

'Idol' Takes a Ratings Dip -- Albeit a Slight One -- in Season Opener

washingtonpost.com Los Angeles Times

Friday, January 18, 2008



Chris Daughtry, the fourth-place finisher in 2006 and now a popular rock musician, looks like some kind of "American Idol" soothsayer for having forecast, right before Tuesday's seventh-season debut, that the show "is in a state of decline, and if they don't do something about it, it's probably not gonna last too much longer." The slippage comes as "Idol" has faced criticism over its content, sometimes from people close to the show. The producers have said the sixth season spent too much time with celebrity mentors at the expense of the contestants.

Critics felt last year's competition was hijacked by a distracting controversy over Sanjaya Malakar, a teenage crooner with ever-evolving hairstyles. In a Rolling Stone interview, Chris Daughtry said "Idol" is "lacking some credibility at this

point." Also looking crazy-prescient is the former head of NBC Entertainment, who, a year ago, told trade publication TV Week: "Nothing burns that bright forever. Some day it will be uncool to watch 'American Idol.'"

The seventh-season debut of Fox's reality hit clocked 33.4 million viewers. That's 4 million viewers shy of last season's unveiling. But, on the bright side if you're a Fox suit, it's about 6 million *more* people than watched ABC, NBC, CBS and CW combined Tuesday night from 8 to 10. Last year's "Idol" kickoff bagged nearly 9 million more viewers than the combined broadcast competition.

Tuesday's "Idol" start was about 2 million shy of 2006's 35.5 million, and kind of on par with 2005's 33.5 million, especially now that DVR penetration is high enough that the more relevant figure for the two-hour debut will be Nielsen's Live+7 figure -- the average number of viewers who watched the show within a week of its broadcast -- which won't be available until around the end of this month. Most worrisome for Fox: This year's opener churned out the smallest rating among teens since the show's initial run in the summer of '02. Meanwhile, it snagged the second best rating, behind only last year's debut, among viewers 50 and older.

Nielsen Ratings are audience measurement systems developed by Nielsen Media Research to determine the audience size and composition of television programming. Nielsen Television Ratings are gathered by one of two ways; by extensive use of surveys, where viewers of various demographics are asked to keep a written record (called a diary) of the television programming they watch throughout the day and evening, or by the use of *Set Meters*, which are small devices connected to every television in selected homes. These devices gather the viewing habits of the home and transmit the information nightly to Nielsen through a "Home Unit" connected to a phone line. Set Meter information allows market researchers to study television viewing habits on a minute to minute basis, seeing the exact moment viewers change channels or turn off their TV. In addition to this technology, the implementation of individual viewer reporting devices (called people meters) allow the company to separate household viewing information into various demographic groups. In 2005, Nielsen began measuring the usage of digital video recordings (TiVo, for example) and initial results indicate that time-shifted viewing will have a significant impact on television ratings. The networks are not yet figuring these new results into their ad rates at the resistance of advertisers. For example, Nielsen may report a show as receiving a 9.2/15 during its broadcast, meaning that on average 9.2 percent of households were tuned in at any given moment. Additionally, 15 percent of all televisions in use at the time were tuned into this program. Nielsen re-estimates the number of households each August for the upcoming television season. (Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nielsen_Ratings)

1. In paragraph form, analyze and interpret the reasons cited for the recent decline in interest of 'American Idol.'
2. On Thursday, January 17, 2008 at 9:20:23 E.D.T. the estimated United States population stood at approximately 303,255,690. What percentage of the national population neglected to *not* tune in for the season premiere?
3. Create and solve three algebraic equations via the commutative, associative, and distributive properties comparing Tuesday night "Idol" viewers with the major competing networks mentioned in the passage above.
4. In compliance with Nielsen Ratings viewing requirements, conduct a survey of *at least* fifteen classmates and determine "Idol" viewing habits by a) race, b) age, c) gender, d) ipod owner vs. nonowner, and e) favorite music.
5. Illustrate and identify the opposite absolute value of the integer that is located halfway between "Idol" viewers of a) 2005 to 2006, b) 2006 to 2007, and c) 2007 to 2008 on a number line.
6. What is the percent of change amongst season opener "Idol" viewers in season seven and four? Five and six?
7. In paragraph form, thoroughly explain the process by which television ratings are calculated. Identify the difference between the product and sum in the Nielsen Ratings between "Idol" 2007 and 2008 season opener.
8. Upon completion of this assignment, how far have we progressed through the 2007-08 series of *The Daughtry Times*[®]? Express your answer as a fraction, decimal, percentage, and pie chart.
9. As obtained from the passage above, in paragraph form, explain at least eight ways using the "Traditional Writing Guidelines" simplifies the paragraph writing process. Be specific.
10. As obtained from the passage above, in paragraph form, explain at least six ways using the "Preliminary Reading Guidelines" simplifies understanding of the material. Be specific.
11. In complete sentences, using contextual clues only, explain the meaning of the italicized words: *soothsayer*, *implementation*, and *albeit*. Additionally, use each in a sentence to demonstrate further comprehension.
12. In paragraph form, explain at least five legitimate and educational purposes behind *The Daughtry Times*[®].