



AP[®] English Language 2000 Scoring Commentary

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Question 1

Sample MM

This essay clearly meets the criteria for the 8; it is insightful in its analysis, and its prose demonstrates an ability to control a wide range of the elements of effective language. It lacks the fullness and impressive language control of the sample 9 essay, but it accomplishes a great deal of its own.

The essay connects Welty's use of common descriptions and images from children's literature with the way in which the passage produces its effect, and, on this point, is especially perceptive and well argued. Its clarification of Welty's use of the hyperbolic is also aptly presented, although the student is not as forthcoming in his explanation of how the passage produces what he calls "Welty's reflective tone." The student's final full sentence returns to the use of images from children's literature and, except for his confusion about who is playing the part of the big bad wolf, this serves as a fine summing up of what this reader views as a key factor in Welty's success. The writer uses language effectively, even though the essay could certainly have benefited from the use of spell check. The student's essay is clearly organized, although this organization is not as organic as one would hope. The student uses a traditional five-paragraph format, but what he wants to say doesn't really seem to fit this restrictive form, and it seems to constrain, rather than assist, the student in making his perceptive observations.

Sample X

Offering an effective analysis that assesses specific elements of the text, this response fits the general description of an 8. Its full development and impressive command of language move it to the score of 9.

This student develops her argument about the cause-and-effect relationship between language and the intensity and value it conveys by focusing on Welty's use of anecdotes. Analyzing Welty's presentation of her experiences with Mrs. Calloway, the student explains how the incidents demonstrate the importance of books to the young Welty, because her desire to read allowed her to overcome her fear of the dreaded librarian. Discussing Welty's use of Mrs. Calloway's rules about books, the student points out the relationship between Welty's impatience with these rules and the intensity of her desire to read, just as she explains how Welty's allusions to a variety of texts demonstrate the voracity and range of her reading and how specific anecdotes connect the mother's love of reading with Welty's own. Through her careful attention to Welty's language, the student also links Welty's treatment of her impressionability with her development as a writer.

The student's conclusion ties the analysis together, demonstrates her awareness of the relationship between form and content, and rewards us for having read the essay, for it goes far beyond the claims offered in the introduction. We finish the analysis feeling rewarded for accompanying this young writer on her explorations.

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Question 1 (cont.)

The student's language comprises an integral part of that reward. Her use of active verbs, her vocabulary, and her sophisticated opening with its use of an absolute phrase, which is followed throughout the essay by varied and balanced syntax—all demonstrate the student's impressive control of language. While the essay contains a few minor infelicities and some unconvincing argumentation about the effects of Welty's use of capital letters, it displays intelligent reading and persuasive writing. The student reveals that she, too, can put an "amalgamation of her experiences in the world of literature" to good use, for she employs many of the techniques that she has discovered there.

Sample Y

This essay demonstrates most of the characteristics of a score of 6, but it provides a more complete analysis and a more mature prose style than essays earning that score. It is, however, less convincing than the essays earning higher scores.

The essay does a number of things well: it demonstrates clear understanding of both the prompt and the passage, is clearly organized, and refers to the text explicitly to support its claims. The student discusses diction and metaphor with some depth and offers substantive proof for the relationship between form and content. The fullness of this discussion and proof move the essay into the realm of the 7, even though its discussion of semi-colons, italics, and "positive tone" is certainly less substantive. While the entire essay has a workmanship-like quality, its conclusion does more than just repeat its thesis, a pattern that is all too common in essays earning a 6.

Question 2

Sample K

This essay offers an effective analysis of Orwell's criticism and an assessment of how well he develops his argument. It contains all the necessary elements for the score of 8, but it is neither as full nor as sophisticated as the sample 9 essay.

The student begins with a rhetorical move of her own by pointing out just how difficult Orwell's task is and by interpreting Orwell's writing as an illustration of his bravery. Characterizing Orwell's criticism as "respectful but firm," the student explains why this tone is appropriate for Orwell's subject matter and intended audience. As did many students, this writer focuses on Orwell's use of specifics that demonstrate Gandhi's apparent equation of his family's lives with those of animals and comments upon Orwell's "bit of a satiric tone." This student qualifies her statements appropriately, rather than overstating her claim and, thus, enhances her credibility.

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Question 2 (cont.)

The student moves from describing and illustrating Orwell's method to evaluating its effectiveness and successfully organizes her essay around this two-part structure. She pinpoints the balance that Orwell maintains through his mixture of respect and questioning. Finally, she concludes that the questions that Orwell raises are about the "core of humanity" and argues that their essential nature makes them especially appealing to Orwell's intended audience.

The essay is not without flaws and problems with correctness, but effective writing accomplishes its writer's goal and convinces us that her position is both reasonable and well supported.

Sample SS

As with sample essay K, this student also characterizes Orwell's writing as having a tone of "respectful criticism," but he provides less detail about how Orwell creates that tone. While the essay offers more insight than an essay earning a 6, it is less accomplished than the higher-scoring responses.

The student understands Orwell's tone and basic strategy but is less adept at telling us what leads him to this understanding. While the student points out that Orwell is using an extended definition as a rebuttal of Gandhi's position, the student doesn't explain why that refutation works. Claiming, quite accurately, that Orwell's rebuttals allow his audience to see how they can relate more to his views than those of Gandhi, the student doesn't explain exactly how Orwell accomplishes this feat, just as the student points out Orwell's paradox but doesn't fully explain its function.

The student earns a score of 7, rather than 6, because of his treatment of Orwell's use of rebuttal and his demonstration of his growing understanding of Orwell's technique. This essay shows its young writer in the act of discovering what he thinks and knows as he writes, and paragraphs two and three demonstrate his growing awareness and insight into Orwell's techniques, as the student explores his reaction to the passage.

Sample WWW

This essay offers a full and well-written response that goes beyond the expectations for an 8. It offers both perceptive insight and stylistic flair.

Using a traditional three-part-stem thesis, the student analyzes Orwell's use of detail, references to the common man, and juxtaposition. The student is always careful to point out how the details he selects from the text function. His argument that Orwell establishes trust with his audience is also aptly supported with specific textual references that substantiate the student's claim, as is his

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Question 2 (cont.)

claim that Orwell uses a compassionate and empathetic approach to help convince his audience. But the student's most complete analysis comes in his discussion of Orwell's use of juxtaposition, and this section of his essay is its most forceful argument. By pointing out the way in which Orwell contrasts "chicken broth" with "an ideal to die for," the student zeroes in on the crux of Orwell's argument and technique, moving on to site the overall juxtaposition of the entire essay: sainthood with humanity. And the student always remembers to point out how and why each of his carefully selected examples works.

The student employs impressive style in the service of this capable and full analysis. His opening quotation from Simon Jacobson is pertinent and sets the tone for the persuasive techniques that he will employ in his own analysis, for it serves as further justification of Orwell's argument. And the student's final paragraph with its use of paradox and juxtaposition borrows Orwell's technique and puts it to compelling use. It also offers a perceptive analysis of Orwell's underlying strategy: "humans don't feel guilty if they force themselves to believe Orwell, so they try very hard to convince themselves that they do." Despite his use of a programmatic, five-paragraph structure, the student manages to write this insightful analysis with considerable aplomb, proving that the ubiquitous form can work when used by a gifted writer.

Question 3

Sample CC

Written with panache, this response offers both a sophisticated argument and an impressive control of language. It demonstrates what good writing students can produce when they feel empowered to use their own voice.

After briefly and successfully paraphrasing Lear's speech, the student begins by telling us about his own experiences and those of his brother as soccer players. And the personal anecdotes work to demonstrate his point. This writer is aware of his audience, admitting that these are not the same terms as those of Lear before explaining to us that the same principle applies. The student's next paragraph takes us to the omnipresent O.J. Simpson case. Even as this audience-aware student apologizes for citing this famous trial, he makes the overused example work. When the student moves on to discuss Bill Gates, he offers important qualifications that help qualify his own stance. The student's vigorous language strengthens each example, and in his conclusion the student expands the scope of the prompt and his thesis by suggesting that there is a greater arena for justice and that "money and power and privilege guarantee nothing in terms of happiness or joy." This unexpected move on the part of the writer is risky; he barely escapes the "money can't buy me love" cliché, but he successfully evades this trap by telling us that he lives his life

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Question 3 (cont.)

"knowing that things have a way of evening out." By balancing the high-flown rhetoric of the first claim with the colloquial understatement of the second, the student successfully avoids sounding mawkish and offers an important qualification on Lear's view of justice.

The energetic writing demonstrates a commanding vocabulary without sounding officious or pretentious. The writer's playfulness—equating Microsoft with juggernaut (sic) and suggesting that the "lance of the justice department may be splintered by the metal doors of the Microsoft compound"—makes his argument entertaining and lively as well. In addition, the essay has the added appeal of seeming to be shaped by its own content and not by any Procrustean design.

Sample O

Although it is more than competent in its development, this essay is not particularly adept in its use of language. The essay begins well, even though its paraphrase is less complexly stated than that of essays earning higher scores. Mustering exemplification from *Les Miserables*, the Watergate scandal, and the O.J. Simpson trial, the student clearly knows how to marshal support for an argument. This extensive use of proof is sufficient to move the essay up to a 7, even though the student pays too little attention to how her examples connect.

Workmanlike in its structure (the ubiquitous three-stemmed thesis and five-paragraph format), the essay has a formulaic feel that does little to enhance its overall effectiveness. But its content is cogent enough to provide the essay with especially purposeful argumentation.

Sample XX

This essay clearly fits the description of an 8. It offers a solid understanding of Lear's speech and proffers its own position with considerable historical support.

Certainly the student's strong point is his use of substantial exemplification to support his claims. He offers us George Washington's mercenaries, Sir Thomas More, and Saddam Hussein in his second paragraph, bribery in the Roman Senate in his third, and the theories of social Darwinism and Horatio Alger in his fourth. In each of these instances, the student makes his point economically and moves on. Perhaps some deeper development of these examples would have made the essay even stronger than it is, but the examples are apt, even when they are not fully explained, and they provide more than ample support for the student's claims.

The student's language demonstrates control of a wide range of the elements of effective writing. While his vocabulary and style are less impressive than that of the sample CC, his use of quotations from *1984* at the beginning and conclusion of the essay serves him well, and the writing and essay have a nice sense of balance in both their sentences and form.