female, the dance is still danced.

**Comment [EDL8]:** This point sentence is very important in terms of leading the reader to the writer's conclusion.

The writer is advocating the usefulness of reading these works by Tannen and Quindlen.

**Comment [EDL9]:** Although this is not a particularly elegant concluding paragraph, it still demonstrates writing proficiency. The essay, on the whole, has made valid connections between the two readings. The writer, on the whole, has asserted her own views on what those other writers have claimed.

**Comment [EDL10]:** This is a fine concluding sentence, as it reminds the reader of Quindlen's metaphor and heightens the reader's awareness of gendered communication.