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# POLITICS AND PRIVACY: DO WE NEED TO KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT A POTENTIAL CANDIDATE?

Word Generation - Unit 1.22

## Focus Words

candidate | campaign | ethics | issue | display

## Weekly Passage

Sam Ellis was a strong supporter of one candidate for President. He agreed with all of her positions. He planned to vote for her in the election. Then, one morning, Sam read in the newspaper that his candidate had once been caught with marijuana. This had happened back when the candidate was in high school, over 25 years earlier. Sam was disappointed. He wondered if she still deserved his vote.

During campaigns, we learn a lot about political candidates. Some have abused alcohol or drugs. Some have cheated on their spouses or stolen money. Do we have a right to know personal details about political candidates? Some people say yes. They point out that a candidate is asking for the public's trust. They ask how we, the public, can understand a candidate's ethics and values if we don't know about his or her personal life.

Others think that if we exclude everyone who ever made a mistake, we might leave out people who would make good leaders. Some people think we should focus on how candidates will handle crucial issues like terrorism, pollution, and global warming, not how they handle their marriage or their private mistakes. Should some parts of a candidate's personal life be off-limits?

Imagine this: one of your friends posted a photograph of you being a clown and doing something very embarrassing at a party (use your imagination). If one day you decided to run for public office, you could be sure that this photo would be displayed in newspapers, on television, and all over the internet. One funny moment from years earlier would follow you into your future. Would you then feel like your privacy had been invaded? Or would you say that the public has the right to know about your teenage behavior?

### TEACHER

Discussion questions:

- ▶ Why was Sam disappointed in his candidate for President?
- ▶ What are some examples of personal information we might find out about a candidate during a campaign? Can you think of an example from real life?
- ▶ What is one argument for knowing personal details about candidates?
- ▶ Some people think we should focus on how a candidate will handle crucial issues. What are some examples of crucial issues?
- ▶ What are some ways that a candidate might explain a past mistake? Can you think of some examples from real life?

# Unit 1.22 - Politics and Privacy: Do we need to know everything about a potential candidate?

## Focus Word Chart (teacher version)

Word	Meaning	Forms			Related Words
		Inflectional	Basic Word Classes	Prefixes/ Suffixes	
candidate	(n.) – a person running for office	candidates (pl.)	candid	candidacy candidature candidateship	
campaign	(n.) – a political contest	campaigns (pl.) campaign (v.)		campaigner	campus champagne
display	(v.) – to show	display (n.) displays displayed displaying			ply plait apply employ imply comply
ethics	(n.) – beliefs about what is morally right		ethic	ethical unethical ethicist	bioethics
issue	(n.) – a matter of public concern	issues (pl.) issue (v.)		issuer issueless	

# Unit 1.22 - Politics and Privacy: Do we need to know everything about a potential candidate?



## Problem of the Week

In 2008, New York Governor David Paterson called a press conference to admit to an **ethical** mistake. Years earlier, he confessed, he had several affairs while he was married to his wife. Some people applauded his honesty. Others wondered why he chose to put his mistakes on **display**. When it comes to politicians and political **candidates**, which **issues** should be private, and which should be public?

In March and April 2008, New Yorkers were asked the following question: Do you think the press should report if a married politician has an affair?

- ▶ 33% said: Yes, always.
- ▶ 34% said: Only if the politician used public money to pay for the affair.
- ▶ 15% said: Only if the politician ran a **campaign** based on family values.

*\*Teacher's Note: These percentages don't add up to 100 – this is not an exhaustive list of responses to the question.*

**Option 1:** How many New Yorkers think that the press should always report if a married politician has an affair?

- A) about one in two
- ☒ B) about one in three
- C) about one in four
- D) about one in five

**Option 2:** In the same poll mentioned above, 40% of respondents said that the press should report illegal drug use by a politician under any circumstances, even if the drug use occurred when the person was much younger. Based on this information, are Americans more tolerant of politicians who use drugs, or of politicians having extramarital affairs?

Answer: Based on the statistics given, Americans are more tolerant of politicians having extramarital affairs – 33% want affairs made public under any circumstances, and 40% want drug use made public under any circumstances.

**Math Discussion Question:** Which of the views above do you find most convincing? When someone decides to become a **candidate** for political office, are they deciding to put their marriage or relationship on **display**? Or should infidelity only become an **issue** if it involves some other **ethical** breach directly related to the candidate's public role, like stealing money or running a hypocritical **campaign**?

# Politics and Privacy: Do we need to know everything about a potential candidate?



## Debating the Issue

### I. Get ready...

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

**A** When candidates run for office, their personal lives are fair game. We need to know if they are good people with solid ethics.

**B** Political candidates should be prepared to have their personal lives on display. It's part of the job. They can explain their embarrassing mistakes, and the voters will understand.

**C** We should look at some parts of a candidate's personal life. We need to know if they broke the law, but we don't need to know about their marriage or their teenage mistakes.

**D** We should focus on how candidates will handle important issues like terrorism. Their personal lives should be private.

**E** \_\_\_\_\_  
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### 2. Get set...

Be ready to provide evidence to back up your position during your class discussion or debate. Jot down a few quick notes:

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# GO!

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.

#### TEACHER

» Some students may need help defining their position on the weekly topic. Here are some examples:

*I think it's more accurate to say...*

*That's interesting - can you tell why you think that?*

*I think the evidence is contrary to what you're saying because. . .*

*Let me share something from the reading that will help us...*

# Unit 1.22 -

## Politics and Privacy:

### Do we need to know everything about a potential candidate?

#### Science Activity



This activity is designed to help you practice thinking like a scientist and to use this week's focus words. Sometimes the data are based on real research, but they should never be considered true or factual.

Bill Clinton was Professor Kahn's favorite president. However, Clinton's presidency included more than one scandal. When he became a presidential **candidate**, his personal life became a popular **issue** in the news. During the **campaign**, a woman named Gennifer Flowers claimed that she and Clinton had an affair. Hundreds of news stories appeared about the affair.

Will people remember President Clinton for his political achievements, or his **ethical** mistakes? Professor Kahn wants to find out.

#### Question:

Which **issues** will people know more about: President Clinton's political achievements, or his personal scandals?

#### Hypothesis:

More people will **display** knowledge of Gennifer Flowers than of President Clinton's Welfare Reform Act. (The Welfare Reform Act was one of Clinton's political achievements as president.)

#### Materials:

- ▶ 100 people
- ▶ A question about Gennifer Flowers
- ▶ A question about the Welfare Reform Act

#### TEACHER

##### Real Research

This experiment is based on a real study conducted in 1998 by three University of Massachusetts professors.

-The data for this experiment are taken from the real study, but the materials and procedure have been simplified. Unlike Professor Kahn's fictional study, the real study was performed while Clinton was president.

-The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996, commonly known as the Welfare Reform Act, was aimed at encouraging people on public assistance to find jobs. It required people receiving welfare funds to begin working within two years, and prohibited people from receiving welfare for more than a total of five years over a lifetime.

##### Source:

Hazen, D. (1998, March 9). Study finds media overplays Clinton scandal, liberal image. Albion Monitor. Retrieved on October 12, 2009 from <http://www.albionmonitor.com/9803a/mediagrade.html>

**Procedure:**

1. Recruit 100 people.
2. Ask them the questions about Gennifer Flowers.
3. Ask them the question about the Welfare Reform Act.
4. Calculate the percentage of people who answered each question correctly.

**Data:**

Topic	Percentage of People That Correctly Answered the Question
Gennifer Flowers	81%
Welfare Reform Act	13%

**Conclusion:**

Is the hypothesis supported or not by the data?

Supported

What evidence supports your conclusion?

Answer: Eighty-one percent of the people correctly identified Gennifer Flowers, while only 13% correctly answered a question about the Welfare Reform Act.

How would you make this a better experiment?

Encourage students to consider sample size, number of trials, control of variables, whether the procedure is a true measure of the question, whether the experiment can be repeated by other scientists, data collection and recording systems, and other potential explanations for the outcome. Students should understand that these simple experiments represent the beginning of an exploration, not the end. If time permits, have students suggest how the experiment could be strengthened, emphasizing the use of the target words in the discussion.



# Writing Prompt

Politics and Privacy:

Do we need to know everything about a potential candidate?

Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

## Focus Words

candidate | campaign | ethics | issue | display

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### TEACHER

Ask students to write a response in which they argue a position on the weekly topic.

Put the writing prompt on the overhead projector (or the board) so that everyone can see it. Remind students to refer to the word lists in their Word Generation notebooks as needed.

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### A tool to help you think about your own writing!

Remember you can use focus words from any of the WG Units.

Check off what you accomplished:

#### Good Start

- ☐ Stated my own position
- ☐ Included 1 focus word

#### Pretty Good

- ☐ Stated my own position clearly
- ☐ Included 1-2 arguments
- ☐ Included 1-2 focus words

#### Exemplary

- ☐ Stated my own position clearly
- ☐ Included 1-2 arguments
- ☐ Included 1 counterargument
- ☐ Used 2-5 focus words

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