



AP[®] English Language and Composition 2004 Free-Response Questions

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2004 AP[®] ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION
FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION

SECTION II

Total time—2 hours

Question 1

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

The passage below is an excerpt from a letter written by the eighteenth-century author Lord Chesterfield to his young son, who was traveling far from home. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how the rhetorical strategies that Chesterfield uses reveal his own values.

Dear Boy,

Bath, October 4, 1746

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Though I employ so much of my time in writing to you, I confess I have often my doubts whether it is to any purpose. I know how unwelcome advice generally is; I know that those who want it most, like it and follow it least; and I know, too, that the advice of parents, more particularly, is ascribed to the moroseness, the imperiousness, or the garrulity of old age. But then, on the other hand, I flatter myself, that as your own reason, though too young as yet to suggest much to you of itself, is however, strong enough to enable you, both to judge of, and receive plain truths: I flatter myself (I say) that your own reason, young as it is, must tell you, that I can have no interest but yours in the advice I give you; and that consequently, you will at least weigh and consider it well: in which case, some of it will, I hope, have its effect. Do not think that I mean to dictate as a parent; I only mean to advise as a friend, and an indulgent one too: and do not apprehend that I mean to check your pleasures; of which, on the contrary, I only desire to be the guide, not the censor. Let my experience supply your want of it, and clear your way, in the progress of your youth, of those thorns and briars which scratched and disfigured me in the course of mine. I do not, therefore, so much as hint to you, how absolutely dependent you are upon me; that you neither have, nor can have a shilling in the world

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but from me; and that, as I have no womanish weakness for your person, your merit must, and will, be the only measure of my kindness. I say, I do not hint these things to you, because I am convinced that you will act right, upon more noble and generous principles: I mean, for the sake of doing right, and out of affection and gratitude to me.

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I have so often recommended to you attention and application to whatever you learn, that I do not mention them now as duties; but I point them out to you as conducive, nay, absolutely necessary to your pleasures; for can there be a greater pleasure than to be universally allowed to excel those of one's own age and manner of life? And, consequently, can there be anything more mortifying than to be excelled by them? In this latter case, your shame and regret must be greater than anybody's, because everybody knows the uncommon care which has been taken of your education, and the opportunities you have had of knowing more than others of your age. I do not confine the application which I recommend, singly to the view and emulation of excelling others (though that is a very sensible pleasure and a very warrantable pride); but I mean likewise to excel in the thing itself; for, in my mind, one may as well not know a thing at all, as know it but imperfectly. To know a little of anything, gives neither satisfaction nor credit; but often brings disgrace or ridicule.

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Question 2

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

Contemporary life is marked by controversy. Choose a controversial local, national, or global issue with which you are familiar. Then, using appropriate evidence, write an essay that carefully considers the opposing positions on this controversy and proposes a solution or compromise.

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Question 3

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

Read carefully the following passage from the introduction to *Days of Obligation* by Richard Rodriguez. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Rodriguez uses contrasts between Mexico and California to explore and convey his conflicting feelings.

Line For the last several years, I have told friends that I
was writing a book about California and Mexico. That
was not saying enough. I've been writing a book
about comedy and tragedy. In my mind, in my life,
5 Mexico plays the tragic part; California plays the role
of America's wild child.

Or was I writing a book about competing
theologies?

10 Josiah Royce, another Californian, another writer,
became a famous Harvard professor. Royce wrote
about California with disappointment from the
distance of New England. Royce believed that some
epic opportunity had been given California—the
15 chance to reconcile the culture of the Catholic south
and the Protestant north. California had the chance to
heal the sixteenth-century tear of Europe. But the
opportunity was lost. The Catholic—the Mexican—
impulse was pushed back, vanquished by comedy; a
Protestant conquest.

20 I use the word "comedy" here as the Greeks used
it, with utmost seriousness, to suggest a world where
youth is not a fruitless metaphor; where it is possible
to start anew; where it is possible to escape the
rivalries of the Capulets and the McCoys; where
25 young women can disprove the adages of
grandmothers.

The comedy of California was constructed on a
Protestant faith in individualism. Whereas Mexico
knew tragedy.

30 My Mexican father, as his father before him,
believed that old men know more than young men;
that life will break your heart; that death finally is the
vantage point from which a life must be seen.

I think now that Mexico has been the happier place
35 for being a country of tragedy. Tragic cultures serve
up better food than optimistic cultures; tragic cultures
have sweeter children, more opulent funerals. In
tragic cultures, one does not bear the solitary burden
of optimism. California is such a sad place, really—a
40 state where children run away from parents, a state of
pale beer, and young old women, and divorced

husbands living alone in condos. But at a time when
Californians are driven to despair by the relentless
optimism of their state, I can only marvel at the comic
45 achievement of the place, California's defiance of
history, the defiance of ancestors.

Something hopeful was created in California
through the century of its Protestant settlement.
People believed that in California they could begin
50 new lives. New generations of immigrants continue to
arrive in California, not a few of them from Mexico,
hoping to cash in on comedy.

It is still possible in California to change your
name, change your sex, get a divorce, become a
55 movie star. My Mexican parents live in a California
house with four telephones, three televisions, and
several empty bedrooms.

How could California ever reconcile comedy and
tragedy? How could there not have been a divorce
60 between Mexico and California in the nineteenth
century?

The youth of my life was defined by Protestant
optimism. Now that I am middle-aged, I incline more
toward the Mexican point of view, though some part
65 of me continues to resist the cynical conclusions of
Mexico.

Which leaves me with at least a literary problem to
start with: How shall I present the argument between
comedy and tragedy, this tension that describes my
70 life? Shall I start with the boy's chapter, then move
toward more "mature" tragic conclusions? But that
would underplay the boy's wisdom. The middle-aged
man would simply lord over the matter.

No, I will present this life in reverse. After all, the
75 journey my parents took from Mexico to America was
a journey from an ancient culture to a youthful one—
backward in time. In their path I similarly move, if
only to honor their passage to California, and because
I believe the best resolution to the debate between
80 comedy and tragedy is irresolution, since both sides
can claim wisdom.

(1992)

END OF EXAMINATION