



## **AP<sup>®</sup> English Language and Composition 2005 Scoring Commentary**

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**AP® ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION**  
**2005 SCORING COMMENTARY**

**Question 1**

**Overview**

This was an argument question. It asked students to read an excerpt of an article, “Training for Statesmanship,” written in 1953 by George Kennan, one of the architects of American foreign policy at the time. In the excerpt, Kennan offers several observations about the relations among power, control, and conformity in the United States. The question directed students to select the observation Kennan makes that they found most compelling and to write an essay arguing the extent to which that observation holds true in the United States or any other country. The question called upon students to demonstrate their abilities to comprehend nonfiction prose; to focus on a single, salient observation among the many in the passage; to state and develop with appropriate evidence a position on the viability and relevance of the observation they focused upon; and to write clear, correct, mature prose.

**Sample: 1A**

**Score: 8**

This essay effectively responds to the prompt. In its opening paragraph it clearly identifies what the student believes to be Kennan’s most compelling observation, that “Americans place extraordinary obligations of group conformity upon themselves,” then announces its thesis that “This conformity can be seen in three basic areas of American life.” The student’s argument takes the form of a five-paragraph essay, with the central three paragraphs focusing on three distinct areas of American life: the school system, politics, and the media. But the fullness of the argument and the facility of the language keep this essay from being overly formulaic. The essay’s second paragraph develops an effective analysis of the ways in which the educational system causes children to “feel the obligations to dress certain ways” and thus generates support for “companies such as American Eagle and Abercrombie and Fitch,” as well as pressures children to act in “certain ways” with regard to “sex, drugs, and alcohol.” The recognition that the ways of responding to these influences varies “Depending on which group they conform with” adds a layer of sophistication to the essay’s argument that contributes to raising it above the midrange of scores. The student’s ability later in the same paragraph to connect these commonplace examples to the molding influence of the college application process, in which “the well-rounded student” must combine “good grades, a handful of extracurriculars [*sic*], and some community service,” adds yet another layer of sophistication to the argument. The essay draws particularly insightful conclusions in arguing that the process of filling out “the same generic application over and over” has “molded the American children” and thus has turned the “American educational system” into “a model of conformity within a society.” In the third paragraph, the essay gives a less developed but nonetheless insightful example of how, in the American political system and the process of registering to vote, “Americans are prompted to pick a party to affiliate or conform [*sic*].” Despite the slight grammatical flaw of the sentence, the insight is original and appropriate. In the fourth paragraph, the essay develops another apt example by arguing that “media is a driving force in conformity.” Its uses specific, appropriate examples to make its relevant points: first, that magazines like *Cosmopolitan* not only flood female readers “with the generic image of the beautiful and sexy woman,” but create “conformity issues for men as well,” and second, that television shows like “Leave It to Beaver” have “pushed” the image of the perfect family. The essay gives final shape to its argument with its conclusion that “America has become a breeding ground for conformity through education politics, and media.”

**AP® ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION**  
**2005 SCORING COMMENTARY**

**Question 1 (continued)**

**Sample: 1B**

**Score: 6**

This essay adequately responds to the prompt. Without mentioning Kennan directly, the essay identifies as its subject Kennan's claim that in the United States power is peculiarly diffused. The first paragraph summarizes the points to be addressed: power is spread out "not only within the government, where power is distributed among three separate branches, but also in the country as a whole." The essay points out that the need for a "central authority" is minimized by the "morality and conformity of the individual, self-policing done by other citizens, and the use of voting to give Americans a sense of power." These ideas are taken up in the second, third, and fourth paragraphs. The democratic principles of the founding fathers ("giving power to the people," establishing the right to vote) are used at the beginning and end to link parts of the essay. The fourth paragraph, a consideration of the significance of voting for American citizens, ends with the claim that "Citizen voting is the central unit of our country and keeps all the other factors together, including power distributions." The final paragraph is a brief summary of the argument of the essay. The writing is not distinguished, but it is clear. The essay effectively uses transitional words ("Unlike," "Since," "The first," "Next," "While") to develop ideas and show relationships. The essay is organized, but it is not as sophisticated or as fully developed as essays receiving higher scores.

**Sample: 1C**

**Score: 4**

This essay responds inadequately to the prompt. It has difficulty in identifying a compelling observation from Kennan's passage, offering instead the general comment that "According to George F. Kennan ... the element of power exists in many different places of everyday life for Americans." The essay then has difficulty developing a clear argument with appropriate evidence. For example, its second paragraph incorrectly identifies the "small group of terrorists" who "had the power to create panic ... by flying planes into the World Trade Center" with Kennan's reference to "'informal associations of a vigilante nature'" inside the United States. Much of the rest of the second paragraph merely quotes or summarizes Kennan. Then, in its statement that "the US gives an abundant [*sic*] amount of power to our political leaders, including the President," the essay flatly contradicts Kennan's argument. Finally, the essay exhibits lack of precision and an immature control of language in its diction and its sentence structure, with phrases like "Great quantities of power," "abundant [*sic*] amount of power," and "the element of power exists in a wide range of people in the US."

**AP® ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION**  
**2005 SCORING COMMENTARY**

**Question 2**

**Overview**

This question called for rhetorical analysis. It offered students a mock press release from *The Onion*, a publication devoted to humor and satire, announcing a new product called “MagnaSoles shoe inserts.” The students were directed to write an essay analyzing the strategies used in the mock press release to satirize how products are marketed to consumers. The question asked students to examine and analyze a humorous text from the contemporary media, to base their analysis—at least in part—on their understanding of the role satire plays in the promulgation of ideas in their culture, and to write clear, correct, analytic prose.

**Sample: 2A**

**Score: 9**

This essay responds very effectively to the prompt. It provides a full and effective analysis and displays a particularly impressive control of language. The essay clearly identifies the satirical purpose of *The Onion* article and directs its analysis to the rhetorical strategies that develop that satire rather than merely focusing on the strategies of marketing. It offers a particularly sophisticated discussion of the consumer mentality being exposed by the satire, and it does so with sentence structure and diction that allow for subtle distinctions and revealing emphases. The one-sentence introductory paragraph illustrates this control and gives a concise overview of the analysis that will follow: “In the face of a rising consumer culture and a subsequent fall of common sense, the Onion uses a satirical tone to draw attention to the public’s gullibility and the advertising industry’s power.” The essay then enters upon a full and insightful discussion of how “Through subtle, tongue-in-cheek humor,” the article “mocks the seductive diction of real advertisements.” The analysis of diction opens into a perceptive discussion of “the post wwii baby boomer ‘more is more’ sentiment that often clouds and misguides human judgement [*sic*].” The essay’s analysis of the article’s use of the word “occident” shows the student’s insight into how a slight turn of diction can expose a broader “fallacy.” The third paragraph’s continuing analysis of “satirical tone” gives a full treatment of the “mocking buzzwords such as bio-flow” used to “create a false sense of professionalism” and thus expose the ways in which actual advertising uses similar language “to create problems where there were none.” The essay’s identification of the article’s promise “to raise the dead” with the “age-old hallmark of quackery” shows the student’s ability to place the object of this satire in a broader tradition of false advertising. Thus, the range and sophistication of the essay’s analysis put it among the most successful of essays written.

**Sample: 2B**

**Score: 6**

This essay adequately responds to the prompt. It provides an adequate analysis of the article’s satirical strategies and identifies specific examples of puns, jargon, and appeals to authority through quotations and testimonials. It gives a clear, well-organized explanation of how these elements develop the article’s satire. The essay recognizes that puns (“go several steps further”) and internal contradictions (“semi-plausible”) “give the entire piece a lighthearted and satiric tone that causes the reader to chuckle.” The essay also sees clearly how the article, in its use of direct quotes, “pokes fun at the fact that doctors use a lot of fancy-sounding names to make consumers believe that what they’re buying is very high-tech.”

**AP® ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION  
2005 SCORING COMMENTARY**

**Question 2 (continued)**

While the essay is successful in identifying and analyzing these elements of satire, it does so with a diction and sentence structure that is simple rather than particularly sophisticated. Terminology such as “tiny jokes,” “fancy-sounding names,” “pokes fun,” and “a funny quote” is adequate to convey the essay’s ideas clearly but does not have the conciseness that would warrant placing the essay at the highest level. Likewise, while the organization and explanation of examples are adequate, the essay is not as fully developed as essays that receive scores at the highest levels.

**Sample: 2C  
Score: 3**

This essay is inadequate in its response to the prompt. Although it correctly recognizes the satiric intent of the article, its attempt to analyze the satiric strategies lacks the perceptiveness needed to make it successful. The introductory paragraph displays misuse and vagueness of diction in the word “degrading” and the phrase “thorough [*sic*] persuasive writing skills.” In the second paragraph, the imprecision of the analysis combines with a breakdown in grammar when the essay asserts that “techniques such as factual information is [*sic*] provided to make the audience more impressed by the product.” The discussion of “personal interviews” in the essay’s third paragraph, while correct, is not sufficiently developed to make a convincing point. The discussion of what the essay redundantly terms “overexaggeration” in the fourth paragraph again reveals imprecise diction and incomplete development. Thus, the essay remains inadequate in its response to the prompt, even though it correctly identifies some satirical strategies and has a unified overall focus.

**AP® ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION**  
**2005 SCORING COMMENTARY**

**Question 3**

**Overview**

This question combined analysis and argument. It provided students with an enthymeme—an argument in brief—from “The Singer Solution to World Poverty.” Peter Singer, a bioethicist, maintains that prosperous people should donate to overseas organizations such as UNICEF or Oxfam America all money not needed for the basic requirements of life. Students were asked to write an essay in which they evaluated the pros and cons of Singer’s argument, supported their evaluation of each side with appropriate evidence, and indicated which side they found more persuasive. The task called upon students to flesh out the structure of Singer’s argument, especially its underlying assumptions or warrants. Additionally, the question required students to produce clear, correct, analytic, and argumentative prose.

**Sample: 3A**

**Score: 8**

This essay responds effectively to the prompt. It provides a full, well-reasoned evaluation of the pros and cons of Singer’s proposal. The essay’s opening paragraph sets in motion a well-articulated, insightful distinction between the compelling moral and pragmatic arguments the essay will bring to bear on Singer’s proposal when it notes that “Singer’s argument rests on a delicate balance of human morals, natural impulses and decisions, not all of which are plausible or realistic.” The essay then proceeds to give due weight to the moral and ethical arguments in favor of Singer’s proposal in a well-developed second paragraph. The essay’s control of language is evident in sentences such as, “Yes, human nature is generous, it feels good to give and no one should be selfish. It even satisfies an innate sense of justice, fairness and equality—those who have more should give to those who have less.” The third paragraph begins with a well-constructed transitional sentence that announces the counterargument with clarity and finesse: “However, while the supporters of Singer’s method have righteousness, justice and logical reasoning on their side, those who oppose Singer may draw on the resources of realism, historical evidence, and their own brand of logical reasoning to support their own argument.” Thus the essay convinces its reader of its balanced, reasoned approach to the issue. The third paragraph then proceeds to develop a full, clear economic argument grounded in realism and human self-interestedness. Particularly compelling is the essay’s questioning of the definitions of and distinctions between “luxury and necessity.” The final paragraph expands on this argument based in realism to place Singer’s proposal in a larger historical context to conclude that “History is behind the critics of ‘Singer’s solution,’ and realism also backs them up.” Thus the essay provides a very well-controlled, well-balanced, well-informed, and well-argued refutation of Singer’s proposal that warrants the high score given it.

**Sample: 3B**

**Score: 6**

This essay responds adequately to the prompt. It presents a balanced discussion of the pros and cons of Singer’s proposal in clear, organized prose. The essay’s second paragraph provides a solid argument based on the moral need “to aid those who are suffering due to hunger and poverty.” It distinguishes between people who “have both necessities and luxuries” and others who “have neither” to argue that this “is a shocking reality that needs to be changed.” The third paragraph counters with its own clearly

**AP® ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION  
2005 SCORING COMMENTARY**

**Question 3 (continued)**

expressed argument that “It is a presumptuous notion to assume that Americans will indeed follow Singer’s advice.” This argument, based on the realistic observation that concerns about “The plight of their fellow human beings will weigh gravely on the minds of Americans for only a short time” before becoming “again caught up in their own materialistic and short-sighted world,” forms the basis for the essay’s conclusion that “in practice [Singer’s plan] falls short of . . . persuading Americans to forego [*sic*] their luxuries in order to give unfortunate people the food and medicine they so desperately need.” Thus the essay presents a clearly written, adequate argument that ultimately refutes Singer’s proposal.

**Sample: 3C**

**Score: 4**

Despite its length, this essay does not adequately respond to the prompt. The essay divides its response into seemingly balanced treatments of the pros and cons of Singer’s proposal, devoting a full paragraph to each position. However, the essay relies mainly on assertions and assumptions without providing sufficient evidence to back them up. The language of the essay is particularly unsophisticated and unconvincing, as evidenced by the opening sentence of the third paragraph: “Their [*sic*] are also cons that come from Singer’s argument.” The essay’s concluding statement is especially vague and potentially contradictory: “These pros and cons are used to persuade people to donate to organizations.” The essay is essentially a series of undeveloped and unsupported general assertions.