

### Chief Reader Report on Student Responses: 2019 AP® English Language and Composition Free-Response Questions

• Number of Students Scored	573,171			
<ul> <li>Number of Readers</li> </ul>	1,554			
<ul> <li>Score Distribution</li> </ul>	Exam Score	N	%At	
	5	56,534	9.9	
	4	104,309	18.2	
	3	150,303	26.2	
	2	179,016	31.2	
	1	83,009	14.5	
<ul> <li>Global Mean</li> </ul>	2.78			

The following comments on the 2019 free-response questions for AP® English Language were written by the Chief Reader, Elizabethada A. Wright, Professor, University of Minnesota Duluth. They give an overview of each free-response question and of how students performed on the question, including typical student errors. General comments regarding the skills and content that students frequently have the most problems with are included. Some suggestions for improving student preparation in these areas are also provided. Teachers are encouraged to attend a College Board workshop to learn strategies for improving student performance in specific areas.

Question #1 Task: Synthesis Topic: Wind Farms

Max. Points: 9 Mean Score: 4.79

### What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

This year's synthesis question asked students to use material from the six provided sources and develop a "position on the most important factors that an individual or agency should consider when deciding whether to establish a wind farm." To achieve this task, students needed to read all the sources, drawing support from the information to write their essay. To do well, students were expected to understand that they were, in essence, creating an argument using the supplied information as well as knowledge that they already possessed. Students also needed to understand that, with sources arguing among one another, students did not have to accept each source as "correct"; instead, the students needed to evaluate the provided information based on their own knowledge and perceptions of the world.

Responses were expected to integrate the information with the students' positions, not merely repeat the information. Therefore, students were expected to understand how to integrate the support for competing arguments into their own.

## How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

The topic is very accessible to students. They demonstrated familiarity with the debate about alternative energy and the impact of fuels on the environment. Students were helped in part by the presence of Source A, which provided them with a literal picture of what wind turbines look like. Ultimately, almost everyone had something to say about wind power.

The task itself is not an especially unusual one for an AP course or exam, yet it did seem to take some students by surprise. The instruction to look at "factors" invited movement away from pro or con arguments, and the richer essays accepted this invitation, discussing the complexity of the issues involved. A number of students, though, tried to shoehorn this topic into the more traditional arguments they may have written before.

The sources provided numerous pathways for students, along with clear opportunities to place the sources in conversation with one another. The numbers and statistics challenged some students but allowed others the opportunity to use the numeracy skills they may have honed in math and science classes.

### What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps	Responses that Demonstrate Understanding	
Students assumed they needed to use information from each source in their essay. The task asks that they cite information from at least three sources. They are welcome to include citations from more, but what they do not need to do is provide their audience with a "tour" of the sources.	Essay C cites four sources (B, C, D, and F), but does not just discuss the source and then move on. For example, the essay cites source B in paragraph 2 to discuss land erosion and returns to that source again twice later in the essay when the information from source B is relevant.	
Students either did not discuss factors to consider, or students treated those factors as little more	Essay B focuses on population distribution and average wind speed as crucial factors to consider when deciding whether or not to	

than topics to discuss rather than create a wind farm. The essay then explains issues to unpack in support of a why those factors are so important, rather position. than using them merely to discuss why wind farms are beneficial or not. The sources often dominated essays, Essay D foregrounds the argument regarding the factors to consider and then and, as one table leader put it, these essays "struggled to develop a uses the sources to illustrate why these position on the most important factors are so crucial. factors." Paraphrase, quotation, and/or Essay A frequently uses direct quotes: summary substituted for however, these quotes work in service of the commentary. "Alicia Sanchez is argument. For example, at the top of page 2, explaining how turbines have done the writer quotes Source B to illustrate why nothing to the economy but have a people must consider the location of wind positive effect on it," for example, is turbines. Similarly, in the second paragraph not an untrue statement from this of that same page, the writer guotes Source student, but it simplifies a portion of C as evidence of how wind farms can affect Source D and does not add to it. local residents. In both examples, the quote Students need to use the information works in service of the student's argument from the sources as a means of and does not replace the argument. supporting their own arguments. Sometimes, referencing one of the sources' information is sufficient; students would better use their time constructing their own logic than in copying provided information. From Essay O: "The answer to the question Students understood that they should write something about the example of why wind energy is the right option is given very bluntly by writer Julia Layton, they provided, and they did so. However, their statements did not 'wind power is clean, and it's renewable have any specificity. The statement, (Source B).' Layton goes on to elaborate "This is showing the benefits of wind upon her statement by stating that wind turbines," in various forms showed energy, 'doesn't release harmful gases like CO<sub>2</sub> and nitrogen oxides into the up in these essays. atmosphere the say coal does ... and we are in no danger of running out of wind anytime soon (source B).' Burning coal and other fossil fuels has been proven to be harmful to the Earth's atmosphere. Global warming is the result of a hole in the ozone layer that was causes by the burning of those resources. Wind energy requires no burning and emits no harmful byproducts. Fossil fuels are also in danger of eventually

ceasing to exist. Wind power will always be

in constant supply, making it an excellent option for energy."

Based on your experience at the  $AP^{\otimes}$  Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

- Teachers need to ask their students to read more (especially non-fiction), and to read critically. To write well, one must be able to read critically. Students should probe other people's arguments; look at the information used to support positions and ask what assumptions are made by these writers to connect their information to their claims. There are two ways teachers can help students do more of this: first, teachers can ask students to read more on issues outside of their immediate concerns; second, students can start use rhetorical analysis to investigate other people's arguments. Students should look at how arguments are structured; what kinds of sources are used to support claims; what assumptions are the arguments making to connect the sources to the claim; is there illogical emotion used to persuade audiences?
- Teachers should continue to invite students to recognize nuance in issues. One of the benefits of debate is that students are often asked to create arguments for issues they disagree with. This practice is something students need to do more of. With this practice, students can be led to recognize that very few issues involve yes/no or good/evil binaries; there are benefits to all the positions. However, teachers need to help students see that the lack of binaries does not mean all issues are relative. There are degrees of value to all positions that students must weigh to create sophisticated arguments. Students need to understand that the foundation of the AP English Language and Composition course is argumentation, and that the specific question that must be addressed is within the prompt.
- Students should understand that a strong argument involves more than the creation of a thesis and repeated paraphrasing of that thesis. Additionally, a strong argument involves more than the articulation of evidence. Students need to explain **why** the evidence works in service of the claim. What happens too often is that students abandon their own ideas too quickly or take the evidence as being more self-evident than it is. The richer essays were rich because of the clear relationship between the evidence and the students' ideas. Evidence by itself doesn't prove anything—it only has life in the essay when the student situates it in service of the essay's position.
- The evidence students choose is not most important: what is most important is the illustration of why the evidence supports what it does. For example, many upper-range essays used the same factors and evidence as lower half papers; however, these upper-range essays provided more explanations. These essays were stronger with the WHAT, as in telling what the factors are. One student essay illustrates the way the analysis was often limited or merely adequate. In discussing economic benefits, the essay states, "A common theme shared among humans is that we simply want the cheapest way to do something," a promising idea. This theme was then dropped as the student concluded that "this is something that should be considered for windmills or anything that is in debate." One table leader characterized these essays as only "vaguely implying why the factors are correct."
- Students need to recognize that they must control the sources, not let the sources control them. The scoring guide states "synthesis means using sources to develop a position and citing them accurately." That means the student uses the sources, so the student is in control of the source, not the other way around. The sources are meant to support a clear position. That is a message we all know and teach, but the essays this year, both the weaker and stronger, bore out the importance of this instruction.
- Accurate citation is also an area that must be continually addressed in the classroom.

## What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

- Teachers will find example responses from this particular question on AP Central, along with scoring notes and specific commentary explaining why each point was or was not earned.
- The 2019 Course and Exam Description for English Language and Composition includes a diverse collection of resources including the Instructional Approaches section as well as the Exam Overview section.
- FRQ practice questions for teachers to use as formative assessment pieces are now available as part of the collection of new resources for teachers for the 2019 school year. These items begin with scaffolded questions that represent what students are ready for at the beginning of the school year and that continue on to present an increased challenge as teachers progress through the course. These resources are available on AP Classroom with the ability to search for specific question types and topics so that teachers are able to find the new collection of FRQ practice questions and the fully developed scoring guidelines that accompany each question.

**Question #2** Task: Rhetorical Topic: Gandhi letter to Lord Irwin

Analysis

Max. Points: 9 Mean Score: 4.14

### What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

This year's rhetorical analysis question asked students to identify and evaluate the rhetorical choices made by Mohandas "Mahatma" Gandhi in 1930 as he composed a letter to Lord Irwin, the representative of the British crown in India. The prompt explains that the letter was written in the context of a nonviolent march in India protesting Britain's colonial monopoly on salt. As in past years, this year's prompt asked students to consider the rhetorical situation a speaker faces and to analyze the choices that the speaker makes in order to elicit appropriate or desirable responses from an audience.

This prompt was accessible for most students who typically knew who Gandhi was and were at least marginally familiar with his movement to win India's independence from Great Britain. As one student wrote, "We all knew and loved Gandhi!"

Within their responses to this, as to any, rhetorical analysis question, students were expected to explain the choices the rhetor (Gandhi) made in his particular situation for his particular audience and how these choices worked. To understand a rhetor's choices and how they work, a student must first consider the rhetor's relationship to the audience, as well as how this relationship necessitates both what this specific rhetor should include — and exclude — in the speech to this specific audience. Additionally, a student must consider how the rhetor arranges the speech for the particular audience in the specific circumstances of the speech. While elements of style certainly merit consideration, they are not the first ingredient on which rhetors focus when developing strategies to persuade audiences: Style is the third canon of rhetoric, not the first or even the second.

In other words, to do well, students needed to understand the purpose of Gandhi's speech, what the relationship must have been between Gandhi and Lord Irwin, what Irwin's attitude toward Gandhi's message might have been, and how Gandhi's specific rhetoric choices worked to make his audience more responsive to his purpose.

## How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

Despite students' familiarity with the speaker and the audience, they struggled with analyzing this passage because it is not really conducive to the more superficial ways students typically rhetorically analyze: identifying rhetorical devices and highlighting examples, rather than offering an analysis of the ways in which Gandhi employs language to "make his case." The passage does far more than simply demonstrate the appeals, with which students want to engage (ethos, pathos, and logos being their favorite); so many fell back on summarizing what Gandhi does in this letter **rather than finding the meaning** of what Gandhi is doing.

Some students attempted to use their knowledge of Indian Independence to write extensively about what happened with Gandhi's movement after this letter was published without providing analysis. These essays were largely unsuccessful. On the other hand, the successful essays were those that may have addressed the larger conversation of India's Independence—but this history was discussed within a context of the rhetorical situation. These successful essays put this passage in conversation with that outcome rather than replacing one conversation for the other.

Overall, compared to past years, students have been focusing less and less on standard rhetorical terms which helps students' ability to consider rhetorical situations, which then allows students to better analyze passages.

### What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps	Responses that Demonstrate Understanding
Students focused on summarizing the speech rather than analyzing it.	From Essay B: "Gandhi's narration of his intentions serves the purpose of disarming hostility from Irwin in order to increase the receptiveness of his letter and ideas. Gandhi's first sentence explains his purpose in 'embarking on non-violence,' immediately opening the letter with his intent and assuaging any concern of a violent rebellion." This passage analyzes as it quotes. This student quotes Gandhi, explaining the impact of Gandhi's word choice.
Students identified rhetorical terms or choices without explaining how the choice worked in Gandhi's rhetorical situation.	• From Essay A: "While Gandhi grounds his letter in reality, he also deftly employs hypothetical statements as he presents his argument to Lord Irwin. While others would suggest that there is no path forward for Britain India to resolve their disputes, Gandhi challenges this notion, pondering, "if the British commerce with India is purified of greed, you will have no difficulty in recognizing our independence" (ll 32-35). His statement is not as much a hypothetical thought exercised as it is an establishment for a condition to be met in order for conflict to be resolved; Gandhi's message rings clear: Britain need to reduce its greed." Instead of merely stating "Gandhi uses hypothetical statements," the student explains how that hypothetical acts as a directive to Irwin.
Students relied on formula or preconceived ideas of what they would analyze (e.g., a discussion of ethos, logos, and/or pathos), regardless of whether the preconceived ideas really impacted the speech.	From Essay A: "While civil rights advocates often use a personal emotion appeal underscored with pathos to assert the necessity of their cause, Gandhi does the opposite, preferring to use detached language, void of emotion." The student does not fall into the clichéd discussion of Gandhi's use of pathos; in fact, the student contemplates the text within the rhetorical situation to argue why Gandhi does not use a pathetic appeal.

- Students appeared to spend too much time writing their introductions and too little supporting their claims. When a two and a half page essay has a one page introduction, there is a disporportiate amount of energy/time spent on the introduction and insufficient energy/time spent on the support for the claim.
- From Essay D: "Just as the colonies of Britain is
  America did in the late 1700's, Gandhi explains his
  greivances and asks for a peaceful separation from
  the British government as the result of unfair taxes.
  Gandhi employs opposing, strong diction, memory,
  and establishes ethos in an attempt to persuade Lord
  Irwin to gracefully and peacefully recognize India's
  independence without violence." While this
  introduction is somewhat formulaic and has some
  minor errors, it establishes the context for the speech
  and articulates its thesis without unnecessary prose.

# Based on your experience at the $AP^{\otimes}$ Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

- Teachers appear to have shifted focus to the speaker/writer's rhetorical situation while spending less time on
  rhetorical terms. Teachers should continue what they appear to be doing in the classroom, extending (perhaps)
  students' abilities to analyze rhetorically to other situations students encounter, explicitly to their reading in
  passages, such as the sources in the synthesis section of this exam.
- Students should approach the passages more organically in their classes. Many students appear to have "prepackaged" responses to this question, and these responses often hinder their ability to do well. Students appear to have been taught formulas for responding (e.g. "In [date], [speaker/writer] addressed [audience] in order to [purpose] using [three rhetorical choices]"). The student then uses a five paragraph essay structure to describe these three choices. Another is that students aim for a choice that may have worked on past exams or classroom exercises (e.g., use of first or second person), but this does not work particularly well for the rhetor the students are analyzing on AP Exams.
- Teachers should emphasize that the rhetorical analysis question does not have "correct" answers. Successful and unsuccessful writers identify the same rhetorical features within a passage; however, what makes some students successful and others unsuccessful is not the "identification" of the features, but the students' abilities to explain how these features work within the writer/speaker's rhetorical situation. Too often, students list what a rhetor does, appearing to think that the more successful choices they identify, the better they'll do on the exam. Instead, success comes from the ability to dig deep into the explanations of why the choices work in the particular contexts.

# What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

- Teachers will find example responses from this particular question on AP Central, along with scoring notes and specific commentary explaining why each point was or was not earned.
- The 2019 Course and Exam Description for English Language includes a diverse collection of resources including the Instructional Approaches section as well as the Exam Overview section.
- FRQ practice questions for teachers to use as formative assessment pieces are now available as part of the collection of new resources for teachers for the 2019 school year. These items begin with scaffolded questions that represent what students are ready for at the beginning of the school year and that continue on to present an increased challenge as teachers progress through the course. These resources are available on AP Classroom with the ability to search for specific question types and topics so that teachers are able to find the new collection of FRQ practice questions and the fully developed scoring guidelines that accompany each question.

**Question #3** Task: Argument Topic: Overrated

Max. Points: 9 Mean Score: 4.57

#### What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

The prompt for this year's argument question first defined the key term it asked students to apply in their answer: "The term 'overrated' is often used to diminish concepts, places, roles, etc. that the speaker believes do not deserve the prestige they commonly enjoy." Students were then given three specific examples of possible topics illustrating this term — a concept (success), a city (Rome), and a role (Queen Rania of Jordan's declaration that being "queen is overrated").

Students were expected to select "a concept, place, role, etc." that they believed is "overrated" and to argue with supporting evidence from their "reading, experience, or observations" why their chosen topic is "overrated."

## How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

Question 3 elicited substantial responses from students: it was often the first essay they chose to write, the answers tended to be lengthy, and few students opted not to write on the topic. The prompt was accessible, with generally very few students misunderstanding the key term (although that did occur).

The question also drew a wide variety of answers. Many students found college, an Ivy League education, standardized testing, grades, high school (including AP classes), prom, popularity, romantic relationships, social media, celebrity, money, the American Dream, Disney theme parks, historical or pop cultural figures, and even the term "overrated" itself as a concept to be overrated. Many responses challenged the current value of a college education, given its expense and the likelihood of leaving with debt, seeing it as a less secure path to a stable and rewarding career than it once was.

As a whole, the essays demonstrated students' sincere and thoughtful responses to the question, with some expressing frustration with news coverage focused on scandal rather than more pressing world problems, such as climate change and inequality. The breadth of the prompt, however, also allowed students to explore topics that might not immediately come to mind as being overvalued: Paris, the traditional family structure, vacations, sports, math, and even cheese.

While the breadth of the question stimulated many students to write at length, they sometimes had difficulty in defining exactly what they most wanted to focus on, and perhaps because of the three examples given in the prompt, some elected to talk about more than one topic in the same essay. Teachers might direct their students to read the prompt carefully, looking for key words in the instructions. In this case, the prompt indicates that students are to "select a concept, place, role, etc.," in other words, one topic. Teachers might work with students to help them frame their argument by reminding them that in a short, on-demand essay, it might be a better strategy to define at the outset one main topic and to develop the argument on that topic by considering at every point how the evidence and explanations they supply connect to the argument being made.

Students, however, were not penalized for writing about more than one topic. Instead, essays were scored holistically according to how well students developed their arguments. Moreover, in more skilled, students were able successfully to address more than one topic. For example, one student addresses conventional notions of success by considering celebrity and then the prestige of an Ivy League education. The essay moves from collective notions of fame and success to a personal example, the student's own longing to be admitted to an Ivy League school. Overall, stronger responses took care to explain how they were using evidence to support their argument and avoided giving a series of examples without thinking about how those examples connected to each other and to the larger argument of the essay.

Upper-half essays also avoided tacking on a concession for the sake of mentioning the other side; in such cases, the concession seemed to come out of nowhere, jarring the reader rather than offering a genuinely more complex consideration of the topic.

More skilled essays also tended not to follow a formula (thesis, three examples, conclusion restating the thesis) but to advance the argument and to arrive somewhere. One essay, for example, began with a discussion how the concept of something or someone being overrated is not really based upon intrinsic value but upon overexposure (LeBron James and other notable basketball players were used to illustrate the point). However, rather than reiterating this argument, the student then turned to consider that perhaps we need novelty so that even if something or someone is "overrated" only because of too much exposure, it is after all a good thing because it leads us to be open to innovation and change. In addition, what often distinguished higher scoring essays from middle and lower scoring ones is the student's attention to language.

### What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps	Responses that Demonstrate Understanding
Students relied on formula.	Essay I argues that the encouragement of "young activists and politicians to be complacent as they allow the older and entrenched authorities to solve local, national, and global problems" is "overrated." In this essay, the student takes a complex concept and explains why such encouragement and the belief in it is dangers, as well as why "young activists and politicians" need to act.
Students repeated their claim via paraphrases of the claim instead of supporting the claim.	Essay D argues that Thomas Jefferson is overrated and goes into a detailed discussion of his hypocrisies to support and explain their position.
Students did not pay attention to their own use of language.	From Essay Z: "The term 'overrated' is often thrown around without shame to place criticism on concepts, objects, experiences, or even people. Upon arriving in Ireland and realizing that not every hill glows green with four-leaf clovers, you mark the country with a 'three-star' rating and the description 'overrated' on Travelocity, embittered by the difference in expectation and reality you had just experience." Effective essays engaged the prompt in a lively way with varied sentence structure, apt word choice, or other strategies that enabled the student to communicate his or her distinctive voice and perspective.
Essays did not argue convincingly why a concept, place, role, or something else was overrated. Instead, they sometimes talked about when it was appropriate or not to use the term, reducing the prompt to a	Essay B focuses on why true democracy, which the student explains the United States is not, is overrated. The student discusses throughout the

question of usage	e rather than developing a		essay why democracies are problematic even though they are so highly regarded.
generalizations a supported, less s did not offer enou	f essays that qualified and offered claims that could be killed essays made sweeping claims, agh evidence or specific examples, weight on limited examples.	•	From Essay B: "Democracy is overrated. One might ask, how can this be? Isn't that what makes our country so great? Isn't it what allows us to live so freely? Well, the answer is yes and no. What we think of as democracy—in our government, in our lives—isn't always really democracy. It might be what we believe in, but it's not truly what we rely on. Democracy is in fact an overrated and underused concept, and when true democracy is used the results get hectic." While the initial statement could easily be a sweeping generalization, the student immediately defines and qualifies the statement and moves on to provide specific evidence to support the claim.
Essays used personal or literary examples without explaining them fully enough to explain why the examples were overrated.		•	From Essay M: "[W]e idealize Ivy League education. I know I do. I have the Harvard pennant and collage sweatshirts to prove it. And so we work tirelessly. The 2A.M. nights, the sacrifices—lost time with friends, with family—all for that illusive chance at admission to one of those 8 schools, which very much symbolize greatness and achievementBut are these institutions as prestigious, as elite, as they're made out to be? Lori Loughlin and Felicity Hoffman just used their millions to BUY admission into Yale and USCwhile I am stressed out over my 34 and 1530, taking AP class after AP class, performing at Carnegie Hall, going to Model UN conferences, and interviewing for internships, all so I can maybe, just maybe, have a chance. Those schools that I idolize, that I held as the pinnacle of learning, the stepping stone to success, they key to bringing my goals, my hopes, my dreams to fruition, are flawed. Overrated." The student uses a personal example but goes into great detail regarding their own experiences and with examples from popular culture to illustrate why the example is overrated.

## Based on your experience at the AP® Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

- 1. Teachers need to help students understand that the first step in the process of writing an on-demand essay is to dissect, and therefore comprehend, the prompt. More does not always equate to better. A clear and focused choice of what is overrated tended to result in better scores.
- 2. Once students have a clear understanding of what the prompt is asking for, teachers might consider helping them to understand that when they chose a variety of kinds/types of evidence as support for their position, they should focus on finding ways to articulate how the different pieces fit together. Teachers should try to make students understand that part of their purpose is to help the audience understand how the variety of evidence connects back to what the prompt. Essays that accomplished this feat were less disjointed and more complete.
- 3. Students must attempt to give detailed examples, explaining how the evidence they choose illustrates why their claim is valid. What many lower level essays do is list examples and then assert that the example supports the claim. Students need to explain *how* the example illustrates the truth of the claim.

## What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

- Teachers will find example responses from this particular question on AP Central, along with scoring notes and specific commentary explaining why each point was or was not earned.
- The 2019 Course and Exam Description for English Language includes a diverse collection of resources including the Instructional Approaches section as well as the Exam Overview section.
- FRQ practice questions for teachers to use as formative assessment pieces are now available as part of the collection of new resources for teachers for the 2019 school year. These items begin with scaffolded questions that represent what students are ready for at the beginning of the school year and that continue on to present an increased challenge as teachers progress through the course. These resources are available on AP Classroom with the ability to search for specific question types and topics so that teachers are able to find the new collection of FRQ practice questions and the fully developed scoring guidelines that accompany each question.