

LESSON PLANS

# 401 Prompts for Argumentative Writing

Student Opinion

By MICHAEL GONCHAR    MARCH 1, 2017

Of all the resources we publish on The Learning Network, perhaps it's our vast collection of writing prompts that is our most widely used resource for teaching and learning with The Times.

This list of 401 prompts (available here in PDF) is now our third iteration of what originally started as 200 prompts for argumentative writing, and it's intended as a companion resource to help teachers and students participate in our annual Student Editorial Contest. (In 2017, the dates for entering are March 2 to April 4.)

So scroll through the hundreds of prompts below that touch on every aspect of contemporary life — from social media to sports, politics, gender issues and school — and see which ones most inspire you to take a stand. Each question comes from our daily Student Opinion feature, and each provides links to free Times resources for finding more information. And for even more in-depth student discussions on pressing issues like immigration, guns, climate change and race, please visit our fall 2016 Civil Conversation Challenge.

What's your favorite question on this list? What questions should we ask, but haven't yet? Tell us in the comments.

And visit our related list as well: [650 Prompts for Narrative and Personal Writing](#).

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**Social Media and Smartphones**

1. Does Technology Make Us More Alone?
2. Is Social Media Making Us More Narcissistic?
3. Will Social Media Help or Hurt Your College and Career Goals?
4. Would You Consider Deleting Your Facebook Account?
5. Does Facebook Need a 'Dislike' Button?
6. Has Facebook Lost Its Edge?
7. Should What You Say on Facebook Be Grounds for Getting Fired?
8. Would You Be Willing to Pay for Facebook or Google in Exchange for Your Privacy?
9. Are Anonymous Social Media Networks Dangerous?
10. Should People Be Allowed to Obscure Their Identities Online?
11. Is Our Culture of Online Shaming Out of Control?
12. Is Snapchat a Revolutionary Form of Social Media?
13. Do Apps Help You or Just Waste Your Time?
14. Do You Spend Too Much Time on Smartphones Playing 'Stupid Games'?
15. Is Pokémon Go a Positive Cultural Force? Or Is it Just Another Excuse for People to Stare at Their Phones?
16. Are Digital Photographs Too Plentiful to Be Meaningful?
17. Do You Worry We Are Filming Too Much?
18. How Many Text Messages Are Too Many?
19. Does Punctuation in Text Messages Matter?
20. Can a GIF Work Better Than Words?

### **Technology in Schools and the Future**

21. Are the Web Filters at Your School Too Restrictive?
22. Does Technology in the Classroom Ever Get in the Way of Learning?
23. Should Tablet Computers Become the Primary Way Students Learn in Class?
24. Can Cellphones Be Educational Tools?
25. Should There Be More Educational Video Games in School?
26. Is Online Learning as Good as Face-to-Face Learning?
27. How Would You Feel About a Computer Grading Your Essays?
28. Do Machines Represent a Threat to Humans?
29. Are Self-Driving Vehicles the Wave of the Future?
30. Do You Think Recreational Drones Are Safe?
31. What Role Will Robots Play in Our Future?
32. Will Wearable Technology Ever Really Catch On?

## **Gender Issues**

33. Do Parents Have Different Hopes and Standards for Their Sons Than for Their Daughters?
34. Is School Designed More for Girls Than Boys?
35. Is Single-Sex Education Still Useful?
36. Is There Too Much Pressure on Girls to Have 'Perfect' Bodies?
37. How Much Pressure Do Boys Face to Have the Perfect Body?
38. What Does it Mean to Be 'a Real Man'?
39. Do We Need to Teach Boys and Men to Be More Emotionally Honest?
40. Is It O.K. for Men and Boys to Comment on Women and Girls on the Street?
41. What Should We Do to Fight Sexual Violence Against Young Women?
42. Why Aren't There More Girls in Leadership Roles?
43. Do Professional Women Need a 'Girls' Lounge'?
44. Why Aren't More Girls Choosing to Pursue Careers in Math and Science?
45. Why Aren't More Girls Pursuing Careers in Computing and Tech Fields?
46. Should Women Be Allowed to Fight on the Front Lines Alongside Men?
47. Now That Women Can Serve in All Combat Roles in the U.S. Military, Should They Also Be Required to Register for the Draft?
48. Do Female Athletes Get Short Shrift?
49. Should Sports Be Coed?
50. Do You Believe in Equal Rights for Women and Men?
51. Is It Harder Being a Girl?
52. Do We Need New Ways to Identify Gender and Sexuality?
53. Should Toys Be More Gender-Neutral?
54. Should There Be More Boy Dolls?
55. Should Transgender People Be Allowed to Use the Bathroom of Their Choice?
56. What Rules Should Apply to Transgender Athletes When They Compete?
57. Is It O.K. to Refuse to Serve Same-Sex Couples Based on Religious Beliefs?
58. Are Women Better at Compromising and Collaborating?
59. Do Boys Have Less Intense Friendships Than Girls?
60. Can a Boy Wear a Skirt to School?

## **Dating and Sex**

61. Should Couples Live Together Before Marriage?
62. Is Dating a Thing of the Past?

63. Is Hookup Culture Leaving Your Generation Unhappy and Unprepared for Love?
64. Could Following These Directions Make You Fall in Love With a Stranger?
65. How Should Children Be Taught About Puberty and Sex?
66. Are Affirmative Consent Rules a Good Idea?
67. Should Birth Control Pills Be Available to Teenage Girls Without a Prescription?
68. Should the Morning-After Pill Be Sold Over the Counter to People Under 17?
69. How Big of a Problem Is Sexting?
70. How Should Educators and Legislators Deal With Minors Who 'Sext'?
71. How Should Parents Address Internet Pornography?

## **Sports**

72. Should High Schools Drop Football Because Too Many Players Are Getting Injured?
73. Should Parents Let Their Children Play Football?
74. If Football Is So Dangerous to Players, Should We Be Watching It?
75. Are Some Youth Sports Too Intense?
76. Should There Be Stricter Rules About How Coaches Treat Their Players?
77. Is Cheerleading a Sport?
78. Should Cheerleading Be an Olympic Sport?
79. Has Baseball Lost Its Cool?
80. Do Sports Teams Have a Responsibility to Hold Players to a Standard for Their Personal Conduct?
81. Should Athletes Who Dope Have to Forfeit Their Titles and Medals?
82. How Big a Deal Is It That an N.B.A. Player Came Out as Gay?
83. Should Women's Basketball Lower the Rims?
84. Should College Football Players Get Paid?
85. Is 'Redskins' an Offensive Name for a Team?
86. Is It Offensive for Sports Teams to Use Native American Names and Mascots?
87. Do Fans Put Too Much Pressure on Their Favorite Professional Athletes?
88. How Much Should Fans Be Allowed to Distract Opposing Teams?
89. Does a Championship Game Always Need to Have a Winner (and a Loser)?
90. Should Sports Betting Be Legal Everywhere?
91. Are Some Extreme Sports Too Extreme?
92. How Young Is Too Young to Climb Mount Everest?

93. Should Colleges Fund Wellness Programs Instead of Sports?
94. Where Should Colleges and Sports Teams Draw the Line in Selling Naming Rights?

### **TV, Movies and Video Games**

95. Does Reality TV Promote Dangerous Stereotypes?
96. Do TV Shows Like '16 and Pregnant' Promote or Discourage Teenage Pregnancy?
97. Does TV Capture the Diversity of America Yet?
98. Is TV Too White?
99. What Makes a Good TV Show Finale?
100. Why Do We Like to Watch Rich People on TV and in the Movies?
101. Does Live Theater Offer Something You Just Can't Get Watching Movies or TV?
102. What — if Anything — Does the Current Hollywood Film Industry Lack?
103. What Makes a Good Commercial?
104. Why Did a Cheerios Ad Attract So Many Angry Comments Online?
105. Should Video Games Be Considered a Sport?
106. Should Stores Sell Violent Video Games to Minors?
107. Do Violent Video Games Make People More Violent in Real Life?
108. When Should You Feel Guilty for Killing Zombies?
109. Can a Video Game Be a Work of Art?
110. What Game Would You Like to Redesign?
111. How Sexist Is the Gaming World?

### **Music, Literature and Art**

112. What Current Musicians Do You Think Will Stand the Test of Time?
113. What Artists or Bands of Today Are Destined for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame?
114. What Musician, Actor or Author Should Be a Superstar, but Hasn't Quite Made It Yet?
115. What Artists Do You Consider 'Sellouts'?
116. How Much Can an Artist Borrow From Earlier Musicians Before It Becomes Stealing?
117. Who Does Hip-Hop Belong To?
118. What Can You Predict About the Future of the Music Industry?
119. Will Musical Training Make You More Successful?

120. Are Paper Books Better Than E-Books?
121. Does Reading a Book Count More Than Listening to One?
122. To What Writer Would You Award a Prize?
123. Who Are the Characters That Authors Should Be Writing About?
124. Are Shortened Versions of Classic Adult Literature Right for Young Children?
125. Do You Prefer Your Children's Book Characters Obedient or Contrary?
126. Do We Still Need Libraries?
127. Do We Need More Diverse Superheroes?
128. What Is a Hero?
129. Can Graffiti Ever Be Considered Art?
130. Do We Need Art in Our Lives?
131. Is It Possible to Separate Art From the Artist Who Created It?
132. Should Society Support Artists and Others Pursuing Creative Works?
133. Should Displays of Art Be Welcome in All Public Spaces?
134. Does Pop Culture Deserve Serious Study?

### **Parenting and Childhood**

135. At What Age Should Children Be Allowed to Go Places Without Adult Supervision?
136. How Much Freedom Should Parents Give Their Children?
137. Should Children Be Allowed to Wear Whatever They Want?
138. How Should Parents Discipline Their Kids?
139. When Does Discipline Become Child Abuse?
140. Should Parents Bribe Their Children?
141. Should Parents Make Their Children Clean Their Room?
142. Do We Give Children Too Many Trophies?
143. Is Modern Culture Ruining Childhood?
144. Are Adults Hurting Young Children by Pushing Them to Achieve?
145. How, and by Whom, Should Children Be Taught Appropriate Behavior?
146. Are 'Dark' Movies O.K. for Kids?
147. When Does a Halloween Costume Cross the Line?
148. Should Halloween Costumes Portray Only 'Positive Images'?
149. Are Parents Violating Their Children's Privacy When They Share Photos and Videos of Them Online?
150. Should Children Be Allowed to Compete on TV?
151. How Young Is Too Young for an iPhone?

152. Should Parents Limit How Much Time Children Spend on Tech Devices?

153. Who Should Be Able to See Students' Records?

### **Being a Teenager**

154. When Do You Become an Adult?

155. When Should You Be Able to Buy Cigarettes, Drink Alcohol, Vote, Drive and Fight in Wars?

156. When You Are Old Enough to Vote, Will You?

157. If Teenagers Are Such Bad Drivers, Should They Be Allowed to Drive?

158. What Can Older People Learn From Your Generation?

159. Does Your Generation Have Too Much Self-Esteem?

160. Is Your Generation More Self-Centered Than Earlier Generations?

161. Is Your Generation Really 'Postracial'?

162. Do 'Shame and Blame' Work to Change Teenage Behavior?

163. Do 'Saggy Pants' Mean Disrespect?

164. Do You Think Teenagers Can Make a Difference in the World?

165. Is Teenage 'Voluntourism' Wrong?

166. Is Prom Worth It?

167. Is Prom Just an Excuse to Drink?

### **School**

168. Do Teachers Assign Too Much Homework?

169. Are High School Students Being Worked Too Hard?

170. Does Your Homework Help You Learn?

171. What Are You Really Learning at School?

172. Does Class Size Matter?

173. What Makes a Good Teacher?

174. Should Schools Strive for Racial Diversity Among Teachers?

175. Do We Need a Better Way to Teach Math?

176. Does Gym Help Students Perform Better in All Their Classes?

177. Should Reading and Math Be Taught in Gym Class Too?

178. Should Kindergarten Be More About Play or Literacy?

179. What Are the Best Ways to Learn About History?

180. What Is the Right Amount of Group Work in School?

181. What Do You Think of Grouping Students by Ability in Schools?

182. How Important Is Arts Education?

183. Should Schools Be Teaching, and Evaluating, Social-Emotional Skills Like

‘Grit’?

184. Should Schools Teach Children How to Cook?
185. Do Schools Provide Students With Enough Opportunities to Be Creative?
186. Is Shakespeare Too Hard?
187. Should High Schools Do More to Prepare You for Careers?
188. How Much Does It Matter to You Which High School You Attend?
189. Would You Rather Attend a Public or a Private High School?
190. Are Small Schools More Effective Than Large Schools?
191. Would You Want to Be Home-Schooled?
192. Should Home-Schoolers Be Allowed to Play Public School Sports?
193. Does the Way Your Classroom Is Decorated Affect Your Learning?
194. Should All Children Be Able to Go to Preschool?
195. Should All Students Get Equal Space in a Yearbook?
196. Should School Newspapers Be Subject to Prior Review?

### **School Rules, Discipline and Bullying**

197. Are School Dress Codes a Good Idea?
198. How Does Your School Deal With Students Who Misbehave?
199. What Role Should the Police Have in Schools?
200. What Are the Best Teaching Methods for Getting Students to Behave Well in Class?
201. Should Schools Be Allowed to Use Corporal Punishment?
202. Is Cheating Getting Worse?
203. Should Schools Put Tracking Devices in Students’ ID Cards?
204. Should Middle School Students Be Drug Tested?
205. Should Students Be Barred From Taking Cellphones to School?
206. How Big a Problem Is Bullying or Cyberbullying in Your School or Community?
207. How Should Schools Address Bullying?
208. How Should Schools Address Cyberbullying?
209. What Should the Punishment Be for Acts of Cyberbullying?
210. When Do Pranks Cross the Line to Become Bullying?
211. How Should Schools Respond to Hazing Incidents?

### **Grading and Testing**

212. Should Students Be Able to Grade Their Teachers?
213. How Well Do You Think Standardized Tests Measure Your Abilities?



214. How Seriously Should We Take Standardized Tests?
215. Do You Spend Too Much Time Preparing for Standardized Tests?
216. Should Schools Offer Cash Bonuses for Good Test Scores?
217. How Important Are Parent-Teacher Conferences?
218. Should Students Be Present at Parent-Teacher Conferences?
219. How Should Parents Handle a Bad Report Card?
220. Does Your School Hand Out Too Many A's?
221. Do Girls Get Better Grades Than Boys in Your School?
222. Does Separating Boys and Girls Help Students Perform Better in School?
223. Why Do Boys Lag Behind Girls in Reading?
224. Should Discomfort Excuse Students From Having to Complete an Assignment?
225. Should Schools Give Students 'Body' Report Cards?

### **Time in School**

226. Should Schools Cancel Summer Vacation?
227. Do Kids Need Recess?
228. Should the School Day Start Later?
229. Is Your School Day Too Short?
230. Do You Think a Longer School Calendar Is a Good Idea?
231. Should the Dropout Age Be Raised?
232. Should We Rethink How Long Students Spend in High School?
233. Should Students Be Allowed to Skip Senior Year of High School?
234. Should Kids Head to College Early?
235. Class Time + Substitute = Waste?
236. A Short Fall Break, but What Should We Call It?

### **College and Career**

237. Should a College Education be Free?
238. Is College Overrated?
239. How Necessary Is a College Education?
240. Should Colleges Find a Better Way to Admit Students?
241. Should Colleges Use Admissions Criteria Other Than SAT Scores and Grades?
242. Do You Support Affirmative Action in College Admissions?
243. Are Early-Decision Programs Unfair? Should Colleges Do Away With Them?

244. What Criteria Should Be Used in Awarding Scholarships for College?
245. Should Engineers Pay Less for College Than English Majors?
246. Does It Matter Where You Go to College?
247. Do College Rankings Really Matter?
248. What Is the Perfect Number of College Applications to Send?
249. Do Fraternities Promote Misogyny?
250. Should Colleges Ban Fraternities?
251. Is a Sorority a Good Place for a Feminist?
252. Should Colleges Offer Degrees in Sports?
253. What Do You Want More From a Career: Happiness or Wealth?
254. Would You Quit if Your Values Did Not Match Your Employer's?
255. Should Employers Be Able to Review Job Applicants' SAT Scores?
256. Do You Worry Colleges or Employers Might Read Your Social Media Posts Someday?
257. Would You Rather Work From Home or in an Office?
258. Is 'Doing Nothing' a Good Use of Your Time?
259. Should All High School Students Be Able to Get a Summer Job if They Want One?

### **Health and Nutrition**

260. Should the Drinking Age Be Lowered?
261. Is Drinking and Driving Still a Problem for Teenagers?
262. Should the Legal Age to Purchase Tobacco Be Raised From 18 to 21?
263. Should E-Cigarettes Be Banned for Teenagers?
264. Is Smoking Still a Problem Among Teenagers?
265. Are Antismoking Ads Effective?
266. Should Marijuana Be Legal?
267. Should Students Be Required to Take Drug Tests?
268. Why Is Binge Drinking So Common Among Young People in the United States?
269. Should Universities Work to Curtail Student Drinking?
270. Should Distracted Driving Be Punished Like Drinking and Driving?
271. Should Texting While Driving Be Illegal in Every State?
272. How Should Schools Handle Unvaccinated Students?
273. Should Physician-Assisted Suicide Be Legal in Every State?
274. Should Terminally Ill Patients Be Allowed to Die on Their Own Terms?
275. Is School Lunch Really All That Bad?

276. Do You Think a Healthier School Lunch Program Is a Lost Cause?
277. Should French Fries and Pizza Sauce Count as Vegetables?
278. How Concerned Are You About Where Your Food Comes From?
279. Is It Ethical to Eat Meat?
280. Is Breakfast Really the Most Important Meal of the Day?
281. Do You Prefer Your Tacos 'Authentic' or 'Appropriated'?
282. Should Sugary Drinks Be Taxed?
283. Should the Government Limit the Size of Sugary Drinks?
284. Should Teenagers Think Twice Before Downing Energy Drinks?
285. How Important Is It to Be Attractive in Our Society?
286. Are Models Too Skinny?
287. What Are Your Opinions on Cosmetic Surgery?
288. Do Photoshopped Images Make You Feel Bad About Your Own Looks?
289. Doctored Photos: O.K. or Not?
290. Should You Care About the Health and Safety of Those Making Your Clothing?

### **Animals and Science**

291. Should Farm Animals Have More Legal Protections?
292. Is It Ethical to Genetically Engineer Animals?
293. When Is Animal Testing Justified?
294. Should Certain Animals Have Some of the Same Legal Rights As People?
295. Do Gorillas Belong in Zoos?
296. Is It Unethical for a Zoo to Kill a Healthy Giraffe?
297. Should Circuses Be Animal Free?
298. Should You Go to Jail for Kicking a Cat?
299. Should You Feel Guilty About Killing Spiders, Ants or Other Bugs?
300. Should Emotional Support Animals Be Allowed on College Campuses?
301. How Concerned Are You About Climate Change?
302. How Should Nations and Individuals Address Climate Change?
303. If You Were President, What Would You Do About Climate Change?
304. Should Developers Be Allowed to Build in and Near the Grand Canyon?
305. Should Scientists Try to Help People Beat Old Age So We Can Live Longer Lives?
306. Given Unlimited Resources, What Scientific or Medical Problem Would You Investigate?
307. When Is It O.K. to Replace Human Limbs With Technology?

308. Should Fertilized Eggs Be Given Legal 'Personhood'?
309. How Do You Think Dinosaurs Went Extinct?
310. Do You Think Life Exists — or Has Ever Existed — Somewhere Besides Earth?
311. Do You Believe in Intelligent Alien Life?
312. Will Humans Live on Mars Someday?
313. Would You Want to Be a Space Tourist?

### **Personal Character and Morality**

314. Does Achieving Success Always Include Being Happy?
315. Can Money Buy You Happiness?
316. Does Buying and Accumulating More and More Stuff Make Us Happier?
317. Which Is More Important: Talent or Hard Work?
318. How Important Is Keeping Your Cool?
319. When Should You Compromise?
320. Are We Losing the Art of Listening?
321. Do People Complain Too Much?
322. Is 'Be Yourself' Bad Advice?
323. How Important Is Keeping a Clean House?
324. Does Keeping a Messy Desk Make People More Creative?
325. Do You Believe That Everything Happens for a Reason?
326. How Much Control Do You Think You Have Over Your Fate?
327. Can You Be Good Without God?
328. How Important Do You Think It Is to Marry Someone With the Same Religion?
329. Does Suffering Make Us Stronger and Lead to Success?
330. Do Bystanders Have a Responsibility to Intervene When There is Trouble?
331. When Is Looting Morally O.K.?
332. Can Kindness Become Cool?
333. Are Manners Important?
334. Have Curse Words Become So Common They Have Lost Their Shock Value?

### **Government and Leadership**

335. How Strong Is Your Faith in American Democracy?
336. Is America Headed in the Right Direction?
337. Is It Possible to Start Out Poor in This Country, Work Hard and Become

## Well-Off?

338. Should the United States Care That It's Not No. 1?

339. How Should Opponents Receive the New President — With an Open Mind and Honor for the Office, or With Defiance and Rejection?

340. What Do You Think the Role of the First Lady — or First Spouse — Should Be Today?

341. Should Voting Be Mandatory?

342. Does Voting for a Third-Party Candidate Mean Throwing Away Your Vote?

343. If You Were Governor of Your State, How Would You Spend a Budget Surplus?

344. What Local Problems Do You Think Your Mayor Should Try to Solve?

345. Should Rich People Have to Pay More Taxes?

346. What Is More Important: Our Privacy or National Security?

347. When Is the Use of Military Force Justified?

348. When Should Countries Negotiate With Their Traditional Enemies?

349. Should the U.S. Be Spying on Its Friends?

350. What Responsibility Do We Have to Take In Refugees From Global Humanitarian Crises?

351. Should Countries Pay Ransoms to Free Hostages Held by Terrorists?

352. Should Millions of Undocumented Immigrants Be Allowed to Live in the U.S. Without Fear of Getting Deported?

353. Are Children of Illegal Immigrants Entitled to a Public Education?

354. Do We Need a Higher Minimum Wage?

355. What Do We Owe Our Veterans?

356. Do Leaders Have Moral Obligations?

357. Do Great Leaders Have to Be Outgoing?

## **Guns, Prisons and the Justice System**

358. What Are Some Answers to America's Gun Violence?

359. How Should We Prevent Future Mass Shootings?

360. Would You Feel Safer With Armed Guards Patrolling Your School?

361. What Is Your Relationship With Guns?

362. Where Do You Stand on Unconcealed Handguns?

363. Should Guns Be Permitted on College Campuses?

364. Would Arming College Students Help Prevent Sexual Assaults on Campus?

365. What Should Be the Purpose of Prison?

366. Should Prisoners Be Given the Opportunity to Get an Education?

367. Should Felons Be Allowed to Vote After They Have Served Their Time?
368. Should the United States Stop Using the Death Penalty?
369. What Do You Think of the Police Tactic of Stop-and-Frisk?
370. When Should Juvenile Offenders Receive Life Sentences?
371. Do Rich People Get Off Easier When They Break the Law?
372. Should All Police Officers Wear Body Cameras?
373. Should Prostitution Be Legal?

### **Other Questions**

374. Should the Private Lives of Famous People Be Off Limits?
375. Should We Be Privy to the Lives of Celebrities' Children?
376. Do You Think Child Stars Have It Rough?
377. What Causes Should Philanthropic Groups Finance?
378. Should Charities Focus More on America?
379. Do Poor People 'Have It Easy'?
380. Should We Think Twice Before Buying Online?
381. Is Amazon Becoming Too Powerful?
382. How Much Do You Trust Online Reviews?
383. Do You Shop at Locally Owned Businesses?
384. Would You Want a Bike Share Program for Your Community?
385. How Much Does Your Neighborhood Define Who You Are?
386. Should Companies Collect Information About You?
387. What Time Should Black Friday Sales Start?
388. How Long Is It O.K. to Linger in a Cafe or Restaurant?
389. Should Restaurants Do Away With Tipping?
390. Should Single-Use Plastic Shopping Bags Be Banned?
391. Do We Crank Up the A.C. Too High?
392. Should Everyone Learn at Least One Other Language?
393. What Are the Five Greatest Inventions of All Time?
394. Dressing Up Like Creepy Clowns: Freedom of Expression or Public Nuisance?
395. Would Life Be Better Without Time Zones?
396. What Words or Phrases Do You Think Are Overused?
397. What Words or Phrases Should Be Retired?
398. Do Laws That Ban Offensive Words Make the World a Better Place?
399. Should Newspapers Reprint Cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad That Some Deem Offensive?

400. Is It Wrong for a Newspaper to Publish a Front-Page Photo of a Man About to Die?

401. Are There Topics That Should Be Off Limits to Comedy?

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