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

## Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary

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#### **Free Response Question 2**

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## Rhetorical Analysis

6 points

On February 27, 2013, while in office, former president Barack Obama delivered the following address dedicating the Rosa Parks statue in the National Statuary Hall of the United States Capitol building. Rosa Parks was an African American civil rights activist who was arrested in 1955 for refusing to give up her seat on a segregated bus in Montgomery, Alabama. Read the passage carefully. Write an essay that analyzes the rhetorical choices Obama makes to convey his message.

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that analyzes the writer’s rhetorical choices.
- Select and use evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the rhetorical situation.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

| Reporting Category  | Scoring Criteria  |   |
|---|---|---|
| <p><b>Row A</b></p> <p><b>Thesis</b></p> <p><b>(0-1 points)</b></p>   | <p><b>0 points</b></p> <p>For any of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is no defensible thesis.</li> <li>• The intended thesis only restates the prompt.</li> <li>• The intended thesis provides a summary of the issue with no apparent or coherent claim.</li> <li>• There is a thesis, but it does not respond to the prompt.</li> </ul> | <p><b>1 point</b></p> <p>Responds to the prompt with a defensible thesis that analyzes the writer’s rhetorical choices.</p>   |
| <b>Decision Rules and Scoring Notes</b>   |   |   |
| <p><b>Responses that do not earn this point:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only restate the prompt.</li> <li>• Fail to address the rhetorical choices the writer of the passage makes.</li> <li>• Describe or repeat the passage rather than making a claim that requires a defense.</li> </ul>  |   | <p><b>Responses that earn this point:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respond to the prompt rather than restating or rephrasing the prompt <u>and</u> clearly articulate a defensible thesis about the rhetorical choices Obama makes to convey his message.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Examples that do not earn this point:</b></p> <p><b>Restate the prompt</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“President Obama gave a speech in 2013 to dedicate a new statue honoring Rosa Parks, who was an American civil rights activist.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“In 1955, Rosa Parks famously refused to give up her bus seat; 58 years later, President Obama gave a speech to commemorate a statue of Parks in the Capitol Building.”</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Make a claim, but do not address the writer’s rhetorical choices</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“On the unveiling of a new statue of Rosa Parks, President Obama gave an eloquent speech honoring Parks’ life and activism.”</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Repeat provided information from the passage</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“In his speech, President Obama praised Rosa Parks for her actions, which led to three hundred and eight-five days of the Montgomery Bus Boycott that successfully ended segregation on public transportation.”</i></li> </ul> |   | <p><b>Examples that earn this point:</b></p> <p><b>Present a defensible thesis that analyzes the writer’s rhetorical choices</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Obama uses sympathetic diction, historical references, and quotes from the Bible to convey his message about Rosa Parks.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“In his 2013 speech honoring Rosa Parks, Obama used narrative, descriptive language, and Biblical allusions to convey his admiration for the civil rights activist.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“President Obama relies on the audience’s familiarity with the story of Rosa Parks’ refusal to give up her bus seat, using that well-known image of her to call on his audience to ‘carry forward the power of her principle’ as the best way to honor her legacy.”</i></li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Additional Notes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The thesis may be more than one sentence, provided the sentences are in close proximity.</li> <li>• The thesis may be anywhere within the response.</li> <li>• For a thesis to be defensible, the passage must include at least minimal evidence that <i>could</i> be used to support that thesis; however, the student need not cite that evidence to earn the thesis point.</li> <li>• The thesis <i>may</i> establish a line of reasoning that structures the essay, but it needn’t do so to earn the thesis point.</li> <li>• A thesis that meets the criteria can be awarded the point whether or not the rest of the response successfully supports that line of reasoning.</li> </ul>   |   |   |

| Reporting Category  | Scoring Criteria   |   |  |   |   |
|---|--|---|--|---|---|
| <p><b>Row B</b></p> <p><b>Evidence AND Commentary (0-4 points)</b></p>  | <p><b>0 points</b></p> <p>Simply restates thesis (if present), repeats provided information, or offers information irrelevant to the prompt.</p>   | <p><b>1 point</b></p> <p><b>EVIDENCE:</b><br/>Provides evidence that is mostly general.</p> <p><b>AND</b></p> <p><b>COMMENTARY:</b><br/>Summarizes the evidence but does not explain how the evidence supports the student’s argument.</p>  | <p><b>2 points</b></p> <p><b>EVIDENCE:</b><br/>Provides some specific, relevant evidence.</p> <p><b>AND</b></p> <p><b>COMMENTARY:</b><br/>Explains how some of the evidence relates to the student’s argument, but no line of reasoning is established, or the line of reasoning is faulty.</p>  | <p><b>3 points</b></p> <p><b>EVIDENCE:</b><br/>Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning.</p> <p><b>AND</b></p> <p><b>COMMENTARY:</b><br/>Explains how some of the evidence supports a line of reasoning.</p> <p><b>AND</b></p> <p>Explains how at least one rhetorical choice in the passage contributes to the writer’s argument, purpose, or message.</p>  | <p><b>4 points</b></p> <p><b>EVIDENCE:</b><br/>Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning.</p> <p><b>AND</b></p> <p><b>COMMENTARY:</b><br/>Consistently explains how the evidence supports a line of reasoning.</p> <p><b>AND</b></p> <p>Explains how multiple rhetorical choices in the passage contribute to the writer’s argument, purpose, or message.</p> |
| <b>Decision Rules and Scoring Notes</b>   |  |   |  |   |   |
| <p><b>Typical responses that earn 0 points:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are incoherent or do not address the prompt.</li> <li>• May be just opinion with no textual references or references that are irrelevant.</li> </ul>   | <p><b>Typical responses that earn 1 point:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tend to focus on summary or description of a passage rather than specific details or techniques.</li> <li>• Mention rhetorical choices with little or no explanation.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Typical responses that earn 2 points:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consist of a mix of specific evidence and broad generalities.</li> <li>• May contain some simplistic, inaccurate, or repetitive explanations that don’t strengthen the argument.</li> <li>• May make one point well but either do not make multiple supporting claims or do not adequately support more than one claim.</li> <li>• Do not explain the connections or progression between the student’s claims, so a line of reasoning is not clearly established.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Typical responses that earn 3 points:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uniformly offer evidence to support claims.</li> <li>• Focus on the importance of specific words and details from the passage to build an argument.</li> <li>• Organize an argument as a line of reasoning composed of multiple supporting claims.</li> <li>• Commentary may fail to integrate some evidence or fail to support a key claim.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Typical responses that earn 4 points:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uniformly offer evidence to support claims.</li> <li>• Focus on the importance of specific words and details from the passage to build an argument.</li> <li>• Organize and support an argument as a line of reasoning composed of multiple supporting claims, each with adequate evidence that is clearly explained.</li> <li>• Explain how the writer’s use of rhetorical choices contributes to the student’s interpretation of the passage.</li> </ul> |   |
| <p><b>Additional Notes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing that suffers from grammatical and/or mechanical errors that interfere with communication cannot earn the fourth point in this row.</li> <li>• To earn the fourth point in this row, the response may observe multiple instances of the same rhetorical choice if each instance further contributes to the argument, purpose, or message of the passage.</li> </ul> |  |   |  |   |   |

| Reporting Category   | Scoring Criteria  |   |
|--|---|---|
| <b>Row C</b><br><b>Sophistication</b><br><b>(0-1 points)</b> | <b>0 points</b><br>Does not meet the criteria for one point.  | <b>1 point</b><br>Demonstrates sophistication of thought and/or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation.  |
|  | <b>Decision Rules and Scoring Notes</b>   |   |
|  | <b>Responses that do not earn this point:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attempt to contextualize the text, but such attempts consist predominantly of sweeping generalizations (“<i>In a world where...</i>” OR “<i>Since the beginning of time...</i>”).</li> <li>• Only hint at or suggest other arguments (“<i>While some may argue that...</i>” OR “<i>Some people say...</i>”).</li> <li>• Examine individual rhetorical choices but do not examine the relationships among different choices throughout the text.</li> <li>• Oversimplify complexities in the text.</li> <li>• Use complicated or complex sentences or language that is ineffective because it does not enhance their analysis.</li> </ul> | <b>Responses that earn this point may demonstrate sophistication of thought and/or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation by doing any of the following:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Explaining the significance or relevance of the writer’s rhetorical choices (given the rhetorical situation).</li> <li>2. Explaining a purpose or function of the passage’s complexities or tensions.</li> <li>3. Employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive.</li> </ol> |
|  | <b>Additional Notes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This point should be awarded only if the sophistication of thought or complex understanding is part of the argument, not merely a phrase or reference.</li> </ul>   |   |

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

Barack Obama will go down in history as the first ~~black~~ black president. However, he recognizes the importance of acknowledging those that made that possible. He did so by placing a statue of civil rights activist Rosa Parks in the National Statuary Hall. In the address he gave to dedicate the statue Obama used repetition, biblical references, and personal anecdotes to convey the power of her actions.

Perhaps President Obama's most notable rhetorical choice is the repetition used throughout his speech.

In the third paragraph of his speech he says, "Rosa Parks would not be pushed... She would not be pushed."

He uses this repetition to stress Rosa Parks' determination in the face of arrest while he tells the famous story of her refusing to move on the bus. In addition in lines 34-35 while discussing the determination of the boycotters Obama says, "walking for respect, walking for freedom." This repetition not only stresses the fact that many boycotters walked miles through harsh conditions (as he previously mentioned in the same paragraph), but further emphasizes the words "freedom" and "respect". This is important because it calls attention to the basic human decency these people, especially Rosa Parks, fought for, with such persistence.

In addition to repetition, President Obama uses several allusions to religion and the bible to



Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

<sup>emphasize</sup>  
~~appear~~ ~~to~~ the great acts that were performed. Most notably in the speech Obama compares the ending of segregation to the ~~destruction~~ destruction of the walls of Jericho. He does this not only to ~~emph~~ highlight the massiveness of the wall that was segregation, but also to show how significant Rosa Parks bus boycott was. He essentially says that the bus boycott started a feat of biblical proportions. In addition he also says that the boycotters and Rosa were, "driven by a solemn determination to affirm their ~~god~~-given dignity." This is significant in several ways. Not only does it call attention to the religious support of the civil rights movement, but it forces many religious people who both opposed desegregation and perhaps even Barack Obama's presidency to accept that ~~the~~ <sup>their</sup> god that they believe in says that all people should be equal. This ~~is~~ is a bold statement that was often made during Rosa Parks' time.

Finally Obama draws on personal anecdotes to stress the importance of Rosa Parks to the black community. He draws on a quote from a childhood friend who he quoted as saying, "nobody ever bossed Rosa around and got away with it." He then continues to elaborate on Rosa's determination and persistence. This quote is important, though, because it shows how important and prominent Rosa Parks is to young ~~the~~ black Americans. It stresses that



Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

she is admired and well known even today. In addition Obama also says, "It is because of these men and women that I stand here today." This may be the most important line in his speech because he brings the actions of Rosa Parks full circle to show the impact, not just on her present, but on America's future. He does this by calling attention to the fact that Rosa started a boycott, that started breaking the walls of desegregation, which if they still existed today, would have prevented Barack Obama, a black man, from ever becoming president. So by doing this Obama proves that Rosa Parks deserves this statue because she has helped shape America in an extremely substantial way.

Barack Obama uses repetition, biblical references, and personal anecdotes to call attention to the heroics of Rosa Parks. He effectively justifies the presence of her statue and highlights the sacrifices and determination of both her, and the other participants in the civil rights movement.



Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

In the address that dedicated the Rosa Parks statue in the National Statuary Hall, former President Barack Obama, uses emotional appeals, logical reasoning, and similes. In order for the people listening to the address to understand to honor Rosa Parks by carrying on her power of principle and her conviction.

Obama uses emotional appeals such as "through the rain and cold and sweltering heat" and "not thinking about the blisters on their feet", so the reader understand the pain they went through. When the audience understands the pain that Rosa Parks and her followers went through they will then see the strength of her conviction. As the audience sees the strength of the conviction they will then know how to carry it on.

Another way Obama conveys his message is through logical reasoning. In lines 68-74, Obama states "Like the bus driver, but also like the passengers on the bus, we see the way things are - children hungry in a land of plenty, entire neighborhoods ravaged by violence, families hobbled by job loss or illness - and we make excuses for inaction, and we say to ourselves, that's not my responsibility, there's nothing I can do."

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

In this sentence Obama explains how people think, and he explains why they don't act when they can. In the preceding sentence he states, "Rosa Parks tells us there's always something we can do". Obama does this so that he can reason with us and tell us that we can do something to help. This creates the audience to start to think like Rosa Parks ~~which~~ which means that Obama had properly conveyed his message.

The last way Obama ~~tries~~ tries to convey his message is with the use of similes. An example is found in lines 41-44, where Obama states, "And with that victory, the entire edifice of Segregation, like the ancient wall of Jericho, began to slowly come tumbling down." Obama used this simile to show how the process of desegregation was slow, but throughout the process Rosa Parks never gave up. The audience then understands the principles of Rosa Parks, and they will try to carry them onward.

In conclusion Obama uses emotional appeals, logical reasoning, and similes so the audience will understand his message to carry on Rosa Parks principles and conviction.

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

In his address - dedicated to Rosa Parks - ~~the~~ ~~black~~ first African American president of the United States, Barack Obama, Appeals emotionally to the audience <sup>and</sup> informs the audience of who Rosa Parks was and why she is important ~~and~~ in order to move the audience toward a more sophisticated way of life.

~~Barack~~ Obama relates this story in the Past to today and how old she would turn the month he gave the speech. Many people know what she did so knowing she would be the hundred years old would be emotional for many members of the audience. The fact that thousands of people stood behind her and boycotted for months until they got their rights is emotionally appealing ~~to~~ Obama would have never been able to take the position of leadership he was in if Rosa Parks and thousands of others wouldn't have stood up for color. rights.

Obama ~~went~~ goes into great depth about Parks story and why she is a hero to today's society. He includes the religious "God-given dignity" ~~the~~ ~~&~~ Parks supporters ~~receiv~~ had to affirm with their determination for the cause at hand. He goes on to state that



Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

the greatest thing we can do is continue to honor her memory and carry forward her power. Parks is courage born and she stood up for what ~~the~~<sup>she</sup> believed in even if it meant going to jail.

## Question 2

**Note:** Student samples are quoted verbatim and may contain grammatical errors.

### Overview

The rhetorical analysis prompt asked students to read an excerpt from a 2013 speech delivered by former president Barack Obama dedicating the Rosa Parks statue in the National Statuary Hall of the United States Capitol building. They were then asked to write an essay that analyzed the rhetorical choices Obama made to convey his message. Students were expected to respond to the prompt with a thesis that analyzed the writer’s rhetorical choices; select and use evidence to support their line of reasoning; explain how the evidence supported their line of reasoning; demonstrate an understanding of the rhetorical situation; and use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating their argument. The skills expected to be demonstrated in this writing included 1.A, 2.A, 4.A, 4.B, 4.C, 6.A, 6.B, 6.C, 8.A, 8.B, and 8.C.

The Question Leader remarks, “As one would expect, this prompt proved very accessible to students. Both the language and the rhetorical situation were clear, allowing students to engage the task of evaluating the rhetorical choices Obama made to convey his message of both commemorating and memorializing Rosa Parks, while also calling the audience to action to be like Rosa Parks in the smaller, consistent actions that she did. As one student so eloquently said, ‘we should all be Rosas,’ capturing the lofty ideals Obama conveys.” We expected and were not disappointed when the vast majority of responses earned the thesis point and demonstrated a clear line of reasoning, although there was a varying degree of success in their explanations of how their observations conveyed meaning (demonstrating the skills of rhetorical analysis and explaining Obama’s choices).

### Sample: 2A

**Score: 1-4-1**

#### Thesis (0–1) points: 1

The thesis is stated at the end of paragraph 1: “In the address he gave to dedicate the statue Obama used repetition, biblical references, and personal anecdotes to convey the power of her actions.” This is a clearly articulated and defensible statement that takes a position on the rhetorical choices Obama makes to convey his message and flows logically from the ideas that precede it in the opening paragraph.

#### Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 4

The response uniformly offers evidence to support all claims in its line of reasoning. Paragraph 2 explicates Obama’s use of repetition (e.g., “in lines 34–35 while discussing the determination of the boycotters Obama says, ‘walking for respect, walking for freedom’); paragraph 3 details his use of “allusions to religion and the bible” (e.g., “Most notably in the speech Obama compares the ending of segregation to the destruction of the walls of Jericho”); and paragraph 4 discusses his use of personal anecdotes (e.g., “He draws on a quote from a childhood friend”). The commentary offered in each paragraph consistently and clearly explains how the evidence offered supports each claim as well as how Obama’s rhetorical choices contribute to the response’s interpretation of the passage. For example, in paragraph 3, when explaining the claim that Obama uses religious and Biblical references to convey his message, the response offers the following commentary: “This is significant in several ways. Not only does it call attention to the religious support of the civil rights movement, but it forces many religious people who both opposed desegregation and perhaps even Barack Obama’s presidency to accept that their god that they believe in says that all people should be equal.” The level of evidence and commentary provided is consistent throughout the response, with the response focusing on the importance of specific words and details from the passage to build its argument (e.g., “This repetition not only stresses the fact that many boycotters walked miles through harsh condition (as he previously mentioned in the same paragraph), but further



## Question 2 (continued)

emphasizes the words ‘freedom’ and ‘respect.’ This is important because it calls attention to the basic human decencies these people, especially Rosa Parks, fought for with such persistence”).

### **Sophistication (0–1 points): 1**

The response earned this point for explaining the broader significance of Obama’s rhetorical choices, demonstrating the understanding that former civil rights activists, a broader American public, and a potentially antagonistic audience are all being addressed in different ways by the different rhetorical choices he makes: “he recognizes the importance of acknowledging those that made” his presidency possible, “Obama draws on personal anecdotes to stress the importance of Rosa Parks to the black community,” and “religious people who opposed desegregation.” In addition, the response makes an interesting connection between rhetorical choices at the beginning of Obama’s speech (the quote from his childhood friend that illustrates Parks’s determination) and Obama’s larger point that it is because of people like Rosa Parks that Obama is now President of the United States, stating that “This may be the most important line in his speech because he brings the actions of Rosa Parks full circle to show her impact, not just on her present, but on America’s future.” The response sets up the larger context for this point with the opening two sentences of the first paragraph and then returns to it at the end of paragraph 4.

### **Sample: 2B**

**Score: 1-3-0**

### **Thesis (0–1) points: 1**

The thesis is stated over the course of the first paragraph: “In the address that dedicated the Rosa Parks Statue in the National Statuary Hall, former President Barack Obama, uses emotional appeals, logical reasoning, and similes. In order for the people listening to the address to understand to honor Rosa Parks by carrying on her power of principle and her conviction.” This is a defensible statement that takes a position on the rhetorical choices Obama makes to convey his message.

### **Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 3**

The response uniformly offers evidence to support its claims, focusing on the importance of specific words and details from the passage to build an argument. For example, in paragraph 2, the response uses direct quotes from Obama’s speech (“through the rain and cold and sweltering heat” and “not thinking about the blisters on their feet”) to introduce the claim that Obama uses these descriptions so “the reader understand the pain they went through.” The commentary explains how some of the evidence supports a line of reasoning (e.g., “Obama uses this simile” about the ancient wall of Jericho “to show how the process of desegregation was slow, but throughout the Process Rosa Parks never gave up”). The response explicates three of Obama’s rhetorical choices (emotional appeal in paragraph 2; logical reasoning in paragraph 3; and use of simile in paragraph 4) as it develops its ultimate line of reasoning that Obama uses these choices to convey his message that we can “carry on Rosa Parks principles and conviction.”

### **Sophistication (0–1 points): 0**

While the response does demonstrate some understanding of Obama’s ultimate call to action, there is not enough development of the significance or relevance of his rhetorical choices within this larger context. The references to Obama’s larger message at the end of each paragraph, while logical and related to the line of reasoning being developed, are not much more than general repetition of the same idea “that we can do something to help.”

## Question 2 (continued)

### Sample: 2C

Score: 1-1-0

#### Thesis (0–1) points: 1

The thesis is stated in the opening sentence of the response: “In his address—dedicated to Rosa Parks—the first African American President of the United States, Barack Obama, appeals emotionally to the audience, and informs the audience of who Rosa Parks is and why she is important in order to move the audience toward a more sophisticated way of life.” This is a defensible statement that takes a position on the rhetorical choices Obama makes to convey his message.

#### Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 1

The response tends to focus on summary and description of the passage. In paragraph 2, it substitutes a claim about the passage for commentary on why Obama makes a particular rhetorical choice: “The fact that thousands of people stood behind her and boycotted for months until they got their rights is emotionally appealing.” In paragraph 3, it paraphrases Obama rather than analyzing his choices: “He goes on to state that the greatest thing we can do is continue to honor her memory and carry forward her power.” Any mentions of rhetorical choices are given without further explanation as to their significance. For example, the response mentions Obama’s inclusion of “the religious ‘God-given dignity’” but does not go beyond stating that “Parks supporters had to affirm” this dignity “with their determination for the cause at hand.”

#### Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

In the opening paragraph, the mention of Obama attempting to “move the audience toward a more sophisticated way of life” introduces the potential for an unusual and interesting argument, but the response does not offer any real development of this point. In addition, no connections are made between the few rhetorical choices that the response identifies and a larger context. While it does hint at the recognition of a broader context (“Obama would have never been able to take the position of leadership he was in if Rose Parks and thousands of others wouldn’t have stood up”), the response does not make an attempt to place Obama’s rhetorical choices within this broader context.