



AP[®] English Language and Composition 2005 Scoring Commentary Form B

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Question 1

Sample: 1A
Score: 8

This essay effectively responds to the prompt. It is a full, stylishly written analysis that fulfills the promise it makes with its clear, controlled introductory paragraph. The essay recognizes the emotional appeal of Maria W. Stewart's lecture and effectively explains how her diction supports that appeal in words like "chains" and "death," along with phrases like "the lash of the cruel driver," to create "an almost macabre element . . . which shocks her audience and conveys the cruel realities of slavery." The essay's analysis of Stewart's use of antithesis, appositives, and "oxymoronic combination" to describe the "racial injustices faced by African Americans" is particularly effective, as is its examination of the way Stewart uses the metaphors of "spider's webs" and "floating bubbles" to describe the labor of African Americans as unprofitable.

Sample: 1B
Score: 6

This essay gives an adequate response to the prompt. It discusses Maria W. Stewart's appeals to emotion, but without the specificity of support or example one would look for in an essay scored at a higher level. The essay's analysis of tone is good, especially when it examines how Stewart's "emphatic repetition of 'Again' . . . display [*sic*] her sense of urgency and impatience." Its analysis of the lecture's "eloquent tone which contradicts the stereotypes of African Americans being 'lazy' or 'idle'" and its mention of Stewart's "scholarly diction" contribute to the adequacy of its response. Finally, the clarity of the essay's prose and organization lends a sense of solidity and competence to this student's response.

Sample: 1C
Score: 4

This essay is an inadequate response to the prompt. The essay offers very little discussion of how Maria W. Stewart's lecture works. Rather, it merely refers to simile and tone. Its mention of Stewart's rebuttal represents little more than a passing nod to analysis of her argument. The essay is a good example of how a student can drop quoted material onto the page, claim that the material supports the writer's purpose, then fail to conduct the analysis of how that material functions. The essay does not rise above the mere iteration of quotations to become more than inadequate.

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Question 2

Sample: 2A

Score: 8

This essay responds very effectively to the prompt. Its introductory paragraph establishes a strong, knowing voice, with its reference to Twain's use of the Mississippi River and its claim that "Barry chooses to focus on . . . the observational phenomena that truly make the Mississippi 'different.'" The essay strengthens as it goes. The second paragraph is good, with its understanding of the tone of Barry's reference to Heisenberg and its command of sentence structure that provides an insightful analysis of how Barry distinguishes between the "average river" and the Mississippi, thereby alarming the reader with "the sheer magnitude of his chosen river's full incomprehensibility." The essay's third paragraph is even stronger. Its analysis of how "Barry chooses anecdotes that are paradoxical to the layman" to convey that "this paradox is unique to the Mississippi" is particularly effective. Indeed, throughout the essay, this student goes beyond recognition of techniques like anecdote, paradox, and, in the essay's fourth paragraph, simile, to give perceptive analyses of the effects of these techniques. The essay's insight and control of its analysis is capped in its concluding paragraph when it acknowledges that Barry's own conclusion that "there is 'still further force and complexity' to be explored . . . leaves the reader to determine what that indefinite dimension might be."

Sample: 2B

Score: 6

This essay provides an adequate response to the prompt. It analyzes Barry's prose in language that conveys the student's own voice: "An excited and energetic force pulses its way through the passage as Barry recreates the Mississippi river [*sic*] with words." Its analysis of Barry's use of imagery and figurative language is sound, as when the essay notes that "This river does not just churn and move about. 'It roils.'" The essay also notes Barry's use of repetition and personification. Its overall structure is controlled and unified. However, its heavy reliance on quotation and its need for further development keep it in the middle range of adequate scores.

Sample: 2C

Score: 4

This essay responds to the prompt inadequately. The essay states what John M. Barry does in the passage ("He continues on to state how the internal dynamics of a river can be altered"), quotes specific examples of Barry's diction and style, and asserts that "John Barry seems awestruck by the Mississippi's complex mechanics," but it does not adequately link those observations and examples to an analysis of how they work. Thus, while this essay does exhibit some strength in its selection of detail, it does not provide the fullness of analysis needed to make it an adequate response to the prompt.

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Question 3

Sample: 3A

Score: 9

This essay is a highly effective treatment of the prompt. In support of Lewis Thomas's proposition, it presents a full, informed, stylistically mature argument that "most human discoveries are not precipitated by any sort of precision but by our human tendency to be wrong." The essay uses particularly appropriate and convincing examples to support its position. The essay's second paragraph points out that penicillin was discovered, "not by careful experiment, but a 'lucky laboratory' where samples were contaminated with the fungus that produces the antibiotic." It then supplements that sound support of its argument with a similarly "nonstandard" discovery that a recent "outbreak of a strange intestinal disease in Milwaukee" was caused by "the stealthy parasite cryptosporidium, which would have run rampant were it not for its detection by a deviation from established 'protocol.'" After these well-phrased descriptions (note the mature control of sentence structure in the examples above) from biology, the essay turns to a contrasting example from literature. Paragraph three argues conversely from Kafka's *The Trial*, in another nicely crafted sentence, that "the insuperable coils of a 'good' institution literally entrap men in Kafka's world, where everything is so flawless that ironically nothing gets done because of the lack of 'the move based on error.'" The essay's fourth paragraph uses an effective transitional sentence ("Thus it is man's natural spontaneity that must be recognized as the driving force behind our innovation") to introduce yet another supporting example, here from technology: "the hundreds of ways 'not to make a light bulb' discovered by Thomas Edison." In its final paragraph, the essay displays the sophistication of its insights by reversing direction to ask, "But does this mean that the [*sic*] every man in the world should immediately abandon his or her standard of perfection to explore the unknown?" (note that we overlook the minor pronoun error here in favor of the larger control of language and logic displayed). The student's concluding answer that "it is the error that must come to us, not us who must seek out the error" reveals the sophistication of both reasoning and expression that places the essay among the highest levels of response to the prompt.

Sample: 3B

Score: 6

This essay presents an adequate midlevel response to the prompt. It develops a structured argument around two sets of appropriate examples, one set from personal experience and the other from history. The essay's first paragraph sets up the argument with a clear thesis statement. The second paragraph then provides a thoughtful, if general, discussion of how mistakes in the student's "relationships with other people," such as "saying something that might be offensive" or "arguing with my parents," has led the student to "realize that I should apologize," and has thus given rise to what the essay implies but doesn't explicitly say is a form of moral growth. In its third paragraph, the essay becomes stronger and more precise by offering two concrete, appropriate historical examples to support Lewis Thomas's point. The student argues that "international failures" by the United States "both before and during World War II" led to corrections of these mistakes after the war. First, "the U.S. realized that its rejection of the League of Nations was a major mistake, and remedied this by helping create a global body for collective peace and security, the United Nations." Second, the failure "to save Jews from the Holocaust" led the U.S. to atone "for its error by being instrumental in the creation of Israel, a home for the Jewish people." The essay's presentation of these two sets of examples in clear prose, organized around a unifying thesis, warrants its being scored as an adequate response in the middle range of scores.

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Question 3 (continued)

Sample: 3C

Score: 3

This essay inadequately responds to the prompt. Despite its length and its attempt to support Lewis Thomas's claims, it makes use of evidence that is especially insufficient and, in some places, inappropriate. The quick listing of "a table with a shorter leg, a person with a crukid [*sic*] smile, a research paper with a persons [*sic*] own thoughts," leaves the essay's argument undeveloped and unclearly supported. In addition, the vague, colloquial quality of the essay's prose makes for a particularly immature control of writing, as evidenced in the following sentences from the first paragraph: "Never making a mistake puts a strain on the thought process of creating something in the future that has a possibility of becoming absolutely flawless. Sure, never making mistakes or errors will rid the world of impercections [*sic*], but that is just the jist [*sic*] of what it will do. Things will be just the way they were suppose [*sic*] to be, 'normal.'"