

**AP English Language and Composition  
Question 3: Argument  
Scoring Commentaries on 2020 Rubrics  
(Applied to 2019 Student Responses)**

**Index of Scores for Samples: Question 3**

<b>Sample Reference</b>	<b>Row A</b>	<b>Row B</b>	<b>Row C</b>
AA	1	4	1
W	1	4	1
E	1	3	0
GG	1	3	0
RR	1	2	0
KK	1	2	0
VV	1	1	0
MM	0	1	0

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**Sample AA**

**6/6 Points (A1 – B4 – C1)**

**Row A: 1/1**

The response earned a point for Row A because it presents a defensible position that responds to the prompt. After introducing America’s commitment to capitalism, the response ends the first paragraph with this thesis: “While capitalism undeniably has its upsides, it has many downsides that are rarely recognized. When considering the downside, capitalism is clearly overrated as it commodifies humanity and uplifts a minority at the expense of the majority.”

**Row B: 4/4**

The response earned four points in Row B because it provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning and consistently explains this evidence. In paragraph two, the response presents a thoughtful ethical argument about human value. While capitalism places an economic value on each person based on what they can produce, this response presents alternative values. Two examples are used to show how people are devalued within a capitalist system: people starving because they cannot afford or get access to food and the lack of clean water in Flint, MI. The strength of the commentary exists in the specific analysis that some people’s lives aren’t valuable enough to warrant assistance. In paragraph three, the response references Jeff Bezos as an example to show the unbalanced distribution of wealth: “One such individual, Jeff Bezos, at one point has the wealth to buy every homeless person (not family but person) in the U.S. a \$200,000 house and still fix Flint’s pipes twelve times over.” This example refers to the Flint water problem from the previous paragraph and in doing so creates a clear conversation between referenced evidence. Finally, this response refutes the claim that capitalism is necessarily good in comparison to communism, calling this line of reasoning a “false dichotomy.” The line of reasoning, first referenced in the thesis statement as “commodification of humanity,” is explicit in the body paragraphs and is seen explicitly in arguments such as, “any government or society that prioritizes profit over human life is broken.”

**Row C: 1/1**

The response earned a point for Row C because it crafts a nuanced argument critiquing capitalism. The response explores the tension of a “society that has enough to feed its people but sees its people starve” and argues that this is a failure. The argument that “a small percentage of the world’s wealthiest people hold more wealth than the poorest half of the world combined” suggests a sophisticated understanding of capitalism’s impact on different socioeconomic groups.

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**Sample W**

**6/6 Points (A1 – B4 – C1)**

**Row A: 1/1**

The response earned a point for Row A because the introduction introduces the topic of voting and situates it within the context of the 4-year presidential voting cycle in America. After providing mostly context and explanation, the introduction includes a clear thesis statement with a defensible position: “While the Electoral College was created in the name of equality for smaller states, it is ultimately overrated because it undercuts the popular vote, it is an archaic practice that is unsuitable for the modern era.” This position maps out a line of reasoning that will be further developed in the response.

**Row B: 4/4**

The response earned four points in Row B because of the specificity of evidence about the Electoral College and the consistent commentary. This commentary supports a line of reasoning focused on the Electoral College as a “relic of the past” and a system that “suppresses the voices of the American people.” The response begins by arguing that the Electoral College can undercut the popular vote within individual states. The commentary provided explains the writer’s position that candidates who receive the most votes should win the election. As an example, the response indicates in paragraph two that Hillary Clinton would have beaten Donald Trump in 2016 if not for the Electoral College since she won the popular vote “by almost three million votes.” The response also cites the 2000 presidential election when Al Gore won the popular vote but lost to George W. Bush because of the Electoral College. In paragraph two, this response reasons, “If a system is in place that consistently fails the American people and silences their voice (2 out of the last 3 presidents have been elected without popular mandate) that is an overrated system.” Not only are appropriate examples used to support the writer’s thesis, but the response also includes commentary that supports the line of reasoning. The next body paragraph is similarly well-documented and reasoned as it argues that the original purpose of the Electoral College is no longer valid. This helps to support the larger line of reasoning that the Electoral College is “unsuitable for the modern era.” The response’s third paragraph indicates that the Electoral College was instituted out of concern that the voting public would not be educated about the candidates in the election, “Today, with the presence of the internet, radio, television, smartphones, and countless other devices, the entire nation can follow campaigns and make at least semi-informed decisions.” The concession in the fourth paragraph suggests that there are some benefits to the Electoral College, namely that without the Electoral College large states would decide the outcome of most elections, but the response refutes that argument pointing out how with the Electoral College smaller states get an unfair advantage.

**Row C: 1/1**

This response earned a point in Row C because it employs a style that is vivid and persuasive. The control of language in this response is impressive, as seen in the following sentences from paragraph three: “While it might have made sense in 1819, the Electoral College has no place in 2019. It is anathema to American democracy, and it is extremely overrated and should be expunged from the

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political system.” The response contains details and stylistic flourishes that are especially impressive in a timed writing situation as can be seen in this example from paragraph four: “In a state like Wyoming with its three votes, a vote there is worth much more than a vote in New York. A person in Lexington, Kentucky is worth three people in Los Angeles, California. These inequities that are plaguing our voting system are undemocratic and are a result of the highly overrated Electoral College.”

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**Sample E**

**4/6 Points (A1 – B3 – C0)**

**Row A: 1/1**

The response earned a point in Row A because it identifies “competition” as being overrated, which serves as a thesis with a defensible position for this response. It acknowledges that motivation is the primary benefit of competition but claims that the negatives--in this case “unnecessary stress and lack of morals” are the main problems with it.

**Row B: 3/4**

The response earned three points in Row B. Although the response provides specific evidence, it only explains how some of that evidence supports the line of reasoning that competition is overrated. The response is organized around two public spheres in which competition is prevalent: school and business. In the first case, the response reasons in paragraph two that competition in earlier grades is harmless and may even motivate a student to work harder in order to make a “better version of yourself.” However, the response then argues that this competition becomes fierce in high school and harmful as some people pretend not to be working hard. The response relies upon a description of “sleepless nights” “tremendous amounts of acquired” stress,” and “a never-ending source of anxiety.” This development suggests a line of reasoning that competition is overrated, specifically in this example, because it “weaken[s] friendships” and causes unhealthy behaviors. This same line of reasoning appears in the third paragraph about business. The response reasons that competition can start off being good to regulate prices for consumers, but eventually corporate greed undermines the competitive process as in the case of Apple forcing consumers to upgrade their devices. The commentary stops short in analyzing how the examples connect to a larger argument about competition as overrated and sometimes the response slips into description or definition. It’s not always explicit in the response how the evidence and commentary support the task of the prompt. While the examples do provide an implicit critique of competition “caus[ing] pain” in paragraph three, the student does not consistently link this to competition itself as overrated.

**Row C: 0/1**

The response did not earn a point in Row C. While the response provides some compelling evidence, specifically “floating duck syndrome,” there is no sustained nuanced argumentation about the long-term negative impacts of competition. The language, while appropriate, is not especially vivid or persuasive.

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**Sample GG**

**4/6 Points (A1 – B3 – C0)**

**Row A: 1/1**

The response earned a point in Row A. The opening paragraph is simple, yet it effectively introduces a thesis statement with a defensible position: “Nowadays, people try too hard to be different to the point where it has become overrated.”

**Row B: 3/4**

This response earned three points in Row B because the three body paragraphs each contain evidence and commentary that help support a line of reasoning “that trying to be different” is overrated. The body paragraphs argue this line of reasoning as it relates to the categories of music, fashion, and popular trends. Paragraph two on musicians and music journalists is the most well-developed of the paragraphs. The writer ties the rejection of “mainstream” music and back to the claim about being different for its own sake. However, as the response continues the paragraphs become less specific and the commentary is scarcer. The lack of commentary in this section fails to support some of the response’s key claims. The paragraph on fashion has an effective but minimal personal example of friends criticizing certain clothes before buying them themselves, and the paragraph on selfishness makes the ironic point that people “try to be different in order to fit in.” Both paragraphs fail to provide substantive commentary that analyzes how “trying to be different” is overrated.

**Row C: 0/1**

The response did not earn a point in Row C. While this essay is focused on and develops evidence and support for the thesis, it does not demonstrate sophistication in rhetoric or with language, context, or ideas. Rather this response is simple, straightforward, and easy to read, even with the typical surface-level errors.

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**Sample RR**

**3/6 Points (A1 – B2 – C0)**

**Row A: 1/1**

The response earned a point for Row A because it responds to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible position: “In unusual circumstances the term “overrated” should be applied to the idea of freedom in regards to social change, but overall it should not be applied in regards to global devastation and cruel treatment.”

**Row B: 2/4**

The response earned two points for Row B because it provides specific evidence and explains how some of that evidence relates to the student’s argument. It does not establish a line of reasoning. Just as the thesis is difficult to follow, the body paragraphs are also challenging. The first example, in paragraph two, refers to Tom Robinson in *To Kill a Mockingbird* to demonstrate how freedom is overrated. The response suggests that Tom’s conviction and murder have some value because of the social change that might have taken place in the town. This example leans heavily on simplified plot summary with little analysis or connection to supporting claims. The next example is equally difficult to follow. The response references the Holocaust and argues that because of “global devastation” and “painful deaths” freedom “was not overrated.” Similarly, the response indicates that slavery is another example where freedom is not overrated. For both of these paragraphs, it is not clear how the examples support the response’s claims.

**Row C: 0/1**

The response did not earn a point in Row C. While the response attempts to argue that there might be rare occasions when freedom is overrated, it does not do so successfully.

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**Sample KK**

**3/6 Points (A1 – B2 – C0)**

**Row A: 1/1**

The response earned a point for Row A because it creates a thesis with a defensible position: “The concept of wealth is overrated as those who do and don’t have financial problems are both capable of experiencing joy and happiness.” The response reasons that since wealth does not necessarily lead to happiness, it is therefore overrated. The response continues by suggesting that something becomes overrated when people have too much of a good thing (in this case money). Though it’s a relatively simple idea, the wording makes it more challenging to follow.

**Row B: 2/4**

The response earned two points for Row B. In a single body paragraph, the response includes two examples--Steve Jobs and *Death of a Salesman*--to support the thesis that wealth is overrated. While both examples are on topic, they aren’t developed well and often misrepresent information. The Jobs example is only a sentence long and simply states that “true happiness came from his time spent with his friends and family.” The evidence from *Death of a Salesman* includes a little more detail, but it is simplified plot summary. “The father” is described as someone who “wants to leave his son with a large sum of money to make him happy and does so by committing suicide and transferring that money to his children.” There is no analysis or commentary that accompanies this statement. The response repeats that money doesn’t bring happiness; therefore, it’s overrated. The response does not establish a line of reasoning that speaks to the task in the prompt.

**Row C: 0/1**

The response did not earn a point for Row C because it does not demonstrate sophistication of thought.



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**Sample VV**

**2/6 Points (A1 – B1 – C0)**

**Row A: 1/1**

This response earned a point for Row A because it posits a simple thesis related to the prompt: “Soccer to me would be considered overrated.”

**Row B: 1/4**

This response earned one point for Row B because the single body paragraph offers very minimal reasoning and commentary. The paragraph shifts back to soccer fans who take the game too seriously for their own health. This observation has little to do with the game being overrated, but the response claims that the lack of the game’s importance demonstrates that it is overrated. The final paragraph returns to a comparison between doctors, who save people’s lives, and soccer players, who score goals for a living. In paragraph three, the response argues that soccer “does not deserve the prestige it is given today,” which is on topic but includes only minimal evidence and commentary.

**Row C: 0/1**

The response did not earn a point for Row C. By the standard set in this response, every profession or activity that does not save lives is overrated. This observation is an example of the weak reasoning and development that prevent this response from earning a point in this row.

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**Sample MM**

**1/6 Points (A0 – B1 – C0)**

**Row A: 0/1**

This response did not earn a point in Row A. While it approaches a thesis, the response never establishes a supportable position on the topic. Rather than arguing for something that is overrated, this response addresses a related but tangential question: what kinds of things could be described as overrated? In answer to that question, this response suggests that places and outfits can be overrated, but people cannot be overrated. The response attempts to construct a thesis in the last sentence: “The label overrated is all about opinion, you chose what happens and what don’t.” While this sentence encapsulates the focus of the response, it does not meet the threshold of a defensible position in response to the prompt.

**Row B: 1/4**

This response earned one point in Row B because it does develop some ideas and comments on the topic as defined in the introduction. In a short, two-sentence body paragraph, the response suggests that it’s not appropriate to use “overrated” to describe people. However, the next paragraph suggests that fashion could be described as overrated “depending on material, reviews, color, and design.” The response does not give any sense of what fashions are overrated, but it does suggest that certain fashions could be overrated depending on where they are worn. The response struggles to find a stable definition of overrated to use to develop the main ideas.

**Row C: 0/1**

This response did not earn a point for Row C due to its simplistic ideas. The paragraphs are undeveloped and there is little control over surface level writing. While there are rudimentary paragraphs and an interesting kernel of an idea--that certain things can or cannot be considered overrated--the response falls short of taking a position and developing it with evidence and commentary.