

AP[®] ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION

2016 SCORING COMMENTARY

Question 3

Overview

The “Argument Question” asked students to utilize their knowledge of the world as well as their personal experiences and observations to support a claim in response to a given question. This year’s “Argument Question” first provided a quote from 19th-century Irish author Oscar Wilde asserting the socially progressive function of disobedience before asking students to take a “position on the extent to which Wilde’s claims are valid.” The phrasing of the question avoided prompting students to binary responses — arguing that Wilde is “right” or “wrong” — but instead encouraged students to develop a more nuanced position on Wilde’s claim.

While it does not provide sources as does the “Synthesis Question,” the “Argument Question” also demands support for the claims made by students, support that is carefully discussed so that the essay’s audience will understand the reasoning behind it. In other words, this question is asking students to use rhetorical strategies to convince their audience that their claim is valid. These strategies include considering the students’ own ethos (How do the students show they know what they are discussing? How do the students show they share the same values as the audience? How do they illustrate that the argument will benefit the audience), logos (Is the support acceptable to the audience? Is the support relevant to the claim? Is the support sufficient for the audience and the situation?), and pathos (Do the students align the audience with themselves? Do they alienate the audience? Do they move the audience with the support?).

Sample: 3A

Score: 8

This essay effectively argues a position on the extent to which Wilde’s claims are valid. Using an analogy between physics and politics to support the claim that “it is through disobedience and rebellion that social progress can be made,” the student proceeds to substantiate this claim with appropriate and convincing evidence and explanations. In the first paragraph, the essay’s discussion of the Stamp Act Congress and the subsequent American Revolution is especially coherent and includes consideration of potential consequences had this form of disobedience not occurred. The essay’s focus moves to the civil rights movement in the third paragraph. Discussing the “Montgomery Bus Strikes and Freedom Riders,” the student offers an insightful comment: “Although they seem like small steps, these efforts were part of a larger effort to get America to realize that segregation was wrong.” In the fourth paragraph, the student presents two more appropriate examples (the Yellow Umbrella Rebellion and the Black Lives Matter movement) and follows with well-developed explanations. Characterized by its clear organizational structure and smooth transitions, the essay provides convincing evidence that connects disobedience to the advancement of social progress. Although it contains a few syntactical flaws, the essay demonstrates a consistent ability to control the elements of effective writing.

Sample: 3B

Score: 6

This essay adequately argues a position on the extent to which Wilde’s claims are valid. Observing that “disobedience promotes the questioning of societal norms, historical change, and progressive thought,” the essay presents three adequately developed pieces of evidence surrounding Henry David Thoreau, the civil rights movement, and the 2016 presidential election that are sufficiently connected to the claim. In the second paragraph, the essay’s discussion of Thoreau yields adequate commentary about “his way of challenging societal norms” and, in the third paragraph, its treatment of the civil rights movement produces some sufficient explanation (“Their success is evident in the many social and legislative changes that

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Question 3 (continued)

followed the Civil Rights Movement, one of the most notable being the Civil Rights Act of 1964"). The student then moves to the current election cycle, and the essay's treatment of Bernie Sanders ends with an adequate comment regarding the impact of his disobedience ("the strength of his progressive ideas that were influenced by disobedience have a great chance of shaping the future of American society"). While the prose contains some lapses, it is generally clear. For its appropriate evidence, adequately developed argument, and clear prose, the essay was scored a 6.

Sample: 3C

Score: 4

This essay inadequately argues a position on the extent to which Wilde's claims are valid. While the single piece of evidence presented (*Animal Farm*) has the potential to provide adequate support for the argument, the essay's explanation of how the evidence helps to develop the position remains insufficient: the connection between the animals overthrowing their leaders and the idea of progress is vague. Likewise, the attempt at analogy (between *Animal Farm* and the Soviet Union) does little to further the argument. In the third paragraph, the essay's attempt at a more philosophical approach ("One of the important causes of rebellion is the ability to think clearly") is unconvincing and inappropriate. The prose generally conveys the student's ideas, but is inconsistent in controlling the elements of effective writing.