

Model Timed Essay: **a 75-minute midterm responding to a prompt on a non-fiction text**

This is an open-book essay exam. Compose an essay with separated paragraphs: an introduction that contains a thesis (your answer with your opinion to the prompt), body paragraphs with evidence from the text and your own analysis, and a sense of closure at the end. Be sure to answer all parts of the prompt in your response. You will have 75 minutes:

Martin Fletcher in his book *Breaking News*, tells his accounts of being a war correspondent for 30 years in Africa and the Middle East, and in the beginning, he says his book is about: “a series of true-life-adventure stories that expose the haunting dilemmas journalists face as we help write the first draft of history: (xii). Describe 3 of those major moral dilemmas he discusses and the context that provoked each (when and where he was). Analyze each struggle by telling what you think of his choices in the face of each. Finally, looking at these moral struggles together, what do you think this reveals about war and the reporting on war.

This part was not given on the exam—this is helpful advice on breaking down prompts:

TO BEGIN: Before writing the essay, quickly break down the prompt so you stay focused and you can generate a quick outline using the prompt that ensures you will directly respond to what was asked. The rhetoric gives simple steps to do this quickly:

(1) **Read the prompt carefully and several times:** do not “rush in” and start writing as this puts you in danger of writing off topic or missing important parts of the prompt. Take a moment and read the prompt through several times.

(2) **Sum up the topic in a few words:** What is the focus of the prompt? Narrow down the focus of the prompt in a word or two to help you mentally focus as well.

3 of Fletcher’s major moral dilemmas

(3) **Circle and/or underline the key words:** Circle or underline the command verbs or question words that are telling you do something or asking you about something.

(4) **Identify and count the required steps in the writing task:** this is a crucial step in timed writing. You don’t want to overlook any parts of the question and get little to no credit for your work as a result. Number the parts of the prompt you need to address in your essay and oftentimes you can even use this as an informal outline for the essay.

(1) Describe 3 major moral dilemmas Fletcher discusses: when and where he was.

(2) Analyze each struggle by telling what you think of his choices in the face of each.

(3) Finally, looking at these moral struggles together, what do you think this reveals about war and the reporting on war.

Breaking News by Martin Fletcher places a heavy focus on the many moral dilemmas war correspondents face when carrying out their work of reporting on crises around the world. It is obvious to most that those active in conflicts, such as combatants, will face many morally challenging situations. However, it may be less obvious that war correspondents, although neutral in conflict, are far from immune to the same kind of moral dilemmas that are the result of war and conflict. Throughout his career, Fletcher is exposed to many situations that challenge his moral and ethical beliefs. How Fletcher chooses to react to these situations reveals much about Fletcher's true motivations. To gain a better understanding of what drives Fletcher, it is important to analyze these specific morally challenging situations and the decisions Fletcher chooses to make. While it is easy to assume the motivations of war correspondents such as Fletcher are merely to achieve good television ratings or career advancement, Fletcher's decisions in the face of moral dilemmas illustrate more noble motivations. Fletcher's decisions, although potentially controversial, showcase the good that comes from war correspondents and Fletcher's relentless search to reveal the truth and inspire support for victims of conflict.

One of the major moral dilemmas Fletcher faces is whether or not to film a young girl's death by starvation while reporting on the widespread famine in Somalia. Fletcher ultimately makes the right decision to film the death, allowing the rest of the world to grasp the extent of the damage in Somalia hopefully inspiring worldwide support for the other victims. During Fletcher's stay in Somalia in the early 1990s, he is tasked with an assignment to portray death by starvation to the world. Fletcher stumbles upon a young Somali girl named Fida Ibrahim, who had been starving to death so walked from her village for over three weeks straight, covering a distance of over 120 miles. In contrast to the warlords such as General Aidid contributing to and profiting greatly from the famine in Somalia, unfortunate victims such as Ibrahim were quite literally paying the ultimate price. While Fletcher desperately wants to show the world the horrible effects that famine has on Somalia and the drastic

need for aid, Fletcher also wants to maintain the dignity of the victims, including Ibrahim. To illustrate Fletcher's struggle, he says, "I couldn't imagine anything more callous. But, I also couldn't imagine a stronger way to connect to the audience" (160). While Fletcher does struggle with the moral question of whether or not to film Ibrahim's death, Fletcher ultimately and rightly decides that Ibrahim's dignity is a necessary cost in order to save many other victims from this same loss of dignity and life. While Ibrahim's death is horrific, her story helped spread awareness of the extent of damage in Somalia. Six months after the warlords lost power in Somalia and in response to the reports shared by Fletcher and the other correspondents, UN food aid was sent and was able to reach its intended recipients. With a stable supply of food aid and support from the rest of the world, death by famine in Somalia drastically diminished. Directly due to Fletcher's willingness to spread truth to the world, many victims who would have suffered the same fate as Fida Ibrahim were now able to get the help they needed. While Fletcher may have struggled with the morality of his decision, Fletcher ultimately made the right choice to film the death and humanize famine by putting a face to it.

While in Israel Fletcher is again faced with another moral dilemma of whether or not to film death when offered the opportunity to film the executions of two conspirators against Palestinian freedom fighters; Fletcher rightfully declines, seeing no benefit for the victims. Late into Fletcher's career, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Fletcher is assigned to report on war and terrorist activity taking place within Israel. Fletcher establishes professional relationships on both sides of the conflict in order to accurately report on the events taking place. During this time Fletcher receives an exclusive invitation from one of his professional contacts within the al-Aska Martyrs' Brigades, one of the main Palestinian terrorist organizations, to film a "wedding," which he knows is code for an execution. Two conspirators against the al-Aska Martyrs' Brigades were caught leaking information to the Israeli government and were now going to pay the ultimate price. Unlike the situation with Fida Ibrahim where

Fletcher knew that by making a moral compromise was for the greater good, Fletcher saw no good outcome to filming this execution. To illustrate Fletcher's feelings on the matter, he says, "After some soul-searching, I did not accept the telephone invitation. I didn't want to witness a murder, even if it was going to happen anyway. I couldn't have prevented the killing of the two collaborators" (226). What is interesting about Fletcher declining this opportunity is that although this opportunity may have helped boost ratings for Fletcher's reporting, Fletcher saw no benefits for the victims by making their death public. This gives a greater glimpse into Fletcher's true motivations, as he is not willing to make moral compromises merely for career advancement. Instead, Fletcher's true concerns lie with unveiling truth and helping victims of conflict. Again we see Fletcher make the right choice in the face of a moral dilemma, revealing the more noble motivations of war correspondence.

Arguably the most challenging moral dilemma Fletcher encounters occurs while reporting on the suicide bombings that took place in Israel, providing Fletcher with the challenge of maintaining an unbiased view between the Israeli victims and the Palestinian freedom fighters while also worrying about the safety of his own friends and family. In the early 2000s, Fletcher is living in Israel with his wife and children. During this time, Israel is experiencing a massive surge in Palestinian suicide bombings. Fletcher is tasked with reporting on the war between Israel and Palestine and providing an unbiased account of both sides of the conflict. This presents Fletcher with one of the toughest struggles of his career. How can Fletcher present an unbiased view of both the Israelis and the Palestinians while he and his family are Jews living in Israel and experiencing the threat of the Palestinian suicide bombers first hand? Making Fletcher's challenge even more difficult are the deaths of multiple close friends' children due to the horrific suicide bombings. Fletcher constantly struggles with the question of whether his own children will be the next victims. Illustrating Fletcher's struggle, he says, "My assignment challenged every journalistic tenet. How could I remain objective and nod politely as a killer

explained why the Jews, my people, were dogs and pigs?" (216). During this time period Fletcher is able to gain an audience with Alaa, one of the leaders of al-Aska Martyrs' Brigades , as well as Alaa's brother Ahmed, the bomb maker. As Fletcher maintains a professional relationship with these two, Fletcher develops a strange kind of fondness for them and is able to understand their views in contrast with the views of Israel. Despite the mental strains of the massive death tolls in Israel due to terrorist acts, Fletcher is able to maintain an unbiased view on the events that took place in Israel during the early 2000s. Instead of taking one side on the issue, Fletcher chooses to make the issue about those who seek peace and those who seek war, rather than Palestinians versus Israelis. By Fletcher being able to maintain his journalistic obligation of remaining unbiased despite the morally challenging circumstances he encounters, Fletcher is able to accurately represent both sides of the conflict to the world. It would have been very easy for Fletcher to use this opportunity to voice his own personal opinions as a son whose Jewish parents fled the Nazi's in World War II. Instead, Fletcher's decisions showcase his true motivations of revealing truth for the greater good rather than tailoring world events to support his personal viewpoints.

When closely analyzing the morally challenging choices Fletcher makes throughout his career, it can be identified that Fletcher's motivations are not simply about high ratings or public praise. Fletcher reveals not only the many struggles that war correspondents face, but also the noble motivation of revealing truth to the world and seeking aid for victims of crisis. Fletcher sums up his motivations when he says, "In a world obsessed with celebrities, wealth, and success, I have focused on those left behind, on those who paid the price" (241-242). Although many of Fletcher's choices can be viewed as controversial, Fletcher ultimately achieves his goal of spreading awareness for victims of conflict around the world. While Fletcher demonstrates a willingness to make moral sacrifices in the effort of spreading awareness, Fletcher also demonstrates restraint when it is clear that moral compromise will not lead to

any benefits such as aid or support for the victims of the conflicts he is reporting on. Analyzing Fletcher's decisions should force us to evaluate our own judgements about war correspondents and the decisions they make. While it is easy to assume war is fought for merely selfish reasons and the motivations of war correspondents are just as selfish, Fletcher's choices in morally challenging situations paint a contrasting picture. What should be gleaned from Fletcher's accounts is that while not always perfectly executed, war correspondents strive to reveal truth and inspire the world to make changes and come to the aid of those around the world who desperately need it.