

Sample Skills Passage and Questions

How will the MCAT exam ask you to demonstrate each of the critical analysis and reasoning skills? The sample passage and questions that follow provide some examples.

Passage

The exhibition, *The Garry Winogrand Game of Photography*, was a reminder of why so many people consider Winogrand to be one of the great American photographers of the twentieth century. Although they continue to acquire further layers of historical specificity, his street photographs, many of them shot in Midtown Manhattan in the 1950s and 1960s, have lost none of their kinetic immediacy; the best of his animal photographs provide sly, incisive views of the human condition; his pictures from the American road grab the wheel from Walker Evans and Robert Frank to send the genre on an unpredictable detour; in photographing all manner of public events, from antiwar demonstrations to art-world parties to political press conferences, Winogrand added significantly to the pictorial record of midcentury United States history. With his liking for seemingly random compositions and his famous tilted-frame effect, Winogrand made photographs that initially struck many viewers as devoid of formal strengths. Now, however, we can appreciate the subtlety and unexpectedness of his framing and the complex interplay he often achieves between anecdote and form.

In putting together the exhibition, one of the curators, Richard Misrach, decided to focus on an aspect of Winogrand's work to which little attention had been given: the color slides. Winogrand began shooting color photos in the 1950s and continued doing so until the late 1960s. He never explained why he stopped shooting in color, but the difficulty and expense of making color prints and their instability may have contributed to his decision.

Misrach was especially drawn to the photographs Winogrand made at boxing matches in the 1950s, and his selections for the exhibition included eighteen boxing shots. In each, the fighters' bodies are isolated against dark backgrounds and often fragmented by the out-of-focus, quasi-abstract ropes cutting across the frame. In one amazing, weirdly off-center shot, a boxer doubling up from a body blow appears to be ascending into the surrounding void.

This small selection whetted one's appetite for seeing more images from Winogrand's color work. However, it was the slides that caused some of the most heated arguments among curators. Bill Jay objected to the slides being shown in any format because they had never been edited by Winogrand. While the prints in the archive had already been chosen for enlargement by the photographer from contact sheets, Jay pointed out, the slides had undergone no such process. Jay insisted that the archive's hoard of thousands of slides and unproofed negatives should be used only for research and never published or exhibited.

Misrach came to his own defense by saying that if "curatorial laws" were followed, the "real hidden treasures" of the archive would never be seen by anyone. He also observed that Winogrand gave his photographs, slides, and negatives to the Center for Creative Photography without conditions, which implies permission to show and publish the work. If Winogrand didn't want the photographs in his archive to be seen, Misrach argued, he could have simply destroyed them. Indeed, as others remarked, some photographers have sought to exert control over the future of their work by destroying negatives.

Furthermore, some curators argued for the importance of posthumous discoveries of artists' work. And taking the discussion into a wider realm, one curator argued that the "artist is not always in the best position to judge his or her work," citing the example of author Franz Kafka asking Max Brod to destroy his manuscripts and how Brod had ignored the request, to the world's benefit.

Source: Adapted from R. Rubinstein, Snap Judgments: Exploring the Winograd Archive. Copyright 2002 by Brant Publications, Inc.