

The One Day portion of the exam consists of three questions: one about the beginning, one about the end, and one about a part of the middle that you like the most.

- 1. What has Gene Weingarten attempted in the lede and how does he achieve it?**
- 2. How would you describe the ending?**
- 3. If you had to select one chapter of this book as your favorite, which would it be?**

For our purposes, I've selected two excerpts that we will consider "the beginning" and "the end." Your answer to each question should be AT LEAST two or three paragraphs, composed of complete sentences and including quotes from the text. This portion of the exam should take no more than 90 minutes; plan to spend 20 to 30 minutes on each question.

THE BEGINNING

is five paragraphs from the chapter titled "The Day."

It is a Sunday, the 362nd day of the year of Chernobyl and Challenger, when preventable failures of technology humbled two superpowers.

The moon is a skinny slice. Before daybreak, its faintness will abet innumerable crimes, including a theft of extraordinary audacity and a murder of unfathomable brutality. Eighteen hours later, narrower still, it will lend an overhead wink to a lifelong romance getting off to its preposterous start.

At midnight on the East Coast, a team of doctors and nurses is hastily assembling to attempt something not one of them has ever done before, except in macabre rehearsals with corpses in the morgue. They've been waiting for weeks, to be summoned on a moment's notice. In the next few hours, they will try to save one life and help a family atone for the final unhinged act of another.

At midnight on the West Coast, a young woman's body lies undiscovered in a culvert beneath an abandoned highway overpass as her family crisscrosses the roads above in a frantic search to find her. They are on their own because police have refused to step in, on the grounds that in the life of a pretty blonde, being two hours late on a Saturday night is not late at all...

It was a day unlike any other, 23 hours 56 minutes and 4.0916 seconds of a planet speeding around Earth's axis at the velocity of a bullet, occupying a spiral of space that will never be revisited.

What has Gene Weingarten attempted in this lede and how does he achieve it? Be as specific as possible about the writing tools or literary devices he uses. Cite examples of cinematic language, as well as musicality achieved by repetition, rhythm, and alliteration. Is there a specific sentence you admire? Tell me why. This excerpt has lots of numbers and several specific measures of time. What effect do those figures have on you as a reader? Please answer in at least two paragraphs.

THE END is five paragraphs from the chapter titled “11:55 P.M., Oakland, California.”

BY THAT POINT, midnight had passed. The twenty-eighth day of the twelfth month of the year was done. Eva Baisey had gotten her new heart and Todd Thrane had lost his life trying to save babies, and baby Michael Green had been burned beyond recognition and Cara Knott had been pulled, dead, from a culvert and Ed Koch had been booed by his loyal constituents and the Confederate flag was marched home and someone had stolen the weather vane and Terry Dolan and Joel Resnicoff had died of AIDS and Brad Wilson had somehow survived his helicopter crash and the football replay had gone on and on and on and little Heather Hamilton had saved the princess. The day would quickly fade into imperfect memory. The events of a single day are hard to hold on to in the relentless flow of time, the most powerful and mysterious force of all. Everything moves on....

Back in 1965, Jerry Garcia had chosen the name [Grateful Dead] for his band, borrowing the term from a folktale common to many cultures: An unfortunate soul who dies too poor to afford burial faces an eternity of torment, but a generous stranger shows up and pays for a proper interment. The spirit of the deceased is so thankful that he returns to earth to reward his benefactor. It is a tale of redemption and resurrection. And of course, gratitude.

It's not clear whether Garcia knew the entirety of that story, at least initially: He'd later said that he'd seen the term in a dictionary, and was thunderstruck by the power of the collision of those two particular words.

It's quite a collision. We are all serving time on death row; only the length of our stay is indeterminate. Dead people, walking. If our lives are to be fulfilling, we must be grateful for the experience alone.

Those who have had a brush with death and survive, who have come nakedly face-to-face with their own mortality, get a visceral glimpse at that truth. It is terrifying and humbling; it changes perceptions and priorities and delivers awe. But denial tends to quickly take hold again—we navigate our terrors through denial—and we return to the mundane: our old habits, our take-for-granted thinking. Each moment becomes once again just another in a series of unremarkable moments, instead of a soul-searing blast of the inexpressible wonder of being.

How would you describe this ending and what effect(s) does it achieve? Look at the underlined sentence. What is the impact of all the

names Weingarten includes? What do you think of all those verbs? Four of these paragraphs are doing double-duty, serving as the end of a chapter and the end of the whole book. What do you think about Weingarten's choice to end the whole book with a chapter about a band called The Grateful Dead? If I were to use the Roy Peter Clark taxonomy of endings, I would call this “Closing the Circle,” “The Tie-Back,” “The Epilogue,” or “The Payoff.” Would you agree with any of those? Which? Is it a “Time Frame” ending too?

THE MIDDLE, in this case, is a chapter of your choosing. **If you had to select one chapter of this book as your favorite, which would it be?** If you don't have a favorite, per se, let me offer another way to think of this question. In the introduction, Gene Weingarten describes the premise for *One Day* like this: "It was a stunt, at its heart. But I like stunts, particularly if they can illuminate unexpected truths." Select one chapter and describe how the writing and reporting make it seem like a stunt. What are the most interesting details? What do the characters say that surprises or excites you? How does this particular story seem unbelievable, or too good to be true in a stranger-than-fiction way?