

## Chief Reader Report on Student Responses: 2018 AP<sup>®</sup> Seminar Free-Response Questions

• Number of Students Scored	30,964		
• Number of Readers	433		
• Score Distribution	Exam Score	N	%At
	5	2,605	8.4
	4	5,324	17.2
	3	17,709	57.2
	2	4,620	14.9
	1	706	2.3
• Global Mean	3.15		

The following comments on the 2018 free-response questions for AP<sup>®</sup> Seminar were written by the Chief Reader, Teresa Reed of the University of Tulsa. They give an overview of the free-response questions and Performance Tasks and how students performed on each, including typical student errors and challenges. General comments regarding the skills 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.

**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:** 10.16***What were the responses to this question 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, students were expected to address three components of the author's main idea: (1) The impact of fiction; (2) its stimulation/activation of the brain; and (3) the resulting improvement in the ability to interact and/or empathize with others.
- Q2. Responses to this question were expected to demonstrate students' ability to identify the claims the author uses and explain the connections among them.
- 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 three years, on each question in Part A of the End-of-Course Exam:

EOC Part A	2015	2016	2017	2018
Q1 (3 pts max)	2.20	2.1	2.34	2.03
Q2 (6 pts max)	4.62	4.8	4.22	4.13
Q3 (6 pts max)	4.07	4.5	3.52	4.01

***What common challenges or errors were seen in response to Question 1, EOC Part A?***

Less successful responses	Successful responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Selected a direct quote from the stimulus material as the main idea.</li><li>• Identified only one or two components of the main idea.</li><li>• Identified elements of the main idea in overly broad terms. .</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Presented the main idea in the student's own words.</li><li>• Identified all three components (fiction, brain, interaction) of the main idea.</li><li>• Incorporated language specifically as used in the stimulus source (e.g., "fiction" as opposed to "reading").</li></ul>

**What common challenges or errors were seen in response to Question 2, EOC Part A?**

Less successful responses	Successful responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Misidentified claims, indicating inaccurate or poor comprehension of the stimulus item.</li><li>• Conflated evidence with claims.</li><li>• Identified claims with no contextualization or explanation.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identified claims in specific rather than vague ways, indicating full comprehension of the stimulus item.</li><li>• Identified the claims as distinct from evidence used to support claims.</li><li>• Identified claims, making clear their connections and relationship to the author's line of reasoning and overall argument.</li></ul>

**What common challenges or errors were seen in response to Question 3, EOC Part A?**

Less successful responses	Successful responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Simply mentioned evidence, offering no evaluation.</li><li>• Made vague references to evidence in general without addressing specific pieces of evidence.</li><li>• Discussed only relevance or only credibility of the evidence.</li><li>• Labelled evidence as "credible" or as "not credible" without justification or explanation.</li><li>• Evaluated the relevance and/or credibility of the source material or the author, but not of the evidence itself.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mentioned and evaluated evidence for relevance and credibility.</li><li>• Evaluated specific pieces of evidence for relevance and credibility.</li><li>• Addressed both relevance and credibility of the evidence.</li><li>• Explained why the evidence was credible or not.</li><li>• Addressed the relevance and the credibility of the evidence itself.</li></ul>

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

- Have students practice the three tasks in EOC, Part A.
- Coach students to paraphrase the author's argument without quoting directly from the text.
- Remind students that the main idea of a complex argument will often have more than one part.
- Help students distinguish between claims and evidence.
- Prepare students to look for numerous claims.
- Remind students to connect each piece of evidence to the claim it supports.
- 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.
- Review recent high scoring student sample responses found on AP Central. Ask students to highlight where they can see explanation of connections between claims, and explanation of *why* particular evidence is relevant or credible.

**End-of-course Exam  
Part B**

**Task:** Read stimulus sources  
and then form an argument

**Topic:** Synthesis Essay

**Max. Points:** 24

**Mean Score:** 17.09

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

This prompt assessed students' ability to:

- Identify a theme or issue connecting two or more of the sources provided;
- 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 used in the response, identifying them either by author or by assigned letters, paraphrasing or identifying quotations; and
- Complete the task within a 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 three years, on Part B of the End-of-Course Exam:

Part B (formerly, EOC Section II)	2015	2016	2017	2018
Maximum 24 pts	15.28	14.7	15.88	17.09

***What common challenges or errors were seen in response to EOC, Part B?***

<i>Less successful responses</i>	<i>Successful responses</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Failed to fully understand the perspective of the provided source(s).</li><li>• Simplified and/or ignored the theme of the sources.</li><li>• Failed to state a clear thesis or position.</li><li>• Summarized or paraphrased key points from the readings but provided no student-driven argument.</li><li>• Compiled numerous quotations but provided no line of reasoning.</li><li>• Relied on clichés ("all work and no play," "money makes the world go round," "money is the root of all evil").</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Exhibited full understanding of the sources resulting from close and careful reading.</li><li>• Acknowledged or demonstrated awareness of the theme connecting the sources.</li><li>• Stated a clear thesis early in the response.</li><li>• Used points from the readings to build an argument driven by the student's voice.</li><li>• Used quotations selectively and purposefully to support a line of reasoning.</li><li>• Provided thoughtful and original commentary throughout the argument.</li><li>• Explained how passages from the provided sources supported the student-driven argument.</li></ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paired claims with matching quotations, but provided no commentary or explanation, thus relying on evidence to speak for itself.</li> <li>• Utilized sources in isolation, instead of synthesizing their ideas, arguments, and perspectives.</li> <li>• Failed to accurately attribute information from sources.</li> <li>• Neglected to organize paragraphs and proofread for grammar, style, and legibility.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Articulated connections, comparisons, and juxtapositions between the sources.</li> <li>• Attributed information from the sources by using the alphabetical identifier ("Source A," "Source B," etc.).</li> <li>• Outlined the argument in advance and proofread the argument prior to submission.</li> </ul>
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**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?**

- Encourage students to read stimulus materials carefully and critically.
- Encourage students to use their own experiences, expertise, or ideas to focus the response in an interesting, original way.
- Remind students that an argument adopted from one of the sources must be expanded in an original way.
- Urge students to use their time wisely. The 90 minutes affords them time to **outline** their argument and to proofread it carefully.
- Use EOC A activities to have students explore the ways professional writers build arguments.
- Provide students with opportunities to practice writing meaningful commentary early in the course.
- Expose students to artistic texts (e.g., poems, short stories, narratives, fiction excerpts).
- Show students how to synthesize the sources and engage them in conversation with one another.
- Teach students to use a writing style appropriate for an academic audience.
- Provide scaffolded EOC B practice early in the year (using fewer or straightforward sources) to help students practice making connections; this can also help students prepare for the Individual Written Argument.
- Urge students to refrain from recycling EOC B responses from prior years.
- Use past exam questions and sources from AP Central to get students to practice making connections and developing their own perspectives.

## 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:** 19.93

### ***What was the completion of this Performance Task expected to demonstrate?***

This prompt 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; and
- Analyze the relevance of evidence and credibility of sources.

### ***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 three years, on the Individual Research Report:

Individual Research Report	2015	2016	2017	2018
Maximum 30 pts	21.54	20.9	20.84	19.93

### ***What common challenges or errors were seen in the Individual Research Report?***

<i>Less successful reports</i>	<i>Successful reports</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Exceeded word count.</li><li>• Did insufficient or superficial research.</li><li>• Failed to synthesize and organize the research.</li><li>• Included entire paragraphs with no references to research.</li><li>• Neglected to include a title that signaled a precise topic (and lens/approach/range of perspectives).</li><li>• Neglected to narrow the topic to achieve research depth.</li><li>• Neglected to signal why the subject of the report matters.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Included information purposefully and selectively to ensure adherence to word count.</li><li>• Cited sources indicate solid awareness of the scholarly discourse surrounding the lens/approach/perspectives under investigation.</li><li>• Discussed connections among sources in a logical and insightful way.</li><li>• Included appropriate attribution for all sources referenced.</li><li>• Included a title that indicated the topic and lens/approach/perspectives of investigation.</li><li>• Narrowed the topic so that research was both focused and manageable.</li></ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relied too heavily on general websites; neglected to use peer-reviewed journals and other academic sources.</li> <li>• Lost focus on the task of reporting out on the research sources; veered into independent argument.</li> <li>• Relied excessively on quoting information from sources without commenting on the argument or evidence.</li> <li>• Neglected to match citations in text with bibliography.</li> <li>• Neglected to proofread bibliographies for required elements (relied heavily on URLs, treated all types of sources equally).</li> <li>• Neglected to use attributive phrases to signal where paraphrases begin.</li> <li>• Neglected to proofread for grammar, spelling, and tone.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided a persuasive description of the importance of the research topic.</li> <li>• Used a variety of credible and well-vetted sources, including peer-reviewed journals and academic sources.</li> <li>• Conveyed a report of the literature on the topic rather than an argument.</li> <li>• Demonstrated comprehension of the arguments in the selected sources by providing insightful evaluative commentary.</li> <li>• Ensured that sources listed in the bibliography matched attributions in the body of the report</li> <li>• Provided all citation elements in the bibliography using a consistent format.</li> <li>• Signaled to the reader the source of information mentioned, quoted, or paraphrased.</li> <li>• Retained an academic and stylistically appropriate tone in discourse largely free of spelling or grammatical errors.</li> </ul>
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**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 Individual Research Report?**

- Ensure that students upload the correct document. It should be their very own Individual Research Report (not an IWA, not a source article, not a team report, not a friend’s paper). Ensure that any identifying information (both the student's and the teacher's) is removed from the paper prior to uploading.
- Hold the line on word counts. Overages of more than 10% are neither evaluated nor considered "extra credit."
- Encourage students to use peer-reviewed articles and other academic sources. Know what databases they are using to find sources.
- Teach students to evaluate bibliographies for quality of research. Good research is central to a good research report.
- Expose students to academic writing samples. Analyze academic conventions (e.g., how do scholarly writers handle information and arguments from other sources?)
- Have students practice making specific report titles from research questions. Teach them to avoid questions and titles that lead to broad generalizations (e.g., how something “affects society”).
- Urge students to use citations in their paragraphs early and often; explain why citations are important to establish the credibility of their own work.
- Help students distinguish between commentary on reasoning of the source and commentary to build one’s own argument.
- Practice writing direct, specific commentary on perspectives (e.g., have them compare and contrast the arguments of two sources).
- Have students practice identifying restatements of data or information, summary of arguments, and analysis/commentary.



- Have students in pairs read their reports aloud sentence-by-sentence. They should read slowly, pausing when they see punctuation, racing through when there's none. If a sentence sounds bad, or can't be read without gasping for breath, it's a poor sentence. If the audience can't mirror back the idea of the sentence, it's a poor sentence.
- Use whole class mini lessons to focus on trouble spots during the Performance Task.
- Take advantage of peer review at multiple stages of the Performance Task.
- Encourage students to review the rubric periodically during the course of the Performance Task.
- Review the instructional PowerPoints and scoring notes provided in the online Teacher Module for IRR.

## Individual Written Argument

**Task:** Write a 2000-word,  
evidence-based argument

**Topic:** Research and Synthesis

**Max. Points:** 48

**Mean Score:** 28.44

### ***What was the completion of this Performance Task expected to demonstrate?***

This prompt assessed students' ability to:

- Review a packet of stimulus materials and determine a theme that links at least two of those sources;
- Formulate a research question directly related to that theme;
- Conduct research and locate credible and scholarly materials relevant to answering that research question;
- Formulate a well-reasoned argument with a clear line of reasoning and a plausible conclusion;
- Evaluate counterarguments in the process of developing his or her own argument; and
- Write 2,000-word argument with claims that are logically organized and supported by credible, scholarly evidence.

### ***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 three years, on the Individual Written Argument:

Individual Written Argument	2015	2016	2017	2018
Maximum pts: 42 in 2015 and 2016 48 in 2017 and 2018	26.83/42 (.638)	27.7/42 (.659)	31.53/48 (.656)	28.44/48 (.592)

### ***What common challenges or errors were seen in the Individual Written Argument?***

<i>Less successful papers</i>	<i>Successful papers</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Failed to identify a theme linking at least two of the stimulus documents.</li><li>• Used the stimulus documents in a perfunctory way, or merely as a jumping off point.</li><li>• Misinterpreted or misused the stimulus document(s) by "cherry-picking" quote(s) out of context, or by selecting a general or common-knowledge idea from the text.</li><li>• Used overly broad research questions, which often lead to oversimplified perspectives and weak claims.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identified a theme linking at least two of the stimulus documents.</li><li>• Integrated the stimulus materials into the argument.</li><li>• Engaged with the argument of the stimulus document, exhibiting full understanding of its content.</li><li>• Used a narrowly focused research question, which lead to well-defined perspectives and solid claims.</li><li>• Developed a strong line of reasoning, providing an explicit rationale for the order of points and sufficiently explaining the relationships between ideas, claims, and evidence.</li></ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developed a weak line of reasoning with sparse explanation of the connection between claims and evidence; often used "this shows that" or "therefore" in place of actual explanation.</li> <li>• Treated only one perspective, or treated perspectives in isolation.</li> <li>• Conflated lenses and perspectives.</li> <li>• Overused subtitles.</li> <li>• Produced a report or an expository essay rather than an argument.</li> <li>• Relied too heavily on general websites; neglected to use peer-reviewed journals and other academic sources.</li> <li>• Treated all evidence as equally credible.</li> <li>• Recycled papers crafted for other courses or assignments, or used stimulus materials and themes from a prior year's IWA prompt.</li> <li>• Neglected to match citations in text with bibliography.</li> <li>• Neglected to proofread for grammar, spelling, and tone.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presented multiple perspectives in conversation with one another, and explained the importance of that conversation in the context of the inquiry.</li> <li>• Retained distinction between perspectives (points of view conveyed in an argument) and lenses (filters through which to consider a topic or issue).</li> <li>• Used subtitles sparingly and purposefully.</li> <li>• Produced an argument proceeding from a clear thesis, developed through a logical arrangement of claims and credible evidence, and culminating with a conclusion.</li> <li>• Used a variety of credible and well-vetted sources, including peer-reviewed journals and academic sources.</li> <li>• Assessed the quality of evidence, explaining the degree to which specific pieces of evidence supported claims.</li> <li>• Submitted original work completed in response to the 2018 Performance Task.</li> <li>• Ensured that all sources (including the stimulus sources) were listed in the bibliography and matched attributions in the body of the IWA.</li> <li>• Retained an academic and stylistically appropriate tone in discourse largely free of spelling or grammatical errors.</li> </ul>
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**Based on your experience at the AP<sup>®</sup> Reading with student work, what advice would you offer to teachers to help them improve the student performance on the Individual Written Argument?**

- Use mock Performance Tasks to:
  - model the identification of themes among various college-level sources;
  - model the integration of stimulus materials into the student's argument;
  - read/make use of college-level material to help students understand what scholarly materials look like and practice identifying the main points and lines of argument in those materials;
  - practice writing focused research questions that explore a contested topic and will lead to a paper with an argument;
  - introduce the student to research reports and explain how an argument is distinct from such a report;
  - practice choosing an area of inquiry with existing tension, thus enabling students to develop context and answer the "so what" question;

- practice explaining the order of claims to show how they build on each other to answer the research question. (e.g., have students identify their topic sentences and ensure there are transitions between points);
  - clarify the distinction between a lens and a perspective;
  - facilitate practice conversations among perspectives, thus enabling students to both locate relationships and explore *how* the perspectives converse
  - practice commenting on the evidence to clarify its adequacy for proving the argument;
  - practice finding sources that are scholarly in nature (e.g., using academic search engines and works cited pages of extant academic sources); and
  - illustrate academic writing style and proper linking of citations.
- Remind students that their research question drives the research.
  - Remind students to double-check the documents they have uploaded to the Digital Portfolio.
  - Encourage students to form groups for peer review and use editing tools provided by the instructor from earlier in the course to inform their input.
  - Review the instructional PowerPoints and scoring notes provided in the online Teacher Module for IWA.