

Chief Reader Report on Student Responses: 2017 AP[®] Seminar

End-of-Course Exam, Parts A and B Individual Research Report (Performance Task 1) and Individual Written Argument (Performance Task 2)

• Number of Students Scored	19,943		
• Number of Readers	290		
• Score Distribution	Exam Score	N	%At
	5	1,340	6.7
	4	3,011	15.1
	3	12,964	65.0
	2	2,308	11.6
	1	320	1.6
• Global Mean	3.14		

The following comments on the 2017 AP Seminar End-of-Course Exam and Performance Tasks were written by the Chief Reader, Teresa Reed, of The University of Tulsa. They give an overview of how students performed on the exam, the Individual Research Report and the Individual Written Argument, including typical student errors. General comments regarding skills that present the most frequent challenges are included, along with suggestions for improving student preparation. Teachers are encouraged to attend a College Board workshop to learn strategies for improving student performance in specific areas.

**End-of-Course Exam
Part A**

Task: Respond to three short-answer questions

Topic: Identifying the author's main idea (Q1), claims (Q2), and use of evidence (Q3)

Max. Points: 15

Mean Score: 10.10

What were responses in this section of the exam expected to demonstrate?

- Q1. Responses to this question were expected to demonstrate students' ability to accurately identify, in its entirety, the author's argument, main idea, or thesis. In this case, there were two primary components to the author's main idea: (1) Greed can stimulate the economy and (2) Greed can lead to poor health and unhappiness.
- Q2. Responses to this question were expected to demonstrate students' ability to identify the claims the author uses to develop the argument's line of reasoning.
- Q3. Responses to this question were expected to demonstrate students' ability to identify specific pieces of evidence the author uses and to assess that evidence in terms of relevance and credibility.

How well did the responses exhibit the skills required for this question?

The chart below shows how students scored this year, compared to the previous two years, on each question in Part A of the End-of-Course Exam:

EOC Part A	2015	2016	2017
Q1 (3 pts max)	2.20	2.1	2.34
Q2 (6 pts max)	4.62	4.8	4.22
Q3 (6 pts max)	4.07	4.5	3.52

What common challenges or errors were seen in the responses to this question?

Q1 — Common challenges or errors:

- Identification of only one part of the main idea
- Presenting a verbatim quote from the argument as the main idea
- Presenting the main idea as a research question

Q2 — Common challenges or errors:

- Mistaking evidence for claims
- Fabricating claims not present in the argument
- Listing claims insufficient in number to form a line of reasoning
- Failing to show claims as part of a line of reasoning

Q3 — Common challenges or errors:

- Labeling evidence as "credible" or "not credible" without justification or explanation
- Mentioning sources with no evaluation of relevance or credibility
- Mistaking claims for evidence

The scoring guidelines for Part A of the End-of-Course Exam include descriptors of typical performance at low, medium, and high levels for each of the three questions. Those descriptors are reproduced here. Scoring guidelines are posted on AP Central.

		Performance Levels		
Row	Content Area/ Proficiency	Low	Medium	High
1	Understand and Analyze Argument	The response misstates the author's argument, main idea, or thesis. 1	The response identifies, in part and with some accuracy, the author's argument, main idea, or thesis. 2	The response accurately identifies the author's argument, main idea, or thesis. 3
2	Understand and Analyze Argument	The response correctly identifies at least one of the author's claims. 2	The response provides a limited explanation of the author's line of reasoning by accurately identifying some of the claims AND identifying the connections or acknowledging a relationship among them. 4	The response provides a thorough explanation of the author's line of reasoning by identifying relevant claims and clearly explaining connections among them. 6
3	Evaluate Sources and Evidence	The response identifies little evidence. It makes a superficial reference to relevance and/or credibility but lacks explanation. 2	The response explains various pieces of evidence in terms of credibility and relevance, but may do so inconsistently or unevenly. 4	The response evaluates the relevance and credibility of the evidence and thoroughly evaluates how well the evidence is used to support the author's argument. 6

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

- Remind students that the main idea of a complex argument may have more than one part.
- Help students distinguish between claims and evidence.
- Prepare students to look for numerous claims.
- Have students practice articulating how claims contribute to a line of reasoning.
- Ensure that students can explain the relevance and credibility of a piece of evidence.
- Remind students that an author's credentials do NOT equal an evaluation of the evidence.

**End-of-Course Exam
Part B**

Task: Read stimulus sources
and then form an argument

Topic: Synthesis Essay

Max. Points: 24

Mean Score: 15.88

What was the response in this section of the Exam expected to demonstrate?

The response to this question was expected to demonstrate students' ability to:

- Identify a theme or issue connecting two or more of the provided sources.
- Read the sources critically, understanding the perspective or voice contained in each source.
- Use the theme as an impetus for writing a logically organized, well-reasoned, and well-crafted argument presenting their perspective.
- Incorporate two or more of the sources to support the newly-developed argument.
- Cite the sources, identifying them either by author or by assigned letters.
- Identify or paraphrase quotations.
- Complete the task within the 90-minute time period.

How well did the responses exhibit the skills required for this question?

The chart below shows how students scored this year, compared to the previous two years, on the synthesis question in the End-of-Course Exam:

Part B (formerly, EOC Section II)	2015	2016	2017
Maximum 24 pts	15.28	14.7	15.88

What common challenges or errors were seen in the responses to this question?

- Failing to infer an idea that could then be used to develop a thesis inspired by the sources.
- Failing to state a clear position or thesis.
- Summarizing sources rather than using them to develop and support a clear, original argument.
- Using numerous quotations rather than developing a line of reasoning.
- Failing to fully understand the perspective or position of the provided source(s).
- Oversimplifying and/or ignoring the theme connecting the sources.
- Writing an expository essay instead of an argument (“fast food is prevalent in American society”).
- Misreading or misinterpreting a source.
- Failing to understand the context of a given source. For example, Source B was written in 1970 (before the debates about GMOs really emerged); additionally, Borlaug was speaking about global hunger, not hunger in the U.S.
- Misreading the charts in Source D and then attempting to build an argument using erroneous information.
- Speaking in absolutes (“always,” “never”) and then attempting to use the sources to prove the point, thus failing to understand that the sources were snapshots in time.
- Failing to outline in advance or think through the organization of the written response.
- Failing to notice that sources can present contradictory perspectives (Source D, for example, contradicted Source A).
- “Cherry-picking” data/information from one or more sources while missing the source’s broader context.
- Using personal anecdotes excessively and at the expense of source analysis, interpretation, and purposeful commentary.
- Treating EOC, Part B the same as EOC, Part A; Part B requires students to interpret and synthesize sources.
- Writing illegibly.

The scoring guidelines for Part B of the End-of-Course Exam include descriptors of typical performance at low, medium, and high levels for each dimension. Those descriptors are reproduced below. Scoring guidelines are posted on AP Central.

		Performance Levels		
Row	Content Area/ Proficiency	Low	Medium	High
1	Establish Argument	The response misstates or overlooks a theme or issue that connects the sources. The response's perspective is unclear or unrelated to the sources.	The response identifies a theme or issue that connects the sources. The response derives its perspective from only one of the sources.	The response identifies a theme or issue connecting the provided sources and presents a perspective that is not represented in one of the sources OR brings a particularly insightful approach to one of the perspectives OR makes a strong thematic connection among perspectives.
		2	4	6
2	Establish Argument	The response's line of reasoning is disorganized and/or illogical. The response lacks commentary or the commentary incorrectly or tangentially explains the links between evidence and claims.	The argument is mostly clear and organized, but the logic may be faulty OR the reasoning may be logical but not well organized. The commentary explains the links between evidence and claims.	The response's line of reasoning is logically organized and well-developed. The commentary explains evidence and connects it to claims to clearly and convincingly establish an argument.
		2	4	6
3	Select and Use Evidence	The response repeats or misinterprets information from at least two of the provided sources, or the information lacks relevance thereby providing little support for an argument.	The response accurately uses relevant information from at least two of the provided sources to support an argument.	The response appropriately synthesizes relevant information drawn from at least two of the provided sources to develop and support a compelling argument.
		2	4	6
4	Apply Conventions	The response contains many flaws in grammar and style that often interfere with communication to the reader OR the response incorrectly or ineffectively attributes knowledge and ideas from sources.	The response is generally clear but contains some flaws in grammar and style that occasionally interfere with communication to the reader. The response accurately attributes knowledge and ideas from sources.	The response communicates clearly to the reader (although may not be free of errors in grammar and style) AND the response effectively integrates material from sources into the argument (e.g. it is clearly introduced, integrated, or embedded into the text) and accurately attributes knowledge and ideas.
		2	4	6

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

- Teach students to build an argument drawing support from a source rather than simply adopting the argument of the source itself. A student can reference the argument of a source provided it is expanded in an interesting way.
- Remind students to think about why the sources are grouped. While the sources may have one very simple theme in common (food), students should pay careful attention to the types of information, the various perspectives, and/or the different arguments presented in each.
- Urge students to use their time wisely. In 90 minutes, there is ample time to read the sources carefully, to take notes on those sources, think through a thesis, pre-write, draft, and proofread.
- Remind students to bring their argument back to their thesis throughout; avoid tangents.
- Remind students to first READ. Then think. Then write.
- Caution students to think carefully about making generalizations, particularly about demographic groups. Often, students started with a commonly held but unsupported belief (i.e., the poor always eat fast food) that ends up unfairly stereotyping particular groups.
- Engage students in the practice of EOC tasks early in the year so that they have an idea of what they will be working toward over several months.
- Prohibit students from recycling previously written essays.
- Remind students that subheadings, if used, should not replace of transitions that make the argument flow.
- Guide students in writing concise, compelling thesis statements. They should state their thesis and then develop it through their line of reasoning.
- Urge students to use a style and tone consistent with academic writing. The response should be neither too chatty, nor excessively formal and elevated. Students should imagine themselves engaged in a serious, thoughtful academic conversation.
- Ensure that students get some opportunity to work with, and learn to write about, an artistic text. While the sources for Part B did not involve a literary or artistic text this year--like a poem or a picture--that will not always be the case.
- Have students practice writing timed, short-answer essays by hand. In 90 minutes, students should be able slow down and write *legibly*.

Individual Research Report

Task: From a given lens, approach or range of perspectives write a critical review of sources used for research

Max. Points: 30

Topic: Individual contribution to the team project

Mean Score: 20.84

What was completion of this performance task expected to demonstrate?

This task assessed students' ability to:

- Investigate a particular approach, range of perspectives, or lens of the team's research project.
- Conduct academic/scholarly research relevant to the issue or topic.
- Produce an evaluative, analytic report about research on the chosen academic or real-world problem or issue.
- Analyze reasoning within the research literature.
- Analyze the relevance of evidence and credibility of sources.

How well did the responses exhibit the skills required for this task?

The chart below shows how students scored this year, as compared to the previous two years, on the Individual Research Report:

Individual Research Report	2015	2016	2017
Maximum 30 pts	21.54	20.9	20.84

What common challenges or errors were seen in the IRR?

- Relying exclusively or too heavily on general websites.
- Creating an independent argument rather than reporting out on the arguments found in the research literature.
- Failing to trace arguments in sources.
- Not making a clear distinction between the source's argument and the writer's ideas.
- Neglecting to include a title, or including a title that signals an argument rather than a report on a precise topic (and lens).
- Neglecting to proofread bibliographies for consistency and required elements (over reliance on URLs).
- Neglecting to proofread bibliographies generated by citation applications.
- Neglecting to match citations in text with bibliography.
- Neglecting to proofread text for grammar and spelling.
- Using a casual tone for an academic project.
- Providing general, limited, or simple analysis of reasoning of a source.
- Providing evidence but not making clear its relevance.
- Restating information gathered from sources.
- Failing to meaningfully connect the various perspectives located in the research.
- Exceeding word count.
- Relying excessively on quoting information from sources.
- Providing vague or superficial evaluations of credibility, or belabored descriptions of attribution standing in for evaluation.

The scoring guidelines for the Individual Research Report include descriptors of typical performance at low, medium, and high levels for each dimension. Those descriptors are reproduced below. Scoring guidelines are posted on AP Central.

Row	Content Area/ Proficiency	Performance Levels		
		Low	Medium	High
1	Understand and Analyze Context	The report identifies an overly broad or simplistic area of investigation and/or shows little evidence of research. A simplistic connection or no connection is made to the overall problem or issue.	The report identifies an adequately focused area of investigation in the research and shows some variety in source selection. It makes some reference to the overall problem or issue.	The report situates the student's investigation of the complexities of a problem or issue in research that draws upon a wide variety of appropriate sources. It makes clear the significance to a larger context.
		2	4	6
2	Understand and Analyze Argument	The report restates or misstates information from sources. It doesn't address reasoning in the sources or it does so in a very simplistic way.	The report summarizes information and in places offers effective explanation of the reasoning within the sources' argument (but does so inconsistently).	The report demonstrates an understanding of the reasoning and validity of the sources' arguments.* This can be evidenced by direct explanation or through purposeful use of the reasoning and conclusions.
		2	4	6
3	Evaluate Sources and Evidence	The report identifies evidence from chosen sources. It makes very simplistic, illogical, or no reference to the credibility of sources and evidence, and their relevance to the inquiry.	The report in places offers some effective explanation of the chosen sources and evidence in terms of their credibility and relevance to the inquiry (but does so inconsistently).	The report demonstrates evaluation of credibility of the sources and selection of relevant evidence from the sources. Both can be evidenced by direct explanation or through purposeful use.
		2	4	6
4	Understand and Analyze Perspective	The report identifies few and/or oversimplified perspectives from sources.**	The report identifies multiple perspectives from sources, making some general connections among those perspectives.**	The report discusses a range of perspectives and draws explicit and relevant connections among those perspectives.**
		2	4	6
5	Apply Conventions	The report includes many errors in attribution and citation OR the bibliography is inconsistent in style and format and/or incomplete.	The report attributes or cites sources used but not always accurately. The bibliography references sources using a consistent style.	The report attributes and accurately cites the sources used. The bibliography accurately references sources using a consistent style.
		1	2	3
6	Apply Conventions	The report contains many flaws in grammar that often interfere with communication to the reader. The written style is not appropriate for an academic audience.	The report is generally clear but contains some flaws in grammar that occasionally interfere with communication to the reader. The written style is inconsistent and not always appropriate for an academic audience.	The report communicates clearly to the reader (although may not be free of errors in grammar and style). The written style is consistently appropriate for an academic audience.
		1	2	3

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading, what advice would you offer to teachers to help them improve the student performance on the IRR?

- Check to make sure that students have not switched their IRR and IWA project when they upload.
- Hold the line on word counts. Keep in mind that ancillary components, like abstracts or annotations in the bibliography or notes, are included in the word count (although footnotes, the bibliography and text in figures or tables are not).
- Encourage students to use academic sources.
- Expose students to academic writing samples.
- Ensure that students can differentiate between "perspective" and "lens."
- Take advantage of peer editing at multiple stages of the Performance Tasks.
- Give students adequate time to refine the controlling team question, one that is debatable, researchable, and invites multiple perspectives.
- Encourage students to review the rubric periodically during the course of the Performance Task.
- Make clear that the report needs to be evaluative, not merely informational.
- Have students practice making report titles from research questions.
- Work with students on making sure that evidence connects to claims.
- Make sure that student research (their own surveys, etc.) undergoes the same evaluation in terms of relevance and credibility as other sources.
- Review the difference between commentary on reasoning of the source and commentary to build one's own argument.

Individual Written Argument

Task: Write a 2000-word evidence-based argument

Topic: Research and Synthesis

Max. Points: 48

Mean Score: 31.53

What was completion of this task expected to demonstrate?

The Individual Written Argument assessed students' ability to:

- Engage deeply with the stimulus materials.
- Identify a theme that links at least two of the stimulus materials.
- Craft an academic research question based on the identified theme.
- Conduct research and develop their own perspective on their question.
- Make a clear, coherent argument.
- Comprehend and engage with college-level, scholarly sources.
- Recognize the conversation surrounding a topic and then engage in that conversation in an informed and academic manner.
- Craft a response that carries an academic tone. In this case, the “student voice” is one that ascends to the level of a college classroom, rather than a conversational or informal tone that students may hear in relaxed discussions.
- Engage with multiple sides of an issue, but not by merely reporting out what those voices have to say, but by putting them in conversation with an argument.
- Explore perspectives and evidence in service of delivering a well-reasoned argument about the topic.

How well did the responses exhibit the skills required for this task?

Individual Written Argument	2015	2016	2017
Maximum pts: 42 in 2015 42 in 2016 48 in 2017	26.83/42 (.638)	27.7/42 (.659)	31.53/48 (.656)

What common challenges or errors were seen in the IWA?

- Approaching the IWA as a descriptive or expository exercise rather than as an argumentation exercise.
- Stringing claims together rather than logically connecting them into a cohesive argument.
- Using a style and/or tone inappropriate for academic writing (first and/or second person, slang, colloquialisms, idioms.)
- Submitting unpolished papers. Peer review is helpful in catching typos, misspelled words, etc.
- Selecting an overly broad topic or issue that precluded the construction of a sound, evidence-based argument.
- Misinterpreting the stimulus materials or using them out of context.
- Recycling arguments already established in the stimulus material as the basis for the IWA.
- Abruptly incorporating stimulus material instead of seamlessly integrating the stimulus source into the argument with a purposeful and clear connection.
- Failing to synthesize evidence in support of the student's argument.
- Summarizing sources and/or perspectives without providing purposeful, contextualizing commentary.
- Using an inaccurate or inconsistent citation or bibliographic style.
- Ending the paper by summarizing the argument rather than by presenting a clear conclusion.
- Presenting a perfunctory, truncated, or underdeveloped counterargument.
- Presenting a biased rant instead of an evidence-based argument.
- Offering a conclusion that was disconnected from the thesis or from the line of reasoning.

The scoring guidelines for the Individual Written Argument include descriptors of typical performance at low, medium, and high levels for each dimension. Those descriptors are reproduced below. Scoring guidelines are posted on AP Central.

Row	Content Area/ Proficiency	Performance Levels		
		Low	Medium	High
1	Understand and Analyze Context	The response has a tangential connection to one of the stimulus materials AND identifies a theme that poorly connects two or more of the sources to the context of the research question or argument.	The response incorporates at least one of the stimulus materials AND relates to a theme or connection between two or more of the sources.	The response effectively integrates at least one of the stimulus materials into its argument AND clearly relates to a theme or connection between two or more of the sources (evidenced through explanation of context or purposeful use of sources).
		2	4	6
2	Understand and Analyze Context	The response puts the research question in a very limited context. It may be trivial or overly broad in scope, or it may prompt a recitation of facts rather than an argument.	The response makes simplistic references to or general statements about the context of the research question. The response makes little or no connection between evidence from sources and a wider context.	The response explains the significance of the research question by situating it within a larger context. The response connects evidence from sources to a wider context by considering the implications of others' claims throughout.
		2	4	6
3	Understand and Analyze Perspective	The response poses a simplistic problem, question, or issue. It identifies different perspectives.	The response identifies the complexity of a problem, question, or issue by comparing multiple perspectives.	The response addresses the complexity of a problem, question, or issue by comparing, interpreting, and drawing relevant connections between multiple, divergent, or contradictory perspectives.
		2	4	6
4	Select and Use Evidence	The response incorporates evidence from a minimal range of sources OR information is provided but not used as evidence to support the argument.	The response incorporates evidence from a range of sources to develop and support the argument.	The response incorporates and synthesizes relevant evidence from a wide range of sources to develop and support the argument.
		2	4	6
5	Establish Argument	The response summarizes information without providing commentary about connections between claims and evidence or offers only very general commentary.	The response is logically organized, but the reasoning may be faulty OR the reasoning may be logical but not well organized. The argument explains the links between claims and evidence.	The response is logically organized, well-reasoned, and complex. The commentary interprets evidence and connects it to claims and reasons to clearly and convincingly establish an argument.
		2	4	6
6	Establish Argument	The response presents information without offering specific resolutions, conclusions, and/or solutions.	The response presents specific resolutions, conclusions, and/or solutions that are tangentially or partially connected to the research question.	The response presents detailed, plausible resolutions, conclusions, and/or solutions that fully address the research question.
		2	4	6
7	Understand and Analyze Argument	The response offers opinions or unsubstantiated statements about different perspectives.	The response offers a superficial or simplistic evaluation of different perspectives that is partially supported by evidence.	The response offers an evaluation of different perspectives considering objections, implications, and limitations.
		2	4	6
8	Apply Conventions	The response includes many errors in attribution and citation OR the bibliography is inconsistent in style and format and/or incomplete.	The response attributes or cites sources used but not always accurately. The bibliography references sources using a consistent style.	The response attributes and accurately cites the sources used. The bibliography accurately references sources using a consistent style.
		1	2	3
9	Apply Conventions	The response contains many flaws in grammar that often interfere with communication to the reader. The written style is not appropriate for an academic audience.	The response is generally clear but contains some flaws in grammar that occasionally interfere with communication to the reader. The written style is inconsistent and not always appropriate for an academic audience.	The response uses effective sentences/precision of word choice to create variety, emphasis, and interest to the reader; it communicates clearly to the reader (although may not be free of errors in grammar and style). The written style is consistently appropriate for an academic audience.
		1	2	3

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading, what advice would you offer to teachers to help them improve the student performance on the Individual Written Argument?

- Practice the craft of narrowing a research question. Have students examine sample questions that are too broad and then have them narrow those questions before brainstorming perspectives.
- Allow sufficient time to prepare for the stimulus materials. College-level writing will require students to thoroughly read and contextualize the material.
- Facilitate conversations about the stimulus materials.
- Direct students to AP Central often for samples of high responses.
- Teach strategies for evaluating visual texts.
- Discuss the rubric for the IWA and lead mock grading sessions with students.
- Scaffold skills by starting small. Begin with two sources on a topic, drawing relevant connections between them, comparing/contrasting, etc. Then build to three or more sources.

- Remind students to contextualize their research question by explaining why their topic matters.
- Contextualize the stimulus documents. These texts are often canonical and not created in a vacuum. Teach them explicitly.
- Practice generating focused, debatable research questions within a significant area of inquiry.
- Remind students that the conclusion should match the research question that was the basis for the paper.
- Show students how to use lenses in order to unearth various perspectives.
- Teach students to place perspectives “in conversation with each other” by examining stakeholders, their various positions on a topic, and why those positions matter.
- Teach students to select resources that will be relevant for their argument. Moreover, encourage students to push past the first page of a resource they intend to use and select materials they can understand.
- Encourage students to favor strong commentary over lengthy quotes.
- Remind students to support every claim with evidence (from one or more credible sources).
- Emphasize the use of paragraphs to build an argument rather than just to present information.
- Remind students to consider the limitations and implications of their solutions and/or conclusions.
- Remind students to provide the details necessary to assess the plausibility of a well-reasoned conclusion.
- Encourage students to use the bibliography (rather than the body of the paper) to cite identifying information for sources, such as author, date, publisher, etc.
- Teach students to use an appropriate and consistent citation style.
- Remind students to ensure that in-text citations are represented in the bibliography.
- Make frequent and generous use of peer review.