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English 101
23 October XXXX

Slow Down and Eat Better

If you drive on any highway in the United States, you'll find fast-food restaurants at every exit and service area. If you walk through any supermarket, you'll see prepared foods that say "make it in minutes" and "ready to serve." According to an article by James Bone on the *TimesOnline* Web site, only one-third of Americans cook meals from scratch, meaning with fresh ingredients. Bone also writes that Americans spend only thirty minutes cooking dinner, compared with 2½ hours in the 1960s. And in his book *Fast Food Nation*, Eric Schlosser claims that one-quarter of Americans eat in a fast-food restaurant each day (3). Why are Americans eating so much fast food? The answer is simple: speed is more important than quality. While Americans may be attracted to food that is fast and easy, they are missing the benefits of slowing down. In fact, Americans' obsession with fast food is hurting not only their health but also the quality of their lives.

The main reason that Americans are getting takeout food and heating prepared meals is obvious: they don't have enough time. In more than two-thirds of families in the United States, two people are working (Bone). People with demanding work schedules have little time for food shopping and cooking.

Zhang opens with general observations to attract readers' interest.

Zhang states a clear thesis at the end of the opening paragraph.

Marginal annotations indicate **MLA-style formatting** and **effective writing**.

A clear topic sentence helps guide readers.

Another reason that mealtime has become so short is that many younger adults grew up in a fast-food culture. In the past fifteen years, cell phones, the Internet, and e-mail have increased the speed of everyday communication. At the same time, microwave ovens, drive-through restaurants, and frozen dinners have changed the way Americans eat. Many people now like to eat quickly, even in their cars or in front of the television, instead of taking time to cook a meal and sit at the table. In this culture of instant gratification, people don't think food is important enough to spend much time on.

An effective transition links the ideas in this paragraph to those in the previous paragraph.

Even though Americans think that they are saving time and improving their lives by eating precooked and prepackaged food, their obsession with fast food is causing the quality of their lives to go down. First, their health is suffering. As most people know, fast foods and frozen meals are generally less healthy than foods made at home. They have lots of preservatives, fat, sugar, and salt to hide the fact that they are not fresh. If people do not eat fresh foods that provide vitamins and minerals, they may become tired and sick, and they may miss out on opportunities to enjoy their lives.

Zhang uses a signal phrase and a parenthetical citation for facts that support her thesis.

Another serious health problem is obesity. There is an obesity epidemic in the United States today, especially with young people, and it is related to the way people are eating. According to Schlosser, "The rate of obesity among American children is twice as high as it was in the late 1970s" (240). Obesity can lead to many health problems, including diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. The United States Department of

Health and Human Services notes that “deaths due to poor diet and physical inactivity increased 33 percent” in the 1990s, and it cites a study that concluded that “poor diet and physical inactivity may soon overtake tobacco as the leading cause of death” in the United States. If fast food causes people to become obese, and then obesity causes them to get sick or die, fast food cannot be considered an “improvement” in Americans’ lives.

In addition to causing health problems, fast food hurts people’s relationships with their friends and families. In an online interview, John Robbins, author of *Diet for a New America* and *The Food Revolution*, comments on the importance of mealtime:

Throughout history, eating has been a way of bringing people together. It’s how parents stay in touch with what’s going on in their kids’ lives. When people break bread together, it’s an act of peacemaking, an act of good will. . . . Dining together can be a deep biological and sacred experience. When we eat, we are connected to all of life. It’s a phenomenon found in every culture in the world, except ours. I see the McDonaldization of our food supply as the annihilation of our true relationship to life. (qtd. in Lee)

While most Americans will not be able to cook full, fresh meals every day, they can begin to improve the quality of their lives by buying fresh foods when they can and by cooking fresh food at least sometimes. For example, people can shop at the farmers’ market for fresh local produce instead of buying canned or frozen vegetables. They will have a chance to buy foods with

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A long quotation (more than four lines) is indented; quotation marks are omitted. An ellipsis mark indicates that some words from the source have been left out.

Zhang notes the limitations of her argument but maintains her position.

Zhang offers readers some suggestions for better eating.

more nutrients at the same time that they get to know people in their community.

Also, if people slow down to make food with their friends or family, they can enjoy the benefits of good nutrition while they are building stronger relationships. An organization called Slow Food, which describes itself as “an international organization whose aim is to protect the pleasures of the table from the homogenization of modern fast food and life,” encourages readers of its Web site to make pasta from scratch once in a while. Friends and family can cook meals together so one person isn’t doing all the work. And people can try to cook family recipes from their parents or grandparents.

Even though Americans may think they are saving time and improving their lives by eating fast food, they will actually have healthier and more enjoyable lives if they change the way they cook and eat. Making dinner from scratch is much healthier than getting burgers and fries from a fast-food restaurant. And people get more than just a full stomach—they get more time with family and friends and a good feeling from creating something healthy.

The conclusion reminds readers of the essay’s main point.

Works Cited

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The works cited list provides references for all the sources Zhang uses in her paper.