

**AP English Language and Composition
Question 1: Synthesis
2020 Scoring Commentaries
(Applied to 2018 Student Responses)**

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Sample I

6/6 Points (A1 – B4 – C1)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned a point for Row A because it presents a thoughtful, multi-sentence thesis that indicates a clear position and establishes a line of reasoning. In paragraph one, the response provides relevant context to set up its insightful thesis: “Although eminent domain can be abused to benefit private interests at the expense of citizens, it is a vital tool of government that intends to have any influence on the land it governs beyond that of written law.” This qualified position sets up the line of reasoning for the rest of the essay.

Row B: 4/4

The response earned four points for Row B because the evidence clearly relates to the thesis and the commentary engages specific details from the sources to draw conclusions relative to the thesis, making it especially well-developed. The response appropriately cites three sources. For example, in paragraph two, the response introduces the concept from the Camey source that eminent domain might be misused, delivering no positive effects. The response specifically uses a small detail from that source, “weeds and rubble,” to establish an image that will be developed using evidence from two additional sources: the Detroit example from the Sornin source and the New London example from the Carney source. The commentary on these sources is used to develop the concept that local governments “will often use [eminent domain], originally intended for the creation of productive public lands, as a societal vacuum cleaner to clean out impoverished areas in the hopes of seducing a business into moving in and revitalizing the town.” The response then shifts to develop its most important idea: “However, characterizing eminent domain by its small-scale failures ignores its larger, more ubiquitous implications.” Now focusing on the thesis of the essay, the response continues to integrate source information throughout as it also provides well-developed commentary that effectively explains the relationship between the evidence and the thesis: “Many of America’s most cherished infrastructure systems are the result of [eminent domain].”

Row C: 1/1

The response earned a point for Row C because it situates the argument in a broader context. For example, in paragraph one the response acknowledges “occasional failures” of eminent domain and asserts they are “overshadowed by the resounding successes of many of the larger, often nationwide attempts of the government to construct much-needed infrastructure...” In paragraph three, the response recognizes the implications of the argument: “Used as intended, eminent domain goes beyond small-scale revitalization and ventures into the realm of sweeping progress and development.” The vocabulary and style enhance the argument by developing vivid, persuasive, and convincing metaphors for understanding (e.g., “...as a societal vacuum cleaner” or “...the death knell of a fading town”).

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Sample E

6/6 Points (A1 – B4 – C1)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned a point for Row A because it provides a thesis that presents a defensible position against eminent domain: “Across the country, vibrant neighborhoods and private properties are threatened by the power of Eminent Domain.”

Row B: 4/4

The response earned four points for Row B because the evidence, from a minimum of three sources, clearly relates to the thesis and the interspersed commentary explains those connections consistently. Immediately following the thesis, the response provides a clear and thoughtful line of reasoning: “While there are many who argue the eminent domain can be used to revitalize, this power often exploits lower-income areas, violates 5th amendment rights, and often fails at the intended good.” The opening anecdote in paragraph one about the “district of Fells Point” provides initial evidence for the reasoning behind the position against eminent domain. Paragraph two again addresses how “eminent domain proposes to help these areas,” but then shifts to the quote from Source B defining “corporatism” followed by commentary connecting the exploits of corporatism to abuse of eminent domain. Having established the possible abuses of eminent domain, the response then looks to the dangers of those abuses as they may disproportionately affect certain groups based on the idea from Source C that “overt racism is rarely a factor in modern takings” making it clear that “unconscious bias plays a role.” Making the connection between bias and unfair compensation, the response then transitions from paragraph three to paragraph four by extending the discussion of problems of unfair compensation and effectively synthesizing information from sources F and A.

Row C: 1/1

The response earned a point for Row C because it situates the argument in a broader context. For example, in paragraph one the response presents a relevant personal example that provides a more sophisticated understanding of the issue. The response also presents counterargument and refutation. For example, in paragraph three: “Oftentimes, the counter argument to the use of eminent domain is that the people whose homes have been taken from them will have a new benefit to look forward to such as a highway, community center, or park, but when your home has been taken from you, the prospect of a highway will not compensate that loss.”

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Sample B

5/6 Points (A1 – B3 – C1)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned a point for Row A because it presents a clear thesis, explaining that “the ends do not justify the means [of eminent domain].” The thesis then establishes a line of reasoning that eminent domain “is unethical and un-American to sacrifice the rights of the poor, the needy, and the few under the guise of ‘the greater good’.”

Row B: 3/4

The response earned three points for Row B because the evidence relates to the thesis, however the commentary that explains those connections sometimes does not fully support all claims. The response makes use of a minimum of three sources and establishes a pattern of addressing the intentions of eminent domain as well as the shortcomings. Paragraph two follows this pattern, then shifts to the definition and intention of eminent domain as at one time “necessary” but then asks, “now that we already have land set aside for public use, is it really necessary to continue forcing people off their private land?” The response then makes blanket comments about parks, monuments, and public buildings that may extend from the original argument, but the commentary does not explain how that matters, leaving the reader to make the connections. Paragraph three concedes the point that eminent domain was originally intended to serve the needs of the public. Using Source B, the response provides specific detail about the supposed benefits of eminent domain. Having established these supposed benefits, the response then returns to the thesis shifting to evidence from Source C about how eminent domain ultimately harms “the poor, racial minorities and politically weak.” After providing this evidence, the response explains the ways in which eminent domain proves harmful to those communities. However, this commentary only restates information from the sources and does not appropriately claim that eminent domain has “become a way for the powerful to oppress the poor.”

Row C: 1/1

The response earned a point for Row C because it situates the argument in a broader context. For example, in paragraph one the response provides a sophisticated concession: “The most common defenses for eminent domain while well-intended, are ultimately built of flawed concepts that go against the American value of individual freedom.” In paragraph four, the response recognizes the implications of the argument: “... especially over the past few decades when corporations have had a major hand in politics. Eminent domain as we know it is a civil rights violation that destroys poor and minority communities in favor of corporate profit.”

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Sample H

5/6 Points (A1 – B3 – C1)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned a point for Row A because it provides a thesis that presents a defensible position that “the practice [of eminent domain] becomes unjustified” in certain circumstances. It then goes on to provide those circumstances, which mostly reflect the reasoning of the argument that eminent domain is wrong “when minorities are victimize[d], a ‘reasonable compensation’ is not attained, and the government works with private companies in the economic philosophy of corporatism.”

Row B: 3/4

The response earned three points for Row B because the evidence relates to the thesis, but the commentary that explains those connections only sometimes supports the line of reasoning. The response appropriately cites three sources. The line of reasoning is explicitly stated in the final paragraph: “The process, however, becomes unethical when governments work closely with private industries, causing social inequalities, unnecessary displacements, corruption, and unfulfilled promises.” The response supports this reasoning in the body paragraphs by discussing, “ groups of lower income and diverse backgrounds are, at times, unequally affected by projects involving eminent domain,” and how eminent domain is also “abused when private companies benefit at the cost of other private entities or citizens.” In paragraph two, the response begins by making a comment related to “victimized minorities” and then provides evidence from Source C, but it only restates the information from that source and provides an incomplete explanation of how the source information relates to the thesis: “Ultimately, families are displaced and the communal social fabric of poorer communities is broken.” Paragraph three provides more incomplete explanation, this time related to the role of corporatism in eminent domain as addressed in Source B. Taking the position that “promises are left unfulfilled so that, in the long run, more are harmed than helped,” but then going on to only explain that “Such an outcome is exemplified in Source B” and then summarizing the argument of the source. It does emerge from that summary with an effective comment on the “disapproval of corporatism” as it connects also to Source E.

Row C: 1/1

The response earned a point for Row C by crafting a nuanced argument in the fourth paragraph, including a concession that, “Government ambitions involving eminent domain are not always harmful.” The response then follows up with the line of reasoning that, “The process, however, becomes unethical when governments work closely with private industries, causing social inequalities, unnecessary displacements, corruption, and unfulfilled promises.” The

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argumentation recognizes that it is not eminent domain that is unethical but the way in which it is applied for corporate gain.

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Sample D

4/6 Points (A1 – B3 – C0)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned a point for Row A because it provides a defensible thesis in paragraph one that “Eminent Domain is productive and beneficial because the government needs it to provide for its citizens and the people receive full compensation for what is lost.”

Row B: 3/4

The response earned three points for Row B because the evidence, cited from three sources or more, relates to the thesis, however the commentary doesn’t always support key claims. The line of reasoning exists explicitly in the thesis and is again restated in the conclusion: “The government is able to provide basic needs to its people and compensate them for everything they lose through Eminent Domain, thus securing the benefits and [ILLEGIBLE] in the government.” The body paragraph supports this line of reasoning by focusing on the government’s ability to “provide such basic human needs as water, heat, gas, and electricity” and an examination of “compensation” for individuals impacted by eminent domain. In paragraph two, the response provides an incomplete and vague explanation of Source A: “[Eminent domain] provides what the government otherwise could not, in places where government can not reach. This power allows the authorities to help people with the needs of otherwise could not.” This commentary is used to support the simplistic assertion that “Eminent Domain only helps people.” In paragraph three, the response provides uneven explanation of Source D: “Compensation for their ruined property provided for the future of those people. It allowed them to sell the property that otherwise couldn’t have been sold.” Both examples demonstrate commentary that only provides a limited explanation of the relationship between the source evidence and the line of reasoning thesis.

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn a point for Row C because its explanations are somewhat repetitive and do not reflect a complex understanding of the issue. The personal example provided in paragraph four attempts to contextualize the argument but appears only vaguely related to the topic and does not provide significant insight or sophistication of thought.

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Sample F

3/6 Points (A1 – B2 – C0)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned a point for Row A because it responds to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible position: “Eminent Domain is productive useful because it can open up opportunities for people, and it can benefit many people.”

Row B: 2/4

The response earned two points for Row B because while it does cite evidence from three sources to support the thesis, the commentary that explains the evidence merely repeats and oversimplifies source information. In paragraph two, the cited evidence from Sources A and B is essentially repeated in the commentary about creating “jobs and opportunities for people.” This repetition of evidence does not strengthen the supporting claims. In paragraph three, the response slightly shifts to a focus on how eminent domain “can benefit many people.” Again, the response includes information from a Source D this time but provides no explanation of how that quote relates directly to the thesis.

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn a point for Row C because there is no complexity of thought or understanding of the topic.

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Sample A

2/6 Points (A0 – B2 – C0)

Row A: 0/1

The response did not earn a point for Row A because its intended thesis in paragraph one does not take a position, rather it merely presents a somewhat obvious binary choice – “eminent domain is good and bad depending on what side you stand on...”

Row B: 2/4

The response earned two points for Row B because, while the evidence provided relates to the subject of the prompt, the commentary that explains those connections oversimplifies and misinterprets the evidence. In paragraph one, the response attempts to explain Source F, “if the government took his property their would be various causes of damage to his work,” but oversimplifies that evidence and its presentation. The remainder of the response overgeneralizes sources and states that those sources relate to the subject. However, the response fails to draw on specific information from the sources or explain how those sources relate to the subject. Examples of this can be seen in statements such as, “when we read Source C we see that the people who receive the short end of the stick is small communities.” Sweeping generalizations of this nature exists throughout the response and hamper its ability to do more than simplistically respond to the prompt.

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn a point for Row C because it does not demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the topic or of the rhetorical situation. Because the response misinterprets or oversimplifies its explanations, there are no examples of a complex understanding or a more sophisticated prose style.

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Sample C

1/6 Points (A1 – B0 – C0)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned a point for Row A because it provides a defensible thesis in paragraph one: “The government utilizing Eminent Domain can be so helpful in many ways like considering better facilitates for transportation, better buildings, and better ways of supplying water.”

Row B: 0/4

The response did not earn any points for Row B because there are no source citations. There are only vague references to people’s opinions “that taking someone’s property is bad” and the idea that “Eminent Domain can be so helpful in many ways like considering better facilitates for transportation, better buildings, and better ways of supplying water.” The response does not connect these vague references to eminent domain to thesis in any substantive way.

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn a point for Row C because there is no evidence of complex understanding of the topic or of the rhetorical situation. The ideas and language do not reflect an understanding of context.

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Sample G

1/6 Points (A0 – B1 – C0)

Row A: 0/1

The response did not earn a point for Row A because the statement that approaches a thesis is simply summary that repeats the language of the prompt: "...many people are reluctant to agree that eminent domain is beneficial." The position is never clearly stated. The final statement of the response is an equivocation: "It's just a matter of preception."

Row B: 1/4

The response earned one point for Row B because, although it does use three sources, it does not provide commentary that connects the sources to the subject of the prompt. There are only a few brief phrases that refer to the quoted evidence such as "...in cases like Freetown, the benefits just seem to outway." The response does not explain how the evidence supports the student's argument and relies upon sweeping generalizations.

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn a point for Row C because there is no evidence of complex understanding of the topic or of the rhetorical situation.