

Selected Writing Tasks and Rubrics

Advanced Placement English Language and Composition
Free Response Exam Question

Question 3

(Suggested time – 40 minutes. This question counts one-third of the total essay section score.)

In his book Money and Class in America, Lewis Lapham makes the following observations about attitudes toward wealth in the United States. Drawing on your own knowledge and experience, write a carefully reasoned essay defending, challenging, or qualifying Lapham’s view of “the American faith in money.”

I think it fair to say that the current ardor of the American faith in money easily surpasses the degrees of intensity achieved by other societies in other times and places. Money means so many things to us—spiritual as well as temporal—that we are at a loss to know how to hold its majesty at bay...

Henry Adams in his autobiography remarks that although the Americans weren’t much good as materialists they had been so “deflected by the pursuit of money” that they could turn “in no other direction.” The national distrust of the contemplative temperament arises less from an innate Philistinism than from a suspicion of anything that cannot be counted, stuffed, framed or mounted over the fireplace in the den. Men remain free to rise or fall in the world, and if they fail it must be because they willed it so. The visible signs of wealth testify to an inward state of grace, and without at least some of these talismans posted in one’s house or on one’s person an American loses all hope of demonstrating to himself the theorem of his happiness. Seeing is believing, and if an American success is to count for anything in the world it must be clothed in the raiment of property. As often as not it isn’t the money itself that means anything; it is the use of money as the currency of the soul.

Against the faith in money, other men in other times and places have raised up countervailing faiths in family, honor, religion, intellect and social class. The merchant princes of medieval Europe would have looked upon the American devotion as sterile cupidity; the ancient Greeks would have regarded it as a form of insanity. Even now, in the last decades of a century commonly defined as American, a good many societies both in Europe and Asia manage to balance their desire for wealth against other claims of the human spirit. An Englishman of modest means can remain more or less content with the distinction of an aristocratic name or the consolation of a flourishing garden; the Germans show to obscure university professors the deference accorded by Americans only to celebrity; the Soviets honor the holding of political power; in France a rich man is a rich man, to whom everybody grants the substantial powers that his riches command but to whom nobody grants to respect due to a member of the National Academy. But in the United States a rich man is perceived as being necessarily both good and wise, which is an absurdity that would be seen as such not only by a Frenchman but also by a Russian. Not that the Americans are greedier than the French, or less intellectual than the Germans, or more venal than the Russians, but to what other tribunal can an anxious and supposedly egalitarian people submit their definitions of the good, the true and the beautiful if not to the judgment of the bottom line?

Advanced Placement English Language and Composition Free Response Commentary and Scoring Rubric

Question 3—*Commentary*

Question 3 asked students to formulate an argument that “defends, challenges or qualifies” critic Lewis Lapham’s assertion about the symbolic importance of wealth in America. Lapham argues that for Americans money is the “currency of the soul” as opposed to the more intangible values of social class, honor, or intellect that he finds promoted in European countries.

The passage is long and complex, much more than simply a prompt for taking a position to argue from, but writers wrote longer than usual essays in response, reflecting perhaps the interest the topic generated in them. Even the least skillful papers demonstrated some understanding of Lapham’s position, though they often simplified it or did little more than paraphrase the text. Somewhat better responses identified issues but exhibited uneven development in making their arguments, or provided limited evidence to support their contentions.

Successful essays understood how to use evidence from experience or reading to create an argument of their own. They made their case with skill and conviction. Their approaches varied from employing personal narratives, to making analogies with a host of examples from Jay Gatsby to Herbert Spencer, to critical analysis of Lapham’s own logic. These essays persuaded, through their own rhetorical choices, convincingly and eloquently.

Scoring Guide

Points:

- 9 Essays earning a score of 9 meet all the criteria for papers that earned 8 points and, in addition, are particularly persuasive or carefully reasoned or demonstrate impressive stylistic control.
- 8 Essays that earned a score of 8 persuasively defend, challenge, or qualify Lapham’s assertions about the American “faith in money.” They present cohesive and carefully reasoned arguments using appropriate evidence from their knowledge and/or experience to develop their positions. Their prose demonstrates their ability to control a wide range of the elements of effective writing, but they are not flawless.
- 7 Essays earning a score of 7 fit the descriptions of essays that received 6 points but are distinguished by fuller or more purposeful argument or stronger prose style.
- 6 Essays earning a score of 6 adequately defend, challenge or qualify Lapham’s assertions about Americans’ peculiar beliefs about money by **presenting arguments** that are generally sound and that use appropriate **evidence**. A few lapses in **diction** or **syntax** may be present, but for the most part the prose of these essays conveys the writers’ **ideas** clearly.
- 5 Essays earning a score of 5 understand the task and make assertions to defend, challenge or qualify Lapham’s notions about American belief in money. Their arguments are generally clear, but may use superficial or limited evidence or exhibit uneven development. A few lapses in diction or syntax may be evident, but for the most part the prose of these essays conveys the writers’ ideas clearly.
- 4 These essays inadequately respond to the question’s task. They may misunderstand, misrepresent, or oversimplify Lapham’s argument, or use evidence inappropriate or insufficient to make their own case. The prose of these essays usually conveys the writers’ ideas, but may suggest inconsistent control over such elements of writing as organization, diction, and syntax.
- 3 Essays that received 3 points are described by the criteria for the score of 4 (see above), but are less persuasive in their attempts to state and defend a position, or are less consistent in their ability to control the elements of writing.
- 2 Essays earning a score of 2 demonstrate little or no success in defending, challenging, or qualifying Lapham’s views about the American faith in money. They may seriously misread Lapham or substitute a simpler task, such as summarizing Lapham’s position or writing responses only tangentially related to the question, such as the evils of money or benefits of capitalism. The prose of these essays may reveal consistent weaknesses in control of elements of writing, such as organization, grammar, or diction.
- 1 Essays earning a score of 1 are described by the criteria for the score of 2, but are particularly simplistic in their response to Lapham or weak in their control of language.
- 0 Indicates an on-topic responses that receives no credit, such as one that merely repeats the prompt.

College Board—SAT Essay Writing Prompt

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below.

Many persons believe that to move up the ladder of success and achievement, they must forget the past, repress it, and relinquish it. But others have just the opposite view. They see old memories as a chance to reckon with the past and integrate past and present.

--Adapted from Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, *I've Known Rivers: Lives of Loss and Liberation*

Assignment: Do memories hinder or help people in their effort to learn from the past and succeed in the present? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

SCORE OF 6

An essay in this category demonstrates *clear and consistent mastery*, although it may have a few minor errors. A typical essay

- effectively and insightfully develops a point of view on the issue and demonstrates outstanding critical thinking, using clearly appropriate examples, reasons, and other evidence to support its position
- is well organized and clearly focused, demonstrating clear coherence and smooth progression of ideas
- exhibits skillful use of language, using a varied, accurate, and apt vocabulary
- demonstrates meaningful variety in sentence structure
- is free of most errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

SCORE OF 5

An essay in this category demonstrates *reasonably consistent mastery*, although it will have occasional errors or lapses in quality. A typical essay

- effectively develops a point of view on the issue and demonstrates strong critical thinking, generally using appropriate examples, reasons, and other evidence to support its position
- is well organized and focused, demonstrating coherence and progression of ideas
- exhibits facility in the use of language, using appropriate vocabulary
- demonstrates variety in sentence structure
- is generally free of most errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

SCORE OF 4

An essay in this category demonstrates *adequate mastery*, although it will have lapses in quality. A typical essay

- develops a point of view on the issue and demonstrates competent **critical thinking**, using adequate **examples, reasons**, and other **evidence** to support its position
- is generally **organized** and focused, demonstrating some coherence and **progression of ideas**
- exhibits adequate but inconsistent facility in the **use of language**, using generally appropriate **vocabulary**
- demonstrates some variety in **sentence structure**
- has some errors in **grammar, usage**, and **mechanics**

SCORE OF 3

An essay in this category demonstrates *developing mastery*, and is marked by ONE OR MORE of the following weaknesses:

- develops a point of view on the issue, demonstrating some critical thinking, but may do so inconsistently or use inadequate examples, reasons, or other evidence to support its position
- is limited in its organization or focus, or may demonstrate some lapses in coherence or progression of ideas
- displays developing facility in the use of language, but sometimes uses weak vocabulary or inappropriate word choice
- lacks variety or demonstrates problems in sentence structure
- contains an accumulation of errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics
- contains an accumulation of errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

SCORE OF 2

An essay in this category demonstrates *little mastery*, and is flawed by ONE OR MORE of the following weaknesses:

- develops a point of view on the issue that is vague or seriously limited, and demonstrates weak critical thinking, providing inappropriate or insufficient examples, reasons, or other evidence to support its position
- is poorly organized and/or focused, or demonstrates serious problems with coherence or progression of ideas
- displays very little facility in the use of language, using very limited vocabulary or incorrect word choice
- demonstrates frequent problems in sentence structure
- contains errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics so serious that meaning is somewhat obscured

SCORE OF 1

An essay in this category demonstrates *very little or no mastery*, and is severely flawed by ONE OR MORE of the following weaknesses:

- develops no viable point of view on the issue, or provides little or no evidence to support its position
- is disorganized or unfocused, resulting in a disjointed or incoherent essay
- displays fundamental errors in vocabulary
- demonstrates severe flaws in sentence structure
- contains pervasive errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics that persistently interfere with meaning

Essays not written on the essay assignment will receive a score of zero

English 9A Exam Sample ECR

Consider the following statement by physicist Albert Einstein:

“Never do anything against conscience even if the state demands it.”

Write a well-organized essay in which you agree or disagree with some or all of Einstein’s statement about following one’s conscience. Support your position with specific examples from your studies, experiences, and observations. Be sure that your essay is fully developed and logically organized and that your choice of words expresses your ideas clearly.

1. Use the space below to plan your response.

2. Now write your essay on your own paper.

English 9A Exam Sample ECR

Rubric for the ECR

Score 6 The response is a thoroughly developed essay which fulfills the writing purpose.

- Has relevant and complete support and elaboration which enhance ideas
- Uses a precise organizational strategy which enhances the purpose
- Maintains a distinctive voice and deliberate tone
- Uses precise word choice and evocative language
- Demonstrates careful attention to audience's understanding and interest
- Has no errors in usage or conventions that interfere with meaning

Score 5 The response is a well-developed essay which attempts to fulfill the writing purpose.

- Has support/elaboration which enhance ideas, although these may not completely fulfill the purpose
- Uses an effective organizational strategy that is consistent with the purpose
- Maintains a consistent voice and tone
- Uses clear and consistent word choice
- Demonstrates attention to audience's understanding and interest
- Has no errors in usage or conventions that interfere with meaning

Score 4 The response is an organized essay which addresses the writing purpose.

- Has support and elaboration which may be uneven or incomplete
- Uses an inconsistent or unevenly applied organizational strategy
- Employs an inconsistent voice or inappropriate tone
- Demonstrates an awareness of audience's understanding and interest
- Has few, if any, errors in usage or conventions that interfere with meaning

Score 3 The response is an incomplete/oversimplified essay which attempts to address the writing purpose.

- Has incomplete or unclear elaboration and support for development of ideas
- Uses an organizational structure that is inconsistent or unclear
- Employs a flat to inappropriate tone and voice
- Demonstrates little awareness of audience's understanding and interest
- Has errors in usage or conventions, some of which may interfere with meaning

Score 2 The response is a poorly written essay which attempts to address the writing purpose.

- Has support and elaboration that is inadequate
- Uses an unstructured or confusing organizational strategy
- Employs an unidentifiable tone and voice
- Demonstrates no attention to audience's understanding and interest
- Has errors in usage and conventions, some of which interfere with meaning

Score 1 The response provides evidence the writer has seen the assignment and is attempting to respond to it.

- Has no elaboration or support, or the development does not support the writing purpose
- Uses little or no organizational structure
- Demonstrates no attention to voice
- Demonstrates no awareness of audience
- Has errors in usage and conventions which interfere with meaning

Score 0 The response is completely incorrect or irrelevant, or there is no response.

English 6, Unit 3

Rubric for Imitation of King's Style

Directions: Select a portion of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech that illustrates his use of several persuasive techniques. Copy the passage and annotate it to analyze the persuasive language and techniques King uses. Imitate King's style and persuasive techniques to write about an issue for which you have strong feelings.

<p>IDEAS & DEVELOPMENT</p> <p>5 The writer clearly states the issue and her or his position and effectively uses one or more persuasive techniques to imitate King's style.</p> <p>4 The writer states the issue and her or his position and appropriately uses one or more persuasive techniques to imitate King's style.</p> <p>3 The paper has a recognizable topic, although use of persuasive techniques to imitate King's style may be uneven or inconsistent.</p> <p>2 The paper lacks a clear topic. Use of persuasive techniques is inadequate.</p> <p>1 The paper lacks ideas and persuasive techniques.</p>	<p>ORGANIZATION</p> <p>5 The organization enhances the main idea. The order, structure, and presentation of information effectively imitate the original.</p> <p>4 The organizational structure supports the main idea and imitates the original.</p> <p>3 The paper has an organizational structure that imitates the original, although the structure may be uneven or inconsistent.</p> <p>2 The paper lacks clear organizational structure. Ideas, details, or events are loosely strung together.</p> <p>1 The paper has no discernible organization.</p>
<p>WORD CHOICE (Diction)</p> <p>5 Words effectively convey the intended meaning in a specific and forceful way.</p> <p>4 Words convey the intended meaning in a clear and appropriate way.</p> <p>3 Words generally convey the intended meaning, but may lack energy and specificity.</p> <p>2 Word choice is limited and may not convey the intended meaning.</p> <p>1 Word choice does not convey the intended meaning.</p>	<p>SENTENCE FLUENCY (Syntax)</p> <p>5 The writing has an effective rhythm. Sentences are well developed, with structural variety including parallelism and repetition to imitate King's style.</p> <p>4 The writing has appropriate sentence variety, with some use of structures imitating King's style.</p> <p>3 The writing is generally clear, but sentences may be mechanical or lack understanding of King's style.</p> <p>2 The writing demonstrates limited understanding of sentence structure or King's style.</p> <p>1 The writing lacks appropriate sentence structure.</p>
<p>VOICE</p> <p>5 The writer's voice is individual and engaging, demonstrating awareness of and respect for the audience and the purpose.</p> <p>4 The writer's voice is appropriate to the purpose and engages the audience.</p> <p>3 The writer's voice is generally clear but may not be fully engaged with the audience or purpose.</p> <p>2 The writer's voice is indifferent and unengaged with the audience and purpose.</p> <p>1 The writer's voice is not evident.</p>	<p>CONVENTIONS</p> <p>5 The writer uses conventions effectively to support meaning.</p> <p>4 The writer uses conventions with few or no errors that distract or interfere with meaning.</p> <p>3 The writer generally uses conventions appropriately, although at times errors are distracting and may interfere with meaning.</p> <p>2 The writer consistently makes errors in conventions that distract the reader and interfere with meaning.</p> <p>1 The writer lacks control of conventions.</p>

COMMENTS

Student Checklist for Writing To Persuade

GRADES 3-5

Name: _____ Title: _____ Date: _____

	3 YES	3 NO	WAYS TO IMPROVE MY WRITING
Ideas and Development Is the position/opinion clearly stated? Is there convincing support for my position/opinion?			
Organization Does the writing have a clear beginning, strong middle, and a convincing conclusion? Are the details organized and sequenced? Are there logical reasons?			
Voice Does the writing engage the readers so that they are convinced to think the same way or to take action? Is there a consistent point of view?			
Word Choice Are there words that support and clarify the position? Are the right words used so that the reader understands my thinking?			
Sentence Fluency Are the sentences different lengths? Do the sentences begin in different ways? Are there different kinds of sentences? Do the sentences lead the reader from one idea to the next?			
Conventions The writing has correct: Capitalization Spelling Usage Punctuation Grammar			

Writing To Persuade

SCORING RUBRIC • GRADES 3–5

Name: _____ Date: _____

**Look for evidence of the specific criteria as you score each student’s paper.
Put a check mark in a score column for each trait. Add the total number of points.**

WRITING TRAITS	1 point Emerging	2 points Developing	3 points Competent	4 points Strong
Ideas and Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presents a firm position or clearly stated opinion about a topic • Provides convincing support for the position (facts, reasons, expert opinions...) 				
Organization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a clear beginning, strong support, and a convincing conclusion • Organizes/sequences ideas • Presents reasonable and logical opinions/reasons • Uses transition words to establish order 				
Voice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engages the reader so that he/she is convinced to think the same way or to take action • Considers the reader’s perspective(s) • Maintains a consistent point of view; reflects a strong commitment to the topic 				
Word Choice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes words that support and clarify the position or opinion • Uses language that shows an understanding of the topic 				
Sentence Fluency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses varied sentence beginnings, lengths, and structures • Uses transitional words and phrases to connect ideas 				
Conventions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses accurate spelling, grammar, usage, punctuation, and capitalization 				
Column Sub-Totals of Points ▶				

TOTAL NUMBER OF POINTS ▶

ANALYTIC SCORE	<p>1 - Emerging: Need for revision outweighs strengths</p> <p>2 - Developing: Strengths and need for revision about equal</p> <p>3 - Competent: On balance, the strengths outweigh the weaknesses; small amount of revision needed</p> <p>4 - Strong: Shows control and skill in this trait; many strengths present</p>
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TOTAL SCORE	<p>Below 12 Little/inaccurate application</p> <p>12-17 Some application</p> <p>18-20 Solid application</p> <p>21-24 Thorough application</p> <p>Off-Prompt (OP) Is readable but did not respond to the prompt</p> <p>Non-Scoreable (NS) Is illegible/incoherent/blank</p>
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Effective Writing Instruction Using the Writing Process and 6-Traits

Learning to become confident writers empowers students to express their thoughts on a variety of topics and issues. Students need daily opportunities to work toward precision, purposefulness, originality, and elegance in their writing. A recursive rather than a strictly linear process, writing involves developing and refining skills through focused instruction, guided practice and reflection, and consistent assessment. Writing in MCPS is based on instruction and assessment of six essential features: ideas and development, organization, voice, word choice (diction), sentence fluency (syntax), and conventions. These are traits of effective writing in all types of discourse, whether the purpose is to persuade, to tell a story, or to explain an idea. This approach implies that teachers at every grade should design and implement instruction on these aspects of writing and consistently assess student writing in terms of these six traits. Developed, researched, and field-tested by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory since 1982, the 6-Traits writing approach is assessment-based and is consistent with the MSDE Content Standards for writing. Since students can revise what they can assess, they learn to discuss writing in terms of these six features at an early age and continue to do so through high school. The 6-Traits approach and rubrics offer a clear vocabulary for students and teachers to discuss, develop, and assess writing in all content areas, empowering students to become confident communicators.

- ***Ideas and Development***—This includes the theme or purpose of a piece of writing, the thesis and insights of the author, the information, elaboration, images, and carefully selected details that build understanding and hold the reader’s attention.
- ***Organization***—This refers to the overall structure of a piece, the introduction or lead, the sequence of ideas and details, the conclusion or ending, and transitions and other features used to keep the writing moving with purpose.
- ***Voice***—At times an elusive quality to describe in a piece of writing, this includes the writer’s sense of both self and audience. *Voice* indicates the way the writer brings together all aspects of writing, suggesting the person and personality behind the words.
- ***Word Choice (diction)***—More than merely vocabulary, this indicates precision in language, the careful selection of words with a sense of purpose.
- ***Sentence Fluency (syntax)***— Refers to the way sentences have been put together and ordered to create a rhythm and flow, the sophistication of how sentences are varied in length and structure to achieve the writer’s purpose.
- ***Conventions***—This characteristic includes punctuation, spelling, grammar, usage, capitalization, and paragraphing, the overall clarity and correctness of written expression.

Focused instruction during all phases of the writing process on the essential elements of good writing, using the 6-Traits approach, gives students a structure for assessing the effectiveness of their own work. Each stage of the writing process allows for direct instruction on several traits of effective writing:

- ***Pre-writing***—thinking, finding, and organizing (*Ideas and Development*)
- ***Drafting***—assembling (*Ideas and Development, Organization, Voice*)
- ***Revising***—fine-tuning content (*Organization, Voice, Word Choice, Sentence Fluency*)
- ***Editing and Proofing***—fine-tuning mechanics (*Word Choice, Sentence Fluency, Conventions*)

Glossary of Important Terms in the English Language Arts Curriculum

6-Traits—essential elements or *traits* of writing that can be taught and assessed; the six traits are *ideas and development, organization, voice, word choice/diction, sentence fluency/syntax, and conventions*

Brief constructed response (BCR)—a term used by MSDE to describe test items that require students to write or *construct* a response; BCRs are items that ask students to explain an idea about a text; BCRs measure performance on reading comprehension indicators, not writing indicators; BCRs in math, science, and social studies measure content knowledge

Common tasks—assignments that all students must complete in each unit in grades 6-12; most units require four or five common tasks; most common tasks involve writing

Data points—selected common tasks that must be reported by schools on IMS; reporting data points helps insure that teachers instruct and assess the common tasks and provides an opportunity for teachers and administrators to monitor curriculum implementation and student achievement

Exemplar sets—model student papers illustrating grade-level expectations for student work for each score on a rubric for a specific writing task

Extended constructed response (ECR)—a term used by MSDE to describe test items that require students to write or *construct* a response; ECRs are items that ask students to write a multi-paragraph answer; ECRs measure performance on writing indicators

Formative assessments—these are ongoing checks for understanding that occur during instruction, allowing teachers to gauge student progress and adjust instruction frequently to meet student needs; many formative assessments involve writing

Portfolio—a collection of student work over time; most pieces in student portfolios are written assignments; students are asked to review their work periodically and to complete *Portfolio Reflections* to self-monitor their progress

Purposes for writing—three reasons or *purposes* for written expression that require different approaches; as defined by state and national standards, the three purposes are *writing to inform, writing to persuade, and writing to express personal ideas*

Range-finding—a process in which teachers collaboratively score and discuss student work to develop exemplar sets indicating grade-level expectations for specific writing tasks

Rubric—a tool to help score and provide feedback for student responses; there are many different rubrics used to score student writing, but all of them use the language of the 6-Traits

Selected response (SR)—a test item that requires students to choose or *select* an answer, essentially a multiple choice question; SR items can ask questions to test writing indicators

Semester exams—assessments given in high school at the end of each semester; semester exams are designed to imitate the English HSA and include SRs, BCRs, and an ECR; in grades 9 and 10, semester exams are countywide exams; in grades 11 and 12, they are locally developed

Unit Assessments—assessments at the end of units 2 and 4 in English and units 1 and 3 in reading in grades 6-8; unit assessments are designed to imitate the Reading MSA and the English HSA and include SRs, BCRs, and ECRs

Writing process—a method or *process* for developing a piece of writing that generally includes five stages: *pre-writing, drafting, editing, revising, and publishing*