

2020

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# AP<sup>®</sup> English Language and Composition

Scoring Commentaries - Packet 3

Rhetorical Analysis Question - Obama

**AP English Language and Composition  
Rhetorical Analysis Question (2020)  
2020 Scoring Commentaries**

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**Sample A**

**Score: 6/6 Points (A1 – B4 – C1)**

**Row A: 1/1**

The response earned one point for Row A because it effectively articulates a defensible thesis in the last sentence of the first paragraph: “With appeals to both pathos and logos, the application of anecdote, and a respectful, admiring tone, Obama’s intended purpose in his eulogy for Kennedy is clear; he paints the late Ted Kennedy in a respectable, memorable light, which those attending the funeral would forever remember the Senator by.”

**Row B: 4/4**

The response earned four points for its specific use of evidence, consistent use of commentary, and explanation of multiple rhetorical choices. The response begins with an analysis of Obama’s “use of personal anecdotes from the late Senator’s life.” After providing a specific text reference, commentary explains why using a “familial dynamic” would be persuasive to the audience hearing the eulogy. The paragraph finishes by observing, “Obama describes Kennedy’s rise to respect within his family and in life as a whole, painting him as a human being, not an untouchable political figure.” This effectively transitions into the third paragraph—“That ability to relate to Kennedy on such a personal level enhanced the effects of Obama’s appeal to pathos”—establishing a line of reasoning between the rhetorical choices, the response explains. After providing evidence and commentary about tragedy in Kennedy’s life and how that would cause “an audience to empathize with a person in a situation such as this,” the paragraph finishes with the explanation, “Obama later mentions that this suffering only increased Kennedy’s drive to do good,” which will form the basis of the response’s fourth paragraph, which outlines some of Kennedy’s successes, establishing him as a “man with the power to shape the law itself.” The fifth paragraph addresses the tone of the eulogy with the same consistency demonstrated in previous paragraphs, meaning this response consistently touched on a wide array of rhetorical choices, linked together in support of the larger thesis about Obama’s purpose.

**Row C: 1/1**

The response earned one point through explaining the significance or relevance of the writer’s rhetorical choices given the rhetorical situation, in this case, appealing to the audience’s understanding of family dynamics and interpersonal relationships. The former is seen in the second paragraph’s assertion that “[t]his familial dynamic described in the quote is one that most people can relate to on some level, as most families have a member who is an underdog in the social pecking order.” The latter is in the third paragraph: “If there is one thing that allows an audience to empathize with a person in a situation such as this, it is the mention of tragedy.”

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**Sample B**

**Score: 5/6 Points (A1 – B4 – C0)**

**Row A: 1/1**

The response earned one point in Row A because it articulates a defensible thesis in the last sentence of the first paragraph: “While bringing emotion and pride to his audience, Obama uses the rhetorical modes of causal analysis, description, and exemplification to best emphasize Kennedy’s life.”

**Row B: 4/4**

The response earned four points for Row B because it integrates evidence from throughout the passage to support the analysis. The response provides well-developed commentary that explicitly establishes a line of reasoning about Obama’s purpose to pay “tribute to both the hardships and accomplishments Kennedy faced and made in his lifetime.” Within this line of reasoning, the response offers multiple supporting claims. In the second paragraph, specific details about Kennedy’s childhood are incorporated into the response: “Obama...tells the audience of how when Ted was thrown off of a boat at age six,” and, “His brothers constantly teased him in many instances such as this.” The response then contains commentary explaining how the evidence supports a line of reasoning: “This story of Kennedy’s childhood not only provides the audience with a joyful story to brighten the usually melancholy mood at most funerals, but also points out the determined nature of Ted’s character.” In the same paragraph, additional evidence about “the many tragedies Ted went through” is paraphrased. Once again, commentary connects this evidence to the line of reasoning explaining how the “relationship between tragedy and Kennedy’s character appeals to the audience’s emotions, by leading them to recognize the sadness Ted felt, as well as inducing pride towards Kennedy’s ability to push through it all.” The response continues this pattern, with the third paragraph claiming, “Obama uses description to continue building on the strength and resilience Kennedy had.” In this paragraph, specific textual evidence is used with the incorporation of direct quotations once again followed by cogent analysis: “This description shows the audience how Kennedy’s persistent personality began at a young age.” In the fourth paragraph, the response returns to its line of reasoning, providing evidence and commentary to support the idea that “[o]ne of the main ideas within the eulogy is how Kennedy was able to push past obstacles that the average man would not be able to face.” The response continues its pattern of providing evidence and commentary to explain why Obama would include these examples in a eulogy.

**Row C: 0/1**

The response did not earn a point for this row because it did not demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the rhetorical choices given the rhetorical situation. While it does understand the context of a eulogy, it does not provide insight into the specific context of this eulogy in a sophisticated manner. The response moves dutifully through the larger rhetorical choices Obama makes, but it does not explore complexities or tensions that are more evident in the final third of the eulogy. While the prose is clear and appropriate, the style is not consistently vivid and persuasive.

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**Sample C**

**Score: 5/6 Points (A1 – B3 – C1)**

**Row A: 1/1**

The response earned one point for Row A because it articulates a defensible thesis in the last sentence of the first paragraph: “In the eulogy delivered at Kennedy’s funeral, President Barack Obama employs a bittersweet tone and imagery in order to completely memorialize and praise a public individual he stood by and looked up to.”

**Row B: 3/4**

The response earned three points for Row B because it includes textual references relevant to the thesis and explains how the evidence supports a line of reasoning. The second paragraph provides evidence of Kennedy’s “hardships not only as a public figure, but as a person” and his ability to rise above these hardships. Commentary then advances a line of reasoning, observing that the “speaker purposefully makes this distinction to communicate to his audience the heroicness of Kennedy.” After additional specific evidence, more commentary explains the content is included “in order to make the audience, American people amongst politicians and relatives to the passed, feel as though there was no doubt that Kennedy was a true warrior” and that “the audience has no choice other than to see how Kennedy’s passing was on to be remembered and grieved, and his life celebrated.” A claim about how “imagery is utilized” begins the third paragraph. After providing specific evidence about “Kennedy’s passion...towards civil rights,” commentary explains that Obama “specifically portrayed this aspect of Kennedy’s standing in order to exemplify a thought every critic or politically divided person could get behind, a choice which makes the audience directly feel the impact that he had on America in a positive and honorable way.”

**Row C: 1/1**

The response earned one point for Row C for its consistent explanation of the significance of Obama’s rhetorical situation. The response begins with an understanding of politics of the time, acknowledging that “Obama stood as a figure that was either praised or condemned by bipartisan politicians,” and points out that Obama “was deeply affected by a likewise public figure such as Ted Kennedy.” This recognition continues at the end of the second paragraph, where the response explains, “because of Obama’s tone, the reality of Kennedy’s eulogy remained that he...deserved every shred of praise and respect throughout all of American thought.” The commentary is more explicit in the third paragraph, acknowledging openly “every critic or politically divided person.” The response concludes by asserting, “These purposeful choices of bittersweet tone and imagery directly influence the entire audience to mourn and celebrate the loss of Ted Kennedy, no matter their political alignment.”

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**Sample D**

**Score: 4/6 Points (A1 – B3 – C0)**

**Row A: 1/1**

The response earned one point for Row A because it articulates a defensible thesis in the last two sentences of the first paragraph: “Obama utilizes descriptive imagery and anecdotes from Kennedy’s personal life in order to praise and memorialize the image of the senator. Obama utilizes a glorifying tone in order to immortalize the memory of Kennedy not only in the funeral attendees, but also the American people.”

**Row B: 3/4**

The response earned three points for Row B because it includes textual references relevant to the thesis and explains (with varying degrees of depth) how the evidence supports a line of reasoning. In the second paragraph, the response identifies the importance of certain nouns Obama uses, specifically those with “familial connotation such as ‘child,’ ‘son,’ and ‘Father.’” The commentary then explains that this rhetorical choice “is able to build a sense of emotional loss within the audience by associating the senator with lost family.” In the third paragraph, the response presents the claim that “Obama then utilizes tragic personal anecdotes and details from Kennedy’s life and childhood in order to emphasize the senator’s strength and resilience despite the turmoil of his life.” Specific evidence is provided as the response combines direct quotes and paraphrase to summarize Obama’s choices. The commentary begins building by explaining, “Obama’s virtuous diction glorifies Kennedy’s ability to persevere in the face of adversity.” The line of reasoning is developed in the next sentence as the response asserts that the evidence is included “in order to illustrate how his personal tragedies led [Kennedy] to become a champion of the common people.” This more thorough analysis is completed in the final sentence of the paragraph: “Through this emphasis, Obama praises Kennedy’s values and achievements in order to create a sense of deep loss for the saintly senator that causes the audience to feel as if they owe it to him to immortalize his memory and legacy.”

**Row C: 0/1**

The response did not earn a point for Row C. While understanding the context of a eulogy, the response does not consistently provide a sophisticated understanding of this specific rhetorical situation. The response does not address the complexities or tensions in the passage, instead focusing on a narrower range of rhetorical choices: Neither Kennedy’s humor nor the complex portrayal of the passionate speaker who respected his opponents is addressed. The style is appropriate to the task but is not consistently vivid and persuasive.

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**Sample E**

**Score: 3/6 Points (A1 – B2 – C0)**

**Row A: 1/1**

The response earned one point for Row A for this idea-driven thesis in the last two sentences of the first paragraph: “Following Ted Kennedy’s death the acting president Obama...told the many challenges of Ted Kennedy and memorable moments that won’t be forgotten throughout his life in order to praise him and honor his legacy.”

**Row B: 2/4**

The response earned two points for Row B because it includes some specific relevant evidence and explains how some of the evidence relates to the student’s argument; however, there is no line of reasoning established. Instead, the paragraphs in this response do not connect to one another and do not develop deep and meaningful argumentation. In the second paragraph, the response does provide evidence of the rhetorical choice to include “Ted Kennedy’s Challenges in his life to honor his legacy,” followed by specific textual evidence from the passage. However, the explanation is simplistic and repetitive: “This quote from his speech refers to Kennedy’s many losses in his family and throughout his life these include his siblings and nephews. [Obama] uses this rhetoric to show people that even though Kennedy faced many challenges in life he still carried on and stayed strong turning him into the person he became.” There is not an explicit connection back to the thesis and how this content would “praise him and honor his legacy.” The second paragraph continues by providing additional specific evidence about Kennedy’s suffering, and the commentary does go beyond mere summary: “This rhetoric also supports the previous quote and statement as he refers to Kennedy’s pain and suffering at an early age attributing to the kind and giving person he became.” However, the connection back to the thesis is not strong enough to establish a line of reasoning throughout the response. The paragraph finishes with new evidence introduced, but no commentary provided. The third paragraph of the response continues similarly, with specific evidence quoting Obama’s anecdote, but the commentary is simplistic: “The president said this to show Ted Kennedy’s humor throughout his life and the smiles he would have put on many people.” These moments of commentary do not explain the connections or progression between the student’s claims, so a line of reasoning is not clearly established.

**Row C: 0/1**

The response did not earn a point for Row C because there is no demonstration of sophistication of thought or complex understanding of the rhetorical situation. Individual choices are briefly examined, but the relationships among different choices throughout the text are not. The response does recognize a tension in the passage when incorporating the description of a fiery Ted Kennedy in the Senate chamber in its third paragraph, but the analysis does not attempt to analyze the juxtaposition with this description and the remainder of the passage’s final paragraph. While the prose of the passage is generally clear, it does not demonstrate a consistently vivid or persuasive style.

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**Sample F**

**Score: 2/6 Points (A1 – B1 – C0)**

**Row A: 1/1**

The response earned one point for Row A, with the first sentence establishing a defensible position that “President Barack Obama uses antimetabole, pathos and other rhetorical devices to convey how he felt about the loss of Ted Kennedy.”

**Row B: 1/4**

The response earned one point for Row B. In the second paragraph, the response claims that “there were many pieces of pathos used in his speech.” The evidence that follows is mostly general and describes the eulogy instead of providing commentary. The response does attempt commentary by observing, “[Obama] uses pathos to connect with the audience by saying what his nieces used to call him.” However, this again describes a textual moment without establishing *how* this evidence connects to the thesis that this eulogy will convey to the audience how Obama “felt about the loss of Ted Kennedy.” This pattern repeats in the third paragraph, with the response claiming that “one of the main devices [Obama] used was Antimetabole.” More specific evidence is provided when referencing “William Wordsworth to show how great of a man Kennedy was even though he went through many lows in life.” The response then provides the generalized observation, “This really pulled the speech together and was a great rhetorical device in Obama’s speech,” instead of explaining how this evidence supports the argument in the thesis.

**Row C: 0/1**

The response did not earn a point for Row C because the provided commentary does not connect the rhetorical choices to the rhetorical situation of this specific eulogy. The response does not examine the relationships among the different choices and does not address complexities or tensions in the text. While the language does convey the response’s ideas, inaccuracies such as “Obama used a William Wordsworth to show how great of a man Kennedy was” keep the response from demonstrating a consistently vivid and persuasive style.



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**Sample G**

**Score: 1/6 Points (A0 – B1 – C0)**

**Row A: 0/1**

The response did not earn a point for Row A. The response lists rhetorical choices (“Obama used pathos, metaphors, and similes throughout the speech”) but makes no claim about their inclusion towards Obama’s purpose in delivering this eulogy.

**Row B: 1/4**

The response earned one point for Row B because it describes rhetorical choices rather than offering any discussion of the effects of these choices in the speech. In the second paragraph, the response claims that “Obama used a plethora of sentences that referred to pathos because of how emotional they were,” then provides textual evidence to support the claim. However, the commentary that “[t]his sentence is a metaphor because it uses the word ‘as’ to compare who Kennedy was to his family” describes a sentence-level structure without connecting back to how the nicknames make an emotional impact on the audience. The third paragraph has a similar structure, identifying what the student believes is a simile, but with commentary that describes what is happening as opposed to why it should persuade the audience: “In this sentence Obama used a simile to compare how everyone was feeling at the time of losing Ted Kennedy.” The final sentence of the third paragraph attempts analysis, but it is too generic to offer insight into the specific choices that Obama makes.

**Row C: 0/1**

The response did not earn a point for Row C because, though there are attempts to contextualize the text, such attempts consist predominantly of sweeping generalizations, such as “used the right amount of rhetorical devices.” The response does mention individual rhetorical choices but does not examine the relationships among the different choices. The response also oversimplifies complexities in the text, such as the overly broad assertion that Obama “used a plethora of emotion.”