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AP ENGLISH LANGUAGE · FREE RESOURCE

AP English Language and Composition — Practice Exam 1: Answer Key, Explanations & Sample Essays

This key accompanies Practice Exam 1. Do not read it before you have taken the exam under timed conditions.

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1. Section I Answer Key

Skill coverage: Skill categories 1, 3, 5, and 7 are tested in the two reading sets; categories 2, 4, 6, and 8 are tested in the three writing sets. The 45 questions break down as follows: Category 1 (5), Category 2 (5), Category 3 (7), Category 4 (5), Category 5 (7), Category 6 (5), Category 7 (5), Category 8 (6). Difficulty codes: E = easy, M = medium, H = hard.

Answer distribution: A = 11, B = 11, C = 12, D = 11. No letter appears more than twice in a row.

Q	ANS	SKILL	PASSAGE	DIFF
1	B	1.A	Passage 1 (oration)	E
2	C	7.A	Passage 1 (oration)	M
3	A	7.A	Passage 1 (oration)	M

Q	ANS	SKILL	PASSAGE	DIFF
4	D	5.C	Passage 1 (oration)	M
5	B	5.B	Passage 1 (oration)	M
6	D	3.C	Passage 1 (oration)	E
7	A	1.B	Passage 1 (oration)	H
8	C	3.A	Passage 1 (oration)	E
9	D	7.B	Passage 1 (oration)	H
10	B	5.A	Passage 1 (oration)	E
11	C	3.B	Passage 1 (oration)	M
12	A	1.A	Passage 1 (oration)	E
13	C	7.A	Passage 2 (periodical essay)	M
14	A	3.B	Passage 2 (periodical essay)	E
15	D	5.C	Passage 2 (periodical essay)	E
16	B	3.A	Passage 2 (periodical essay)	M
17	B	7.A	Passage 2 (periodical essay)	H
18	D	5.B	Passage 2 (periodical essay)	M
19	A	1.B	Passage 2 (periodical essay)	H
20	C	3.C	Passage 2 (periodical essay)	M
21	D	5.C	Passage 2 (periodical essay)	H
22	A	3.A	Passage 2 (periodical essay)	M
23	B	5.A	Passage 2 (periodical essay)	M
24	C	1.A	Passage 2 (periodical essay)	E
25	B	4.B	Passage 3 (four-day week)	M
26	A	2.A	Passage 3 (four-day week)	H
27	D	4.A	Passage 3 (four-day week)	E
28	C	6.B	Passage 3 (four-day week)	M
29	B	8.B	Passage 3 (four-day week)	M
30	C	8.A	Passage 3 (four-day week)	E
31	D	6.A	Passage 3 (four-day week)	M
32	A	2.A	Passage 3 (four-day week)	M

Q	ANS	SKILL	PASSAGE	DIFF
33	C	2.A	Passage 4 (musical instruments)	M
34	D	4.C	Passage 4 (musical instruments)	H
35	A	4.A	Passage 4 (musical instruments)	E
36	B	6.B	Passage 4 (musical instruments)	M
37	D	6.C	Passage 4 (musical instruments)	M
38	C	8.B	Passage 4 (musical instruments)	H
39	B	8.A	Passage 4 (musical instruments)	H
40	C	2.A	Passage 4 (musical instruments)	M
41	A	2.A	Passage 5 (rooftop gardens)	M
42	D	6.B	Passage 5 (rooftop gardens)	H
43	A	4.A	Passage 5 (rooftop gardens)	E
44	B	8.B	Passage 5 (rooftop gardens)	M
45	C	8.A	Passage 5 (rooftop gardens)	E

Difficulty profile: 13 easy, 22 medium, 10 hard.

2. Section I Explanations

Passage 1 (Questions 1–12): The Independence Day oration

1. Answer: B. [Skill 1.A: identify and describe components of the rhetorical situation.] The first paragraph thanks the committee and describes the pleasures of the holiday (“The fields are green; the bells have been rung since dawn”), but it also says the committee has chosen “to be reminded of something unpleasant” and ends with the guest who “is bound to say” what the kitchen cost. The speaker honors the occasion and warns that he will not simply celebrate it. (A) is wrong because the thanks are not flattery meant to make criticism palatable; the speaker openly announces unpleasantness. (C) is wrong because the reference to children is an aside about the holiday, not an explanation of reluctance. (D) is wrong because the speaker says he “would not take a holiday from any child”; he does not oppose holidays.

2. Answer: C. [Skill 7.A: how comparisons contribute to tone and meaning.] The house is “framed upon a great principle” and furnished with a charter of equality, yet it has “a room in the cellar, locked from the outside” holding three million people. The extended metaphor presents a nation with noble professed principles and a hidden, tolerated injustice. (A) is wrong because the passage never ties the house to the founders’ wealth. (B) is wrong because the speaker does not predict collapse; his concern is moral, not structural. (D) is wrong because, although the speaker grants that the house is “noble,” the metaphor is built to expose the cellar, not to hold the founders up as models.

3. Answer: A. [Skill 7.A:] The company upstairs hears the noise “and calls it the settling of timbers”: it supplies a harmless explanation for a sound it could recognize as suffering. The miller who “no longer hears his wheel” shows that constant exposure dulls perception. Together the images suggest habituation. (B) is wrong because the speaker accuses the company of indifference, not of enjoying cruelty. (C) is wrong because the issue is moral perception, not engineering knowledge. (D) is wrong because the company does hear the noise; it does not lack the information.

4. Answer: D. [Skill 5.C: methods of development.] Each question names a virtue the nation claims (love of liberty, Christianity, prudence) and is followed by a contrary fact: liberty is “sold at auction by the pound”; steeples stand over “the coffle”; prudence would “pay a debt while it is small,” yet this debt has grown. (A) is wrong because the speaker answers each question himself. (B) is wrong because the virtues are listed to be undercut, not praised. (C) is wrong because the topic never leaves slavery; the debt is a metaphor for the moral reckoning.

5. Answer: B. [Skill 5.B: how organization creates unity and reflects the line of reasoning.] Paragraph 2 gives an image of hypocrisy (the house with a locked cellar). Paragraph 3 turns to the nation’s specific self-descriptions and tests them. (A) is wrong because paragraph 3 does not qualify a thesis; it extends the point. (C) is wrong because no counterargument appears until paragraph 4. (D) is wrong because paragraph 2 is a figurative picture, not a narrated event.

6. Answer: D. [Skill 3.C: how claims are qualified by concession.] The speaker lists four objections, grants the first three (“the evil is old,” “tangled,” held by “neighbors and not monsters”), and rejects the fourth (“But gradual!”). The concession lets him spend his force on the one claim he opposes and makes him seem fair. (A) is wrong because the concession does not narrow the distance between his view and his opponents; he immediately rejects the central objection. (B) is wrong because the granted points are relevant; he is conceding, not dismissing. (C) is wrong because he proceeds at once to the rebuttal.

7. Answer: A. [Skill 1.B: how an argument demonstrates understanding of an audience’s beliefs, values, or needs.] By conceding that defenders can be “kind to their dogs and generous in their pews,” the speaker shows he knows his listeners think of themselves as decent and would reject being called monsters. He then redirects them: the question is “whether the sin is to continue.” (B) is wrong because the audience is described as a Northern picnic crowd, and nothing indicates slaveholders are present. (C) is wrong because the pews are mentioned only as evidence of ordinary virtue. (D) is wrong because the speaker’s remarks assume familiarity, not ignorance.

8. Answer: C. [Skill 3.A: identify and explain claims and evidence.] The sentences about the sale in “a morning” and the child taken “between one breakfast and the next” immediately follow “But gradual! The slave does not suffer gradually.” They are evidence that the suffering is sudden and ongoing, so a patient remedy ignores it. (A) is wrong because law is not the issue in these lines. (B) is wrong because economics is never mentioned. (D) is wrong because the speaker makes no comparison between enslaved mothers and children and other enslaved people.

9. Answer: D. [Skill 7.B: how clauses are created, combined, and placed to show relationships.] “Let us read it in the pulpit and the schoolroom, in the market and the legislature, until the men who cheer its sentences are obliged to hear what they say” is a long sentence: two parallel prepositional phrases name places, and the “until” clause states the intended result. (A) is wrong because the sentence is long, not short and blunt (the short sentences precede it). (B) is wrong because the main clause and verb (“Let us read”) open the sentence. (C) is wrong because the listed places are where the charter should be read, not institutions blamed for neglecting it.

10. Answer: B. [Skill 5.A: describe the line of reasoning and how it supports the thesis.] “Do not mistake me. I do not speak in despair” turns from indictment to hope and to action (“Let us read it aloud”). It tells the audience the criticism serves reform. (A) is wrong because the speaker does not retract anything. (C) is wrong because the paragraph is about hope and action, not a new charge. (D) is wrong because the speaker never apologizes to the committee.

11. Answer: C. [Skill 3.B: identify the overarching thesis.] The thesis is that a nation celebrating liberty while tolerating slavery empties the holiday of meaning; the closing wish is that the holiday become “the day on which a people, having made itself free, opens the cellar door.” (A) is wrong because the speaker praises the founders’ words (“better than the founders’ deeds”). (B) is wrong because he rejects gradual remedies. (D) is wrong because he wants the holiday to be redeemed (“let this holiday be what it promises to be”), not abandoned.

12. Answer: A. [Skill 1.A.] The opening shows the occasion (an Independence Day invitation); the body shows the exigence (a nation proclaiming liberty and holding “three million” in bondage). (B) is wrong because no legislature is mentioned. (C) is wrong because the committee is thanked, not opposed. (D) is wrong because the charter’s authenticity is never in doubt; the speaker calls it “a noble paper.”

Passage 2 (Questions 13–24): The periodical essay on idleness

13. Answer: C. [Skill 7.A: word choice in context.] The writer says the idle man “acknowledges his fault with a smile” and that we “extend” this “strange indulgence to ourselves and deny to every other offender.” “Indulgence” here means leniency, the willingness to excuse a fault. (A) and (B) are modern, pleasure-related senses of the word and do not fit a sentence about how people treat offenders. (D) is wrong because no one is formally pardoned; the leniency is informal and habitual.

14. Answer: A. [Skill 3.B: identify the thesis and the claim about structure.] The last sentence of paragraph 1 proposes that “idleness is not commonly a vice of one great act, but of many small omissions, no one of which would be thought worth a reproach.” (B) is wrong because the writer never says that idleness is pleasant or harmless; he calls it a vice. (C) is wrong because no comparison of difficulty with other vices is made. (D) is wrong because the essay’s example, Eubulus, is a man of great ability.

15. Answer: D. [Skill 5.C: methods of development, here analogy.] The sand-bank is formed “not by any violence of the current, but by the silent deposit of particles too minute to be noticed in the passing.” The comparison illustrates how idleness forms by tiny accumulations. (A) reverses the point, since the passage stresses the absence of any single force. (B) is wrong because the analogy concerns how the habit forms, not whom it obstructs. (C) is wrong because the navigator’s danger is a vehicle for the comparison, not its subject.

16. Answer: B. [Skill 3.A.] Eubulus has “abilities . . . such as promised distinction” and rises each morning “with a determination,” yet spends his hours “arranging his papers” and “considering which task was most deserving of priority.” Preparation replaces performance. (A) is wrong because the writer does not generalize about talented people. (C) is wrong because the friends only “regretted” him. (D) is wrong because the writer objects to using planning in place of work, not to planning itself.

17. Answer: B. [Skill 7.A: tone.] The clause says a reputation for “what he might have done” is “easily conferred, because it can never be examined.” This is a dry, ironic remark: such a reputation is cheap because it cannot be tested. (A) is wrong because the clause shows no sympathy for the family. (C) is wrong because the tone is cool, not angry, and the friends are not attacked. (D) is wrong because the writer speaks of an acquaintance, not of himself.

18. Answer: D. [Skill 5.B.] Paragraph 1 makes a claim about the nature of idleness (a vice of small omissions). Paragraph 2 explains how it develops (the sand-bank, the deferred letter). Paragraph 3 gives an extended example (Eubulus). (A) is wrong because only one anecdote appears and it does not offer a different cause. (B) is wrong because the objection appears in paragraph 4, not in the first three. (C) is wrong because the writer does not argue for tolerating idleness.

19. Answer: A. [Skill 1.B.] The writer introduces the defense of rest ("It will be said, perhaps, by those who defend their own ease") and concedes it before distinguishing it from idleness. This shows he expects readers who value their leisure and might feel accused. (B) is wrong because the writer assumes readers know what labor is. (C) is wrong because the writer treats repose as legitimate. (D) is wrong because physical health is not the issue.

20. Answer: C. [Skill 3.C.] "To this I willingly assent" grants the point about repose. The next sentence ("But let it be remarked") draws the distinction between chosen repose and suffered idleness. The concession makes him seem reasonable. (A) is wrong because the paragraph defends the argument. (B) is wrong because the tone is calm and accommodating. (D) is wrong because no example follows the sentence.

21. Answer: D. [Skill 5.C.] Paragraph 4 contrasts repose, which is "chosen," with idleness, which is "suffered," and contrasts the two with the figures of the servant ("Rest is the servant of industry") and the usurper ("idleness is its usurper"). (A) is wrong because no single day is narrated. (B) is wrong because the paragraph separates rest from idleness rather than linking them as cause and effect. (C) is wrong because no statistics appear.

22. Answer: A. [Skill 3.A.] The sentence follows the rejection of "vast resolutions" and precedes the instruction to "begin with the letter he has deferred." It supports the claim that change begins with small, immediate duties. (B) is wrong because the sentence is advice, not a verdict on human capacity. (C) is wrong because no proportion of work to rest is proposed. (D) is wrong because "command" refers to self-governance, not service under others.

23. Answer: B. [Skill 5.A.] Paragraph 1 says idleness is "many small omissions"; paragraph 2 says it grows by tiny deposits. The remedy, "the conquest of the next small duty," reverses the process. (A) is wrong because the writer says habit may be "made the servant." (C) is wrong because he criticizes only vast resolutions. (D) is wrong because the essay addresses the reader's own tendencies.

24. Answer: C. [Skill 1.A.] The essay analyzes a common fault, uses an example and analogies, and ends with advice, all in a measured voice addressed to educated readers. (A) is wrong because it is not a portrait of one man (Eubulus is one example). (B) is wrong because no physical causes are investigated. (D) is wrong because no social class is attacked.

Passage 3 (Questions 25–32): The four-day school week

25. Answer: B. [Skill 4.B: write a thesis that requires proof and previews the structure of the argument.] Sentence 3 as written ("The school board should consider changing the calendar") is vague. Choice (B) takes a position (adopt a four-day week) and previews the three lines of reasoning in the body: savings (paragraph 2), teachers (paragraph 2), and safeguards for vulnerable families (paragraph 3). (A) is a defensible claim but gives a reason (Friday absences) that the body never develops, so it does not preview the argument. (C) is a definition, not a claim. (D) states a background fact and takes no position.

26. Answer: A. [Skill 2.A: write introductions appropriate to the purpose and context.] The introduction needs a bridge from the attendance data to the proposal. Choice (A) tells the school-board audience why the pattern matters: a calendar that students already skip should be reconsidered. (B) is a historical aside that does not connect to the data. (C) blames students and drifts away from the proposal. (D) undermines the data the writer has just offered.

27. Answer: D. [Skill 4.A: develop a paragraph that includes a claim and evidence.] Sentence 6 is vague ("Many districts have seen real savings"). Choice (D) gives specific, relevant evidence for the cost claim in sentence 4: a survey, twelve districts, and an average 11 percent decrease in transportation costs. (A) restates the claim as opinion. (B) concerns teachers' preferences, not savings. (C) is relevant to rural districts but says nothing about cost.

28. Answer: C. [Skill 6.B: use transitional elements to guide the reader.] Sentence 7 begins a second benefit after the paragraph's financial argument. Choice (C) names the shift ("Money is not the only reason") and introduces the new point. (A) uses "However," which signals contrast, but teacher benefit does not contradict the savings. (B) uses "In conclusion," which is premature. (D) has no transition and drops the claim.

29. Answer: B. [Skill 8.B: write sentences that clearly convey ideas.] Sentence 5 explains why sentence 4 is true, so "because" is the correct link. (A) is a comma splice. (C) uses "Although," which makes the support contradict the claim. (D) says the opposite of the draft's claim.

30. Answer: C. [Skill 8.A: use words and syntax to convey a specific tone.] The draft is formal and addresses school-board members. "Are concerned" is neutral and respectful. (A) is slang ("freaking out," "dumped"). (B) is condescending ("apparently not considered"). (D) is presumptuous ("It is obvious") and shifts the claim from the parents' concern to the writer's assertion.

31. Answer: D. [Skill 6.A: develop a line of reasoning and commentary.] Sentence 8 is the commentary that explains how a free Friday benefits teachers. Without it, sentence 7 would be an unsupported claim. (A) is wrong because the sentences are not repetitive. (B) is wrong because sentence 8 stays on teachers. (C) is wrong because the counterargument begins in sentence 9, and sentence 8 does not introduce it.

32. Answer: A. [Skill 2.A: write conclusions appropriate to the purpose and context.] Choice (A) draws together the three strands of the argument (savings, instruction, safeguards) and ends on the goal of serving vulnerable students. (B) adds a detail that does not reinforce the argument. (C) undercuts the position. (D) is flippant and conflicts with the tone.

Passage 4 (Questions 33–40): The value of learning an instrument

33. Answer: C. [Skill 2.A:] The audience is school-board members, and the introduction should connect to their decisions. Choice (C) opens with a concrete image of budget decisions and leads into sentence 1. (A) is too broad. (B) is a generic, off-topic fact. (D) insults the audience the writer needs to persuade.

34. Answer: D. [Skill 4.C: qualify a claim using modifiers.] The original claim ("improves students' performance in every academic subject") is an overstatement. Choice (D) uses precise modifiers ("for several years," "is associated with," "many academic subjects") and links the claim to the paragraph's point about attention. (A) and (B) overstate. (C) reverses the writer's position.

- 35. Answer: A.** [Skill 4.A.] The claim concerns cognitive benefits. Choice (A) offers specific, relevant evidence: a study of 300 students and working-memory scores. (B) is anecdotal and does not show that instrument study caused anything. (C) is about relaxation, not thinking. (D) concerns the difficulty of instruments, which is irrelevant.
- 36. Answer: B.** [Skill 6.B.] Sentence 9 introduces a counterargument, so the transition should signal concession and contrast ("Skeptics may object, however"). (A) "Furthermore" signals addition. (C) "For example" signals illustration. (D) "As a result" signals consequence. None fits a counterargument.
- 37. Answer: D.** [Skill 6.C: use appropriate methods of development.] The stem asks for a comparison. Choice (D) compares a musician to an athlete and illustrates perseverance. (A) and (C) are facts, not comparisons. (B) is a vague observation.
- 38. Answer: C.** [Skill 8.B.] The colon in (C) shows that sentence 5 explains sentence 4, and "because" explains the violinist's attention. (A) is a run-on with comma splices. (B) uses "but," which wrongly signals contrast. (D) changes the meaning so that the violinist "who cannot half-listen" is a special case and the cause-effect logic is muddled.
- 39. Answer: B.** [Skill 8.A.] "A decorative frill" conveys what critics think: music is ornamental. (A) is informal. (C) states the writer's view, not the critics', and contradicts "can be sacrificed." (D) changes the meaning to controversy, which does not convey dismissiveness.
- 40. Answer: C.** [Skill 2.A.] Choice (C) reinforces the draft's reasoning (attention, patience, shared purpose) and creates urgency by tying music to every other classroom. (A) is a pleasant but weak generalization. (B) concedes the opponents' case. (D) shifts to students who do not play instruments, which is off topic.
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Passage 5 (Questions 41–45): Rooftop gardens

- 41. Answer: A.** [Skill 2.A.] The revised sentence keeps the original contrast and adds a preview of both the history (thousands of years) and the practical uses ("reaches well beyond decoration"). (B) is vague. (C) is too general. (D) previews only history and adds a claim (historians do not fully understand) that the draft does not support.
- 42. Answer: D.** [Skill 6.B.] Paragraph 1 describes early roof gardens as leisure spaces, and sentence 4 contrasts them with today's uses. "Although" makes the contrast explicit. (A) claims continuity, which contradicts the sentence's meaning. (B) implies cause and effect. (C) "Meanwhile" suggests simultaneous events, not a shift across centuries.
- 43. Answer: A.** [Skill 4.A.] The stem asks for evidence about rainwater. Choice (A) offers a specific finding about rainfall retained by green roofs. (B) concerns residents' preferences. (C) concerns roof structure. (D) states a problem but not that green roofs solve it.
- 44. Answer: B.** [Skill 8.B.] Sentences 6 and 7 add related points; "and" joins them and the commas set off the descriptive clause. (A) uses "but," falsely signaling contrast. (C) uses "so," implying that growing food causes land scarcity. (D) is a run-on.
- 45. Answer: C.** [Skill 8.A.] Choice (C) is concise and formal. (A) retains slang ("hung out," "beat the heat"). (B) overstates ("revolutionized urban life forever"). (D) is wordy and repetitive.
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3. Question 1 (Synthesis): Rubric, Scoring Notes, and Scored Samples

3.1 Scoring rubric (6 points)

Each essay is scored on three rows: **Row A, Thesis (0–1)**; **Row B, Evidence and Commentary (0–4)**; **Row C, Sophistication (0–1)**.

Row A: Thesis (0–1 point)

SCORE	DESCRIPTION
0	The response has no defensible thesis. It may restate the prompt, summarize the issue without taking a position, list pros and cons without choosing, or not respond to the prompt.
1	The response responds to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible position on the value, if any, of year-round calendars compared with the traditional calendar.

Decision rules: The thesis may be one or more sentences and may appear anywhere in the response. It must take a position; “there are advantages and disadvantages” is not a position. A thesis may preview the line of reasoning but need not. “Defensible” means that the sources contain at least minimal support for it. The point is earned even if the body of the essay fails to support the thesis. A response that only restates the prompt (“Year-round calendars have some value and some drawbacks”) earns no point.

Row B: Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points)

SCORE	DESCRIPTION	TYPICAL RESPONSES
0	Restates the thesis, repeats provided information, or references fewer than two sources.	Quote or paraphrase of the prompt; mention of one source only.
1	Evidence from or references to at least two sources. Commentary summarizes rather than explains.	Lists what sources say (“Source A says students lose a month of math. Source B says Riverbend had a bad electric bill.”); evidence is general; little or no link to the thesis.
2	Evidence from at least three sources. Commentary explains how some evidence relates to the argument, but no line of reasoning is established, or the line of reasoning is faulty.	Each paragraph addresses one source in turn; commentary says “this shows” without developing the claim; claims are not connected to each other; or the reasoning contradicts the thesis.
3	Specific evidence from at least three sources is used to support all claims in a line of reasoning. Commentary explains how some of the evidence supports the line of reasoning.	Clear claims, each tied to specific evidence from at least three sources; some commentary is insightful, but other evidence is only summarized or loosely linked; sources are used one at a time.

SCORE	DESCRIPTION	TYPICAL RESPONSES
4	Specific evidence from at least three sources is used to support all claims in a line of reasoning. Commentary consistently explains how the evidence supports the line of reasoning.	Paragraphs build on one another; sources are put in conversation (one qualifies, extends, or challenges another); every piece of evidence is tied to a claim and to the thesis.

Decision rules: Responses that earn 1 point tend to summarize sources or mix specific evidence with generalities. Responses that earn 2 points may make good points but cannot connect them into a line of reasoning, or may rely on one source per claim. Responses that earn 3 points may support all claims but explain only some of the evidence. A response cannot earn the fourth point if errors in grammar or mechanics interfere with communication. Merely citing a source ("as seen in Sources B, C, and E") without specific evidence is not enough.

Row C: Sophistication (0–1 point)

A response earns the point by demonstrating sophistication of thought or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation in any of four ways:

1. Crafting a nuanced argument by consistently identifying and exploring complexities or tensions across the sources.
2. Articulating the implications or limitations of an argument (for example, by situating the argument within a broader context).
3. Making rhetorical choices that strengthen the force and impact of the student's argument (for example, the staging of the argument or the voice).
4. Employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive.

What does not earn the point: Merely mentioning a counterargument or an opposing source without exploring it; a single sweeping statement of context ("Since the dawn of time, children have gone to school"); generalizations that are not part of the argument; naming complexities without explaining their significance; ornate or inflated diction that does not clarify the argument. Sophistication must be sustained across the essay, not produced by one sentence.

3.2 Scoring notes specific to this prompt

What a defensible thesis looks like. Any thesis that takes a position on the value of year-round calendars compared with the traditional calendar, in a way the sources can support, earns Row A. Examples:

- Year-round calendars are valuable mainly for students at risk of falling behind, and only when paired with extra instruction.
- The long summer break should be kept, because the modest academic gains of year-round calendars do not justify their costs to families.
- Year-round calendars are worth adopting because even small gains in reading and math, concentrated among low-income students, justify their moderate costs.
- Year-round calendars are valuable in principle but should not be treated as a stand-alone reform.

Theses that earn no point: "Year-round school has advantages and disadvantages." "Year-round school is a controversial topic." "Summer learning loss is a problem."

What strong responses might argue (and the sources that support each argument):

- The calendar is a container, not a cure: its value depends on what a district does with the extra breaks (Source A: "delivery mechanism"; Source E: "A calendar is just a container").
- Benefits are real but concentrated among low-income students, which argues for targeted adoption (Source A on unequal losses; Source B on Riverbend's low-income third graders; Source D on low-income reading proficiency, +2.7 versus +0.6).
- The costs fall unevenly and are partly hidden: higher operating costs (Source D), air-conditioning and building costs (Source B), child-care problems for families on different calendars (Source B), lost camp and job opportunities (Sources B and C).
- Teacher well-being complicates the extended-year option: it produces the largest gains but also the most burnout (Source D, 38 percent).
- The equity argument and the anti-calendar argument converge: Source C agrees that unequal summer loss is "a scandal" but says the cause is poverty; this can be used to argue that the calendar is a partial fix whose gains should be supplemented by other programs.
- Source F suggests that rearranging breaks without changing what happens in them is cosmetic ("summer in bite-size servings"), which can be used to reinforce Sources A and E.
- The evidence is limited: Source D's districts were not randomly assigned, Source B covers one district over two years, and Source A calls the effects of balanced calendars "positive but small." A strong response may argue that the sources justify pilot programs and evaluation rather than a wholesale change.
- The traditional summer has values the test scores do not measure (Source C), which can be weighed against measured gains.

Common traps and weaknesses.

- *Source-by-source organization.* Paragraphs that each summarize one source (A, then B, then C) rarely show a line of reasoning.
- *Quote-and-paraphrase commentary.* "This shows that year-round school helps students" repeats the evidence without explaining why it supports the claim.
- *Misreading the table.* Source D's extended-year column (200 days) is not the same as the balanced calendar (180 days); responses that attribute the largest gains to "year-round school" in general ignore that the largest gains come with the largest costs and burnout. The districts were also not randomly assigned, so the table does not prove causation.
- *Treating the cartoon as a statistic.* Source F is a rhetorical opinion; it can be used as evidence of public skepticism, not of academic results.
- *Equating the prompt with summer learning loss alone.* The prompt asks about the value of the calendar, so a response must weigh costs and tradeoffs as well as learning.
- *Vague bundling.* "As seen in Sources B, C, and E" without specifics earns little credit.
- *The "two-sided" thesis.* "Year-round school has benefits but also costs" is not a position.

3.3 Sample responses

SAMPLE 1A: SCORE 6 (ROW A: 1, ROW B: 4, ROW C: 1)

Year-round school calendars are neither the cure their champions promise nor the threat their critics fear. Their value is real but conditional: a rearranged calendar helps only when it gives schools a way to reach the children who need extra time, and it is worth its costs only where such children are numerous. Districts should therefore adopt balanced calendars selectively, in high-need schools, and pair them with intersession instruction, rather than rewriting the calendar for everyone.

The case for doing something begins with the fact that the long summer harms some children more than others. Whitcomb and Ortega-Hayes report that students lose about a month of math learning on average and that low-income children lose more reading skill, a gap that “accumulates across the elementary years” (Source A). That finding is the strongest reason to take the calendar seriously, because it identifies who is hurt: not all students equally, but those with the fewest books and programs at home. Helen Brandt, a camp director, concedes as much, calling the inequity “a scandal” (Source C). Even the calendar’s most spirited opponent, in other words, accepts the problem that year-round schooling is meant to solve.

Where Brandt and the researchers part ways is on the remedy, and here the evidence favors a middle course. Brandt argues that “the scandal is the poverty, not the calendar” and proposes libraries and camps instead. The logic is appealing, but the state’s three-year review suggests the calendar can matter: reading proficiency among low-income students rose 2.7 points in balanced-calendar districts, against 0.6 in traditional ones (Source D). Riverbend’s experience points the same way, with low-income third graders gaining four points while other students were “essentially unchanged” (Source B). Notice what these two sources share: the gains concentrate among the very children Source A says lose the most. A calendar that mostly helps those students is an argument for aiming it at them, not for imposing it on every family.

Why does the calendar help some students? Principal Jerome Okafor gives the most revealing answer: “A calendar is just a container. What matters is what we put in it” (Source E). His school uses the shorter breaks for tutoring, reaching children who “were simply gone” in July. That description matches Source A’s conclusion that the best results came where the calendar served “as a delivery mechanism” for intersession instruction. Taken together, A and E shift the question from whether year-round school is better to what it makes possible. A balanced calendar without intersessions is, as the cartoon in Source F jokes, merely summer “cut into pieces”: the same break, repackaged, with the same learning loss and a new set of scheduling headaches.

Those headaches are not trivial, and they are why selectivity matters. Riverbend’s families with children on two calendars struggled to find child care, the summer swim program lost nearly a third of its enrollment, and July’s electric bill rose \$212,000 (Source B). Brandt warns that teenagers lose summer jobs and hourly-wage parents lose predictability (Source C). The state data add that balanced calendars raise per-pupil costs by 4.1 percent against 2.9 percent for traditional schedules, and that extended-year calendars, though they produce the largest gains, cost 9.6 percent more and leave 38 percent of teachers reporting high burnout (Source D). The extended year thus buys the most learning at the highest human price. A balanced calendar costs relatively little extra, and in a school where most children are at risk, the benefit per dollar is highest.

An honest position must admit its limits. Source D’s districts were not randomly assigned, so districts that chose new calendars may differ in ways the table cannot show, and Riverbend’s four-point gain is two years of data from one district. Brandt’s picture of summer as the season when children “grow into people” is not refuted by

any test score; it names a value a spreadsheet cannot measure, and it is why a district with few struggling readers has little reason to shorten its summer. The wisest policy honors both claims: protect the long summer where it is mostly a gift, and break it up where it is mostly a gap.

Year-round calendars, then, are a tool, not a verdict. Used as a delivery system for tutoring in high-need schools, they offer a modest, evidence-backed benefit at tolerable cost. Used everywhere for their own sake, they trade a family's summer for a promise the data do not make.

Scoring commentary (6/6).

Row A: 1 point. The thesis takes a clear, defensible position: year-round calendars have conditional value and should be adopted selectively in high-need schools with intersession instruction. It is supported by the sources and previews the argument.

Row B: 4 points. The essay uses specific evidence from all six sources (A through F), well beyond the three required. Every claim in the line of reasoning is supported: summer loss is unequal (A, C); the calendar seems to help low-income students (D, B); the mechanism is intersession instruction (E, A, F); the costs and burdens favor selectivity (B, C, D); and the evidence has limits (D, B, C). The paragraphs build on one another rather than treating sources one at a time. Commentary is consistent: for example, the sentence "Notice what these two sources share: the gains concentrate among the very children Source A says lose the most" explains why Sources B and D support the claim of targeting, and the discussion of "container" and "delivery mechanism" connects A and E to explain a mechanism, not merely repeat what each says. The essay also puts sources in conversation (Brandt versus the researchers).

Row C: 1 point. The essay earns sophistication by consistently exploring tensions across the sources: Brandt agrees on the problem but disagrees on the remedy; the extended year gives the largest gains at the greatest human cost; the table suggests gains but does not prove causation. It articulates limitations (non-random assignment, one district, values that test scores cannot measure) and uses them to refine, not abandon, its position. The sophistication is part of the argument throughout, not an isolated sentence.

SAMPLE 1B: SCORE 4 (ROW A: 1, ROW B: 3, ROW C: 0)

Year-round school is a good idea for students because it prevents summer learning loss, even though it has some costs that districts have to deal with.

First, year-round school helps students keep what they have learned. According to Source A, students lose about one month of math learning during the summer, and low-income students lose more reading skill. If school is spread out over the year with shorter breaks, students will not forget as much. Source B says the same thing, because the principal in Riverbend says teachers spend less time reviewing after breaks, since "the review after a break takes a week." This shows that year-round schools are helping students learn more because teachers do not have to waste time reteaching things the students forgot. In Riverbend, reading scores for low-income third graders went up four points, which means the change is especially good for students who need help.

Also, the data in Source D shows that year-round calendars help students. The balanced calendar districts had math proficiency go up 2.4 points compared to 1.1 for traditional calendars, and the extended-year districts went up the most at 4.7. Reading went up too. This shows that more school time leads to better results, so year-round school is a good way to help students. The table also shows that low-income students gained the most from the extended year, which is important because they are the ones who are hurt most by summer loss.

However, there are some downsides. Source C is an opinion by a camp director who says that children need summer to grow up, and that the costs fall on families who cannot afford it. Source B also says that parents have trouble finding child care and that the electric bill went up \$212,000. Source D says the costs go up by 4.1% for balanced calendars and 9.6% for extended-year calendars, and 38% of teachers report burnout in the extended year. These are real problems. But I think they are outweighed by the benefits. Schools can fix the child care problem by offering programs, and the costs are worth it if students learn more.

The cartoon in Source F makes fun of the new calendar by saying summer is cut into “bite-size servings.” But the cartoon does not show that students learn less, so it is not strong evidence against year-round school. It is only an opinion, and the board member in it is the one who looks silly, which suggests that some people dislike the change. Still, people may get used to a new calendar over time, as families in Riverbend probably will.

In conclusion, year-round school has some problems, but the benefits for student learning are greater. Districts should adopt it because it reduces summer learning loss, improves test scores, and helps low-income students the most. The costs are a small price to pay.

Scoring commentary (4/6).

Row A: 1 point. “Year-round school is a good idea for students because it prevents summer learning loss” is a clear, defensible position.

Row B: 3 points. The essay uses specific evidence from five sources (A, B, C, D, F), and its claims form a recognizable line of reasoning (learning loss is real, the calendar reduces it, the costs are outweighed). That is the work of a 3. It does not reach 4 because commentary is inconsistent: several sentences begin “This shows” and restate the evidence (“This shows that more school time leads to better results”), and the essay conflates the extended-year calendar (200 days, with more instructional time) with the balanced calendar (180 days) when it concludes that “more school time” is the cause of gains. The paragraph on downsides lists evidence and then dismisses it with unsupported assertions (“Schools can fix the child care problem by offering programs,” “the costs are worth it if students learn more”), so the weighing of costs and benefits, the heart of the argument, is not explained. The sources are also used one at a time rather than in conversation. The essay does show some explanation (for example, noting that low-income students gain most and that these are the students most hurt by summer loss), which keeps it above a 2.

Row C: 0 points. The essay does not explore tensions across sources beyond acknowledging that “there are costs,” and it dismisses counterevidence rather than complicating its own claim. The conclusion repeats the thesis. Nothing sustained elevates the argument beyond the straightforward.

SAMPLE 1C: SCORE 2 (ROW A: 1, ROW B: 1, ROW C: 0)

I think year-round school is a bad idea. Students need summer to relax and do other things.

In Source C the writer says that kids learn a lot at summer camp like how to paddle a canoe and settle arguments. She says that is important and that kids shouldn't lose that. Camp is a good experience and a lot of kids look forward to it all year. I agree with her that summer is important to kids.

Source B is about Riverbend which changed its schools to year-round. It says that the parents were not happy because they have kids in different schools with different schedules and its hard to find child care. It also says the electric bill went up by a lot. That means year-round school costs too much money and makes life harder for families.

Source A says that students forget math over the summer but it says that year-round schools only have small effects. So year-round school doesn't really work that well. The cartoon in Source F also makes fun of year-round school by saying summer is cut into pieces.

Some people say that year-round school is good because kids won't forget what they learned. But I don't think that is true because kids can read books in the summer, and if they don't that is their fault. Also teachers need a break too and they would get burned out. My own school has a long summer and I think it works fine for everybody. When I was in elementary school I went to my grandparents' house every July and I learned a lot there too, so I do not think a school calendar is the only way to learn.

In conclusion year-round school is a bad idea because it costs too much, hurts families, and takes away summer. Students should keep the traditional calendar so they can have fun and be kids.

Scoring commentary (2/6).

Row A: 1 point. "I think year-round school is a bad idea" is a position, and the sources contain support for it (Sources B and C). It is thin, but the rubric asks only for a defensible position.

Row B: 1 point. The essay refers to four sources (A, B, C, F), so it meets the threshold of two sources, but its evidence is mostly general ("the electric bill went up by a lot," "small effects") and its commentary summarizes. The statements "That means year-round school costs too much money" and "So year-round school doesn't really work that well" restate or oversimplify the sources instead of explaining how they support a line of reasoning. Source A's finding that effects are positive but small is turned into "doesn't really work," a misreading. The counterargument paragraph relies on a personal assertion ("that is their fault") that ignores Source A's evidence about unequal losses. The paragraphs are not linked, so no line of reasoning is established. Because it does not reach even "three sources with some explanation," the score stays at 1.

Row C: 0 points. No sophistication; the essay is straightforward, and the closing sentence is a generalization.

4. Question 2 (Rhetorical Analysis): Rubric, Scoring Notes, and Scored Samples

4.1 Scoring rubric (6 points)

Row A: Thesis (0–1 point)

SCORE	DESCRIPTION
0	There is no defensible thesis. The response restates the prompt, describes or summarizes the passage, names rhetorical devices without making a claim about how Lincoln uses them, or does not respond to the prompt.
1	The response responds to the prompt with a thesis that analyzes Lincoln's rhetorical choices.

Decision rules: The thesis must make a claim about the writer's choices, not merely about the passage's content. A thesis that only repeats the prompt's statement of Lincoln's message ("Lincoln uses rhetorical choices to convey his message about the causes of the war") earns no point. A thesis that identifies choices by description

rather than label ("Lincoln balances the sentences about North and South and then turns to Scripture") is as acceptable as one that uses terminology. The thesis may be more than one sentence and may appear anywhere in the response.

Row B: Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points)

SCORE	DESCRIPTION	TYPICAL RESPONSES
0	Restates the thesis, repeats provided information, or offers information irrelevant to the prompt.	Paraphrase of the prompt or a list of devices without textual evidence.
1	Evidence is mostly general. Commentary summarizes the passage or only identifies devices.	"Lincoln uses religion and repetition." Labels (ethos, pathos, logos) are offered as the analysis.
2	Evidence is some specific textual detail. Commentary explains how some of the evidence relates to the argument, but the essay does not establish a line of reasoning, or the reasoning is faulty.	Quotations are accurate, but commentary says "this shows he is humble" and stops; paragraphs list devices in sequence with no development.
3	Specific evidence supports all claims in a line of reasoning. Commentary explains how some of the evidence supports the line of reasoning and explains how at least one rhetorical choice contributes to Lincoln's message.	Clear claims tied to quoted evidence; some commentary explains function and effect for this audience; other evidence is summarized or loosely linked.
4	Specific evidence supports all claims in a line of reasoning. Commentary consistently explains how the evidence supports the line of reasoning and explains how multiple rhetorical choices contribute to Lincoln's message.	Paragraphs build on each other; each choice is tied to purpose and audience; choices are shown working together.

Decision rules: Multiple examples of the same choice (for example, three instances of parallelism) count toward the fourth point only if each instance is shown to advance the message in a distinct way. A response that explains how Lincoln's choices shape the audience's understanding is stronger than one that explains only that he "emphasizes." Errors in grammar or mechanics that interfere with communication prevent the fourth point.

Row C: Sophistication (0–1 point)

A response earns the point by demonstrating sophistication of thought or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation in any of these ways:

1. Explaining the significance or relevance of Lincoln's rhetorical choices given the rhetorical situation (for example, the audience's expectation of triumph in March 1865).

2. Explaining the purpose or function of the passage's complexities or tensions (for example, the speech's simultaneous judgment and reconciliation).
3. Explaining the relationship between Lincoln's rhetorical choices and the broader context, or between choices and each other.
4. Employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive.

What does not earn the point: Sweeping claims about history that are not part of the analysis ("Lincoln was one of the greatest presidents"); examining individual choices without relating them to one another; hinting at a tension without explaining its function; oversimplifying the passage's complexity (for example, treating the speech as simple praise of the North); ornate language that does not clarify the analysis.

4.2 Scoring notes specific to this prompt

What a defensible thesis looks like. A thesis earns Row A if it claims something about how Lincoln's choices produce his message. Examples:

- Lincoln replaces the expected language of victory with restraint, balanced syntax, and scriptural humility, so that reconciliation feels like a shared moral obligation rather than a concession.
- By moving from short, shared statements to long theological sentences and finally to a single series of commitments, Lincoln leads his audience from remembering to judging to acting.
- Lincoln assigns responsibility for the war's cause while also sharing responsibility for its cost, using parallel sentences and biblical language to hold both ideas at once.

Theses that earn no point: "Lincoln uses ethos, pathos, and logos to convey his message." "Lincoln talks about the cause of the war and the need for peace."

What strong responses might argue.

- The opening deliberately lowers expectations ("less occasion for an extended address," "no prediction . . . is ventured"). Because the audience expects triumph, the restraint builds credibility and models humility.
- Parallelism that appears balanced but is not ("one of them would make war . . . the other would accept war") allows Lincoln to hold the South responsible for starting the war without adopting a vindictive tone.
- Euphemism ("a peculiar and powerful interest") followed by concrete, bodily images ("unrequited toil," "drawn with the lash") moves the audience from comfortable abstraction to moral confrontation.
- Collective pronouns and verbs ("All dreaded it," "Both read the same Bible," "Neither anticipated") implicate the entire nation in the war and prepare for the call for mutual charity.
- Biblical allusions (Matthew 7:1, Matthew 18:7, Psalm 19:9) give Lincoln a moral authority above party and turn the war into a divine judgment on slavery that includes the North.
- The conditional, tentative syntax of the third paragraph ("If we shall suppose . . . shall we discern . . .?") invites the audience to reason with him; the rhetorical question lets them reach the conclusion themselves.
- The periodic, winding sentences of paragraph 3 contrast with the final paragraph's single sentence built on anaphora ("With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right"), which moves from judgment to action.
- The infinitives at the end ("to bind up," "to care for him who shall have borne the battle") end on concrete duties toward veterans, widows, and orphans, tying reconciliation to Northern loss as well as Southern defeat.

- The speech's complexity: Lincoln condemns slavery and holds the South accountable for beginning the war, but also says that "the prayers of both could not be answered." Strong responses explain why this tension serves his purpose.

Common traps and weaknesses.

- *Devices are not choices.* Labeling "ethos," "pathos," or "a call to action" as the choice instead of as the effect of a concrete choice (a quotation, a parallel construction) keeps Row B low.
- *Unsupported terminology.* Claiming "anaphora" or "juxtaposition" without showing it in the text.
- *Treating the speech as an essay.* Writing "the reader" instead of "the audience," or ignoring that Lincoln spoke aloud at the Capitol in March 1865.
- *Misreading the allusion.* Writing that Lincoln says God is on the Union's side. He says the opposite: "The prayers of both could not be answered."
- *Flattening the tone.* Describing the speech as only "conciliatory" ignores the severity of "every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword."
- *Summary instead of analysis.* Retelling the speech paragraph by paragraph without explaining how Lincoln's choices achieve his message.

4.3 Sample responses

SAMPLE 2A: SCORE 6 (ROW A: 1, ROW B: 4, ROW C: 1)

Four years after he pleaded with a divided country to avoid war, Abraham Lincoln stood before a crowd that was ready for a victory speech and gave it something harder: a reckoning. Lincoln withholds the language of triumph, builds sentences that distribute responsibility between the two sides, and turns to biblical diction to recast the war as a judgment that includes the North, so that his closing call for "charity for all" feels not like leniency toward the defeated but like the only response consistent with the nation's shared guilt.

The speech begins by refusing to claim anything. Lincoln says there is "less occasion for an extended address," that "little that is new could be presented," and that although the progress of the war is "reasonably satisfactory," "no prediction in regard to it is ventured." For an audience that has endured four years of casualties and can sense the end, this restraint is a purposeful choice. By declining to boast, Lincoln models the humility he will later ask of the nation, and by speaking briefly he leaves his listeners no triumphant rhetoric to lean on. He also earns credibility: a president who will not predict victory will be believed when he describes what victory means.

In the second paragraph Lincoln recalls the eve of war, and his syntax does careful work. "All dreaded it, all sought to avert it" is a pair of short, parallel clauses that draw the whole country into a single anxious moment. Then comes the sentence that assigns blame without abandoning that unity: "Both parties deprecated war, but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive, and the other would accept war rather than let it perish." The parallel structure makes the two sides appear symmetrical, but the verbs ("make" against "accept") are not. The South chose war; the North, reluctantly, answered it. By wrapping an accusation in balanced grammar, Lincoln preserves the moral distinction while avoiding the vindictive tone that would make reconciliation harder.

The third paragraph carries the speech's central argument, and here Lincoln moves from politics to theology. He first names slavery obliquely as "a peculiar and powerful interest," but he insists that "all knew that this interest was somehow the cause of the war." The euphemism lets him speak plainly before a divided audience without adding cruelty to the point. Yet he soon shifts to unmistakable concreteness: "the wealth piled by the

bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil," "every drop of blood drawn with the lash." Between these two registers, abstraction and bodily image, Lincoln moves his listeners from comfortable language to physical language, and the balanced clauses of the lash and the sword frame the war as a payment, so that Northern suffering belongs to the same account as Southern. When he observes that "Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other," he implicates his own side's piety as well as the South's. The quotation "Woe unto the world because of offenses" and the careful conditional "If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses" add to this humility. Lincoln does not declare God's will; he asks the audience to consider it, and the rhetorical question that follows ("shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes?") invites them to reach his conclusion themselves.

That conclusion gives the closing paragraph its force. After the long, winding sentences of paragraph three, the final sentence is a single sweeping series: "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right . . . let us strive on." The repeated "with" shifts the mood from judgment to duty. Notably, Lincoln does not end on forgiveness alone; he moves to infinitives of concrete obligation, "to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan." Mercy toward the South and care for Northern veterans sit in the same sentence, so charity is not a reward for the defeated but a task for everyone.

Lincoln's speech thus holds a tension it never resolves: the nation must be both judged and healed. The speech's structure is built to serve that tension. A president who announced victory would have invited celebration, and one who only blamed would have invited vengeance. Lincoln's restraint, balanced syntax, scriptural humility, and final turn to action work together to make reconciliation the one conclusion a listener who has followed him cannot refuse.

Scoring commentary (6/6).

Row A: 1 point. The thesis names specific choices (withholding triumph, balanced sentences, biblical diction) and claims what they accomplish: recasting the war as a shared judgment so that "charity for all" feels obligatory.

Row B: 4 points. Every claim is supported with specific quotations, and the essay follows the speech chronologically while building an argument: restraint creates credibility; balanced syntax allocates blame without vengeance; the shift from euphemism to bodily imagery and the biblical conditional create shared guilt; the final series turns judgment into duty. Commentary is consistent and goes beyond naming devices. For example, the essay observes that the parallel structure "appears symmetrical" but the verbs "make" and "accept" are not, which explains how the sentence works for this audience. Multiple choices (restraint, syntax, euphemism and concrete image, allusion, conditional syntax, anaphora, infinitives) are each tied to Lincoln's message and are shown working together.

Row C: 1 point. The essay explains the function of the speech's central tension (judgment and healing) and ties its choices to the rhetorical situation (an audience expecting triumph in March 1865). It also relates choices to one another, noting how restraint, shared guilt, and the final series build toward the closing obligation. The sophistication is sustained and is part of the argument.

SAMPLE 2B: SCORE 4 (ROW A: 1, ROW B: 3, ROW C: 0)

In his Second Inaugural Address, Abraham Lincoln uses a humble tone, religious allusions, and repetition to convey his message that both the North and the South share responsibility for the Civil War and that the nation must now move toward peace.

Lincoln starts his speech with a humble tone. He says there is “less occasion for an extended address” and that “little that is new could be presented.” This makes him seem modest, and it shows he is not going to brag about winning the war even though the Union is winning. His audience is people at the Capitol who are tired of four years of war, so Lincoln’s humble tone helps him connect with them and makes them trust him.

Next, Lincoln explains the causes of the war. He says “all dreaded it, all sought to avert it,” which shows that everyone wanted to avoid war. Then he says “Both parties deprecated war, but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive, and the other would accept war rather than let it perish.” This sentence uses parallel structure to compare the North and South. It shows that the South started the war but the North accepted it. Lincoln also says slavery was “somehow the cause of the war,” which is the first time he says directly what the war was about. This helps the audience understand the real reason for the war.

Lincoln also uses religious allusions to show that both sides share blame. He says “Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other.” He quotes the Bible, “Woe unto the world because of offenses,” and says that God may have given the war as punishment for slavery. This appeals to the audience’s religion because many people in 1865 were religious. It makes them think that the war was bigger than just North and South, and that everybody needs to be forgiven.

Finally, in the last paragraph Lincoln uses repetition of “with” in “With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right.” This repetition emphasizes his message of peace and makes the end of the speech memorable. He ends by asking the audience “to bind up the nation’s wounds” and “care for him who shall have borne the battle,” which gives them a goal to work toward after the war. Lincoln wants the country to put aside its anger and focus on rebuilding.

In conclusion, Lincoln uses humility, parallelism, religious allusion, and repetition to convey his message. These choices help the audience see that the war was a shared responsibility and that the country must be reunited with peace and charity. They make the speech powerful because they remind people that the war was not only about winning and losing but about what kind of nation would come after it, and Lincoln wanted that nation to be one without hatred.

Scoring commentary (4/6).

Row A: 1 point. The thesis names three choices (humble tone, religious allusion, repetition) and links them to Lincoln’s message about shared responsibility and peace. It is a claim about rhetorical choices, though general.

Row B: 3 points. Evidence is specific (accurate quotations from each paragraph), and the essay follows the speech in order, so claims are supported. Commentary explains how at least one choice contributes to the message: the observation that the parallel structure “shows that the South started the war but the North accepted it” explains the function of the verbs, and the connection of religious allusion to a wider-than-sectional view of the war is a genuine point. It does not reach 4 because the commentary is uneven. Several passages summarize (“This shows that everyone wanted to avoid war”), the claim that the audience was “religious” is a generalization rather than an analysis of how Scripture shapes the audience’s view of slavery, and the repetition paragraph says only that the repetition “emphasizes” peace and is “memorable.” The essay also treats the choices one at a time, with limited explanation of how they work together.

Row C: 0 points. The essay does not explain the complexity of the speech (judgment and reconciliation held together) or the significance of its choices for an audience expecting a victory speech. The conclusion repeats the thesis.

SAMPLE 2C: SCORE 2 (ROW A: 1, ROW B: 1, ROW C: 0)

In his speech, Abraham Lincoln uses religion, emotional language, and repetition to convince the audience to stop fighting and make peace.

Lincoln uses a lot of religion in his speech. He talks about God and the Bible many times. He says “Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God.” This is pathos because it makes people feel emotional about God. Lincoln wants the audience to feel guilty about the war so they will want it to end. He also says that God might want the war to continue until slavery is paid for, and this shows that the war is about slavery.

Lincoln also uses emotional language. He talks about the slaves and says “every drop of blood drawn with the lash.” This makes the reader feel sad for the slaves. Lincoln wants the reader to know how bad slavery was so they will understand why the war happened. He also says “the nation’s wounds” to make people feel the country is hurt and needs to heal. This is a metaphor.

Another thing he uses is repetition. In the last paragraph he says “With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right.” This repeats the word “with” three times. The repetition makes the speech sound better and helps the audience remember it. It also shows that Lincoln wants peace.

The speech is also logical, which is logos. Lincoln explains that four years ago everyone wanted to avoid war but it happened anyway. He says “the war came.” This shows that he is giving reasons for the war so people will believe him.

Overall, Lincoln uses religion, emotion, and repetition to get his point across. The audience would be convinced by his speech because he is a very good speaker. It shows that Lincoln wanted people to stop fighting and have peace. Peace is important to everyone, and many people in the audience probably wanted the war to be over, so the speech was a good way to give them hope. Lincoln is a famous president and is known for being a good leader.

Scoring commentary (2/6).

Row A: 1 point. The thesis makes a claim about choices (religion, emotional language, repetition) and a purpose. The purpose is imprecise, since Lincoln was not urging the Union to stop fighting, but the claim about the choices is defensible, and the rhetorical situation is not a condition for Row A.

Row B: 1 point. Quotations appear, but the commentary identifies devices and labels appeals (“This is pathos,” “which is logos”) without explaining how the specific language works for this audience. The statement that Lincoln “wants the audience to feel guilty” is asserted, not shown. The essay refers to the “reader” rather than the audience of a spoken address, and it misses the shared nature of responsibility in “Both read the same Bible.” Most of the sentences summarize or repeat the quotation (“It also shows that Lincoln wants peace”). No line of reasoning is established, since the paragraphs could be reordered without change.

Row C: 0 points. The essay ends with a generalization about Lincoln’s reputation, which is not part of the argument, and it does not consider the rhetorical situation.

5. Question 3 (Argument): Rubric, Scoring Notes, and Scored Samples

5.1 Scoring rubric (6 points)

Row A: Thesis (0–1 point)

SCORE	DESCRIPTION
0	There is no defensible thesis. The response restates the prompt, announces that “there are many sides,” offers a position only by inference, or does not respond to the prompt.
1	The response responds to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible position on the extent to which the claim that the unexamined life is not worth living is valid.

Decision rules: A defensible position may agree, disagree, or qualify the claim. The thesis may be one or more sentences and may appear anywhere in the response. Because Question 3 has no sources, a thesis need not be supported by provided material; it must take a position that a reasonable person could argue. A thesis that only repeats the prompt (“The unexamined life is or is not worth living, depending on the person”) earns no point. The point is earned even if the body of the essay does not support the thesis.

Row B: Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points)

SCORE	DESCRIPTION	TYPICAL RESPONSES
0	Restates the thesis, repeats the prompt, or offers evidence irrelevant to the argument.	Generalizations with no examples.
1	Evidence is mostly general. Commentary summarizes the evidence or restates the claim.	“Many people reflect on their lives and are happier.” One-sentence examples; “This shows that reflection is good.”
2	Evidence is some specific. Commentary explains how some evidence relates to the argument, but no line of reasoning is established, or the reasoning is faulty.	Three examples that illustrate the same point without developing it; examples that are specific but whose relevance to “worth” is not explained.
3	Evidence is specific and supports all claims in a line of reasoning. Commentary explains how some of the evidence supports the line of reasoning.	Well-developed paragraphs, but some commentary is general; examples may be only partly analyzed.

SCORE	DESCRIPTION	TYPICAL RESPONSES
4	Evidence is specific and supports all claims in a line of reasoning. Commentary consistently explains how the evidence supports the line of reasoning.	Each example is analyzed, and the argument builds from paragraph to paragraph; the writer defines key terms and uses counterevidence to refine the thesis.

Decision rules: Personal anecdotes earn credit when they explain specific impact and context. Historical and literary examples earn credit when the writer explains the causal or logical relationship to the claim. Examples that illustrate the same point in parallel (three paragraphs each showing “reflection is helpful”) typically earn a 2 or 3 because they do not develop a line of reasoning. Errors in grammar or mechanics that interfere with communication prevent the fourth point.

Row C: Sophistication (0–1 point)

A response earns the point by demonstrating sophistication of thought or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation in any of four ways:

1. Crafting a nuanced argument by consistently identifying and exploring complexities or tensions (for example, by distinguishing kinds of examination, or by examining what “worth” means).
2. Articulating the implications or limitations of an argument by situating it within a broader context (historical, ethical, or social).
3. Making rhetorical choices that strengthen the force and impact of the argument.
4. Employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive.

What does not earn the point: A token counterargument that is dismissed in a sentence; sweeping generalizations offered as context (“Since the beginning of time, humans have asked questions”); a single appeal to complexity (“It depends on the person”) that is not explored; ornate language that does not strengthen the argument.

5.2 Scoring notes specific to this prompt

What a defensible thesis looks like. Any position on the extent to which the claim is valid earns the point if it is clear. Examples:

- The claim is largely valid: a life without reflection is lived by habit, so it cannot be fully one’s own, though examination need not be formal philosophy.
- The claim is partly valid: reflection gives a life direction, but a life of care and action can be worth living without much explicit reflection, so “not worth living” is too strong.
- The claim is invalid: worth is measured by what a person does for others, and an endless search for self-understanding can paralyze.
- Examination and action are partners, not opposites: examination without action is empty, and action without examination is blind.

What strong responses might argue.

- Define “examined” and “worth.” Does examination mean formal philosophy, or the ordinary habit of asking whether one’s conduct matches one’s values? Is “worth” measured from within (meaning, integrity) or from outside (contribution, happiness)?

- Socrates's own life as evidence that examination and action are not opposites (he questioned in the marketplace, served as a soldier, and accepted death rather than stop questioning). The claim was made in a rhetorical situation: a defense against a jury demanding silence or exile.
- Benjamin Franklin's practice of tracking his conduct against thirteen virtues as an example of examination built into a busy life.
- Thoreau's "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately" as an argument for examination that transforms action.
- Hamlet as a case of reflection that paralyzes, or Dorothea Brooke and similar figures who find value through action. The refinement: reflection must return to action.
- Frederick Douglass on literacy as "a curse rather than a blessing" shows that examination can hurt, which complicates the assumption that examination makes life more pleasant.
- Everyday evidence: the caregiver, nurse, teacher, or parent who reflects without formal language. This supports the argument that examination is more common and more varied than the claim suggests.
- Limits: the claim can sound elitist if examination requires leisure; the response should consider whether the capacity to examine one's life depends on conditions (literacy, time, safety).
- Counterexamples: people who act on strong inherited convictions and whose lives are plainly worthwhile; a strong response considers whether their lives are truly "unexamined" or whether their convictions were tested by experience.

Common traps and weaknesses.

- *Binary framing.* Casting the question as "thinkers versus doers" and picking a side without noting that many lives combine both.
- *Parallel examples.* Three paragraphs that each say "reflection is helpful" with a different example.
- *Appeal to authority.* "Socrates was smart, so he must be right" is not reasoning.
- *Undefined terms.* Using "examined" and "worth" without saying what they mean.
- *Anecdote without commentary.* A story about a game or class followed by "This shows I learned" without connecting it to the claim about worth.
- *Token counterargument.* A paragraph that begins "Some people disagree" and dismisses the objection in a sentence.
- *Summary of Socrates's trial.* Retelling the historical event instead of using it as evidence.

5.3 Sample responses

SAMPLE 3A: SCORE 6 (ROW A: 1, ROW B: 4, ROW C: 1)

Socrates did not say that the unexamined life is regrettable or incomplete. He said it is "not worth living," and the severity of that verdict is exactly what tempts us to reject it. Everyone knows someone who never read a word of philosophy and lived with unmistakable worth. But the claim is more defensible than it first appears once we ask what examination means. I will argue that Socrates is largely right: a life need not be a philosopher's life to be worth living, but it must be one in which a person asks, again and again, whether what she does matches what she values, because without that question action becomes habit, and habit, however busy, is something that happens to a person rather than something she lives.

The strongest evidence that examination is a practice rather than a luxury comes from people who combined it with work. Benjamin Franklin, one of the busiest men in colonial Philadelphia, kept a small notebook in which he marked each day's failures against thirteen virtues. His method was almost comically modest, yet it shows what examination looks like in the life of a doer: a recurring, concrete question about conduct. Socrates himself belongs in this category. He did not retreat from Athens to think; he cross-examined shoemakers and generals in the marketplace, served as a soldier, and accepted death rather than abandon his questioning. If examination and action were opposites, the man who made this claim would be a refutation of it. He is instead a demonstration that the examined life is lived in public, in the middle of things.

The best objection is that reflection can paralyze, and literature has a famous case. Hamlet examines his own motives so thoroughly that months pass while the action he knows he must take remains undone. If the examined life means endless scrutiny, then it is not only unnecessary but dangerous, and the person who acts without second thoughts may accomplish more than the one who reflects. This is a genuine limit on Socrates's claim, but it supports a refinement rather than a refutation. Hamlet's trouble is that his examination never reaches a conclusion that can govern conduct. Franklin's does: each evening's question produces a resolution for the next morning. The claim, rightly understood, is not that more reflection is always better but that a life needs reflection that returns to action. The thinker who never acts and the actor who never thinks fail by the same standard, because neither has connected what he values to what he does.

Consider a hospital night nurse I came to know during my mother's illness, a woman who would say she has no time to ponder the meaning of her life. Her days are made of actions: turning patients, calming a frightened family, noticing what a monitor will not show. A skeptic would say that her life is worth living precisely because it is so full of acts and so empty of philosophy. But watch what she does when a shift goes badly. She replays it on the drive home, asks herself what she missed, and changes how she checks on the next patient. That is examination, unlabeled and unglamorous. Her goodness is not an accident of temperament; it is a standard she keeps applying to herself. What the claim leaves out is the vocabulary of reflection, not the practice, and the practice is common among people who would never call themselves thinkers.

Still, I would not pretend the claim is without cost. Examination can hurt. Frederick Douglass recalled that learning to read, his first step toward understanding his own condition, felt at times like "a curse rather than a blessing," because it showed him the full weight of what had been done to him. Socrates's phrase risks sounding as if the examined life is a happier one; Douglass suggests it is more often a heavier one, worth bearing because it makes freedom thinkable. Worth, in other words, is not the same as comfort. A person who never looks closely may be content, but contentment is not the standard the claim sets.

So the unexamined life may not be worthless to the people it serves, but it is incomplete for the person living it, and "worth living" is a judgment made from within. Socrates is right that the one who never asks what she is doing and why is only half present at her own life.

Scoring commentary (6/6).

Row A: 1 point. The thesis takes a clear, qualified position (Socrates is largely right; examination need not be philosophy, but it must connect values to action) and defines the key term.

Row B: 4 points. The evidence is specific and varied (Franklin's virtue notebook, Socrates's career, Hamlet, the nurse, Douglass), and the paragraphs build a line of reasoning: examination is a practice in the lives of doers; the paralysis objection refines rather than refutes the claim; ordinary people examine without the vocabulary; examination has costs that affect what "worth" means. Commentary is consistent. For example, the Hamlet paragraph explains why the example matters ("Hamlet's trouble is that his examination never reaches a

conclusion that can govern conduct. Franklin's does"), and the nurse paragraph interprets the anecdote ("That is examination, unlabeled and unglamorous"). The essay does not just provide examples; it uses each to move the argument forward.

Row C: 1 point. The essay explores complexities: it distinguishes examination as practice from philosophy as vocabulary, separates worth from comfort, and uses the Douglass example to complicate Socrates's implied promise that examination makes life better. It treats the counterargument (Hamlet) as a way to refine the position, not as a token objection, and the sophistication is sustained throughout.

SAMPLE 3B: SCORE 4 (ROW A: 1, ROW B: 3, ROW C: 0)

The statement that the unexamined life is not worth living is mostly true, because people who never think about their lives cannot learn from their mistakes or find real purpose. While some people live happily without reflecting, a life without examination is missing the things that make life meaningful.

First, examining your life helps you learn from your mistakes. When I played on my school's soccer team, our coach made us watch film of every game, including the ones we lost. At first I hated it, but I realized that I kept making the same mistake of drifting out of position when the other team had the ball. After seeing it on film I fixed it, and I became a better player. If I had never examined my games, I would have kept making the same mistake. This shows that examining your actions makes you improve, and a life where you never improve is not as worth living.

Second, examination gives life a purpose. Socrates said the unexamined life is not worth living at his trial, where he refused to stop asking questions even though it cost him his life. He believed that people should think about how they live and what is good. Because Socrates examined his life, he knew what he valued and was willing to die for it. This shows that examination gives people purpose, because when you know your values you can make choices that match them. Someone who never examines their life could end up doing a job they hate just because everyone expects them to. It is easy to follow the crowd, and examination is what lets a person decide for himself.

However, some people might argue that the unexamined life can be worth living. A farmer who works hard every day and takes care of his family might never think deeply about his life, but his life still seems worth living. This is a good point, because it shows that you do not have to be a philosopher to have a good life. But even the farmer probably examines his life in small ways, like thinking about whether he is providing for his family or whether the crops did well this year. So he is still examining his life, just not in a formal way.

In conclusion, the unexamined life is not worth living because examination helps us learn from our mistakes and gives us purpose. Even people who do not think about it in a formal way still examine their lives in small ways. Everyone should take time to reflect on their lives so that they can be happy and make the right choices in the future. Even a few minutes a week spent thinking about what matters can keep a person from drifting through life without noticing.

Scoring commentary (4/6).

Row A: 1 point. The thesis takes a defensible, qualified position and previews two reasons (learning from mistakes, finding purpose).

Row B: 3 points. The evidence is specific (the soccer film sessions, Socrates at his trial, the farmer), and the paragraphs form a line of reasoning from learning to purpose to a counterargument. Commentary explains some of the evidence: the soccer example is linked to improvement and then to the claim about worth, and the sentence "when you know your values you can make choices that match them" explains how Socrates's example

supports the claim about purpose. It does not earn the fourth point because much commentary restates the evidence ("This shows that examining your actions makes you improve"), the step from "improve" to "worth living" is asserted rather than explained, and the former paragraph concedes the counterexample and then dismisses it with a guess ("probably examines his life in small ways") without evidence. The essay therefore does not consistently explain how the evidence supports the line of reasoning.

Row C: 0 points. The counterargument is acknowledged but resolved quickly; the essay does not explore what "examined" or "worth" means, nor does it consider limits or implications. The conclusion repeats the thesis and ends with advice.

SAMPLE 3C: SCORE 2 (ROW A: 1, ROW B: 1, ROW C: 0)

I agree with Socrates that the unexamined life is not worth living, because people who never think about their lives end up wasting them.

First, people should think about their lives because they only have one life. If you do not think about your life you could waste it. For example, many people spend their whole lives working at jobs they do not like and never ask themselves if they are happy. That is a waste and shows that the unexamined life is not worth living. Everyone should think about what they want to do.

Also, Socrates was a famous philosopher in Greece and he said that the unexamined life is not worth living. He was very smart and many people still read his books today. Because he was so smart we should listen to what he says. He was put on trial and had to drink poison, but he did not give up his ideas. That shows he was brave.

Some people say that it is better to act than to think about things all the time. I think that this is wrong because if you just act without thinking you could make mistakes. For example, if you drive without looking you could get in an accident. So you should think before you act.

In conclusion, the unexamined life is not worth living because people should think about their lives. Life is short and we need to make the most of it. If everyone examined their lives the world would be a better place. This is why I agree with Socrates, and I think everyone else should too. People today are very busy and do not think enough about what is important, and that is a problem in our world. I think schools should teach students to think about their lives, and I think that more people would be happy if they did.

Scoring commentary (2/6).

Row A: 1 point. The thesis takes a position (agreement with Socrates) and gives a reason (people waste their lives if they do not reflect). It is simple but defensible.

Row B: 1 point. The evidence is general ("many people spend their whole lives working at jobs they do not like") or irrelevant to the claim about worth (Socrates's fame, the driving example). Commentary summarizes or restates ("That is a waste and shows that the unexamined life is not worth living"). The reasoning "Because he was so smart we should listen to what he says" is an appeal to authority, and "if you drive without looking" confuses careful attention with examining one's life. The counterargument about action is misunderstood and dismissed. No line of reasoning is established.

Row C: 0 points. No sophistication; the conclusion offers sweeping generalizations ("the world would be a better place," "people today are very busy").

6. How to Score Yourself

Step 1: Score Section I. Count your correct answers (no penalty for wrong answers). This is your **MCQ raw score** out of 45.

Step 2: Score each essay. Using the rubrics and the sample essays, score each essay on Row A (0–1), Row B (0–4), and Row C (0–1). Compare your essay to the samples of similar length and quality. Ask a teacher or peer to score at least one essay if you can, because writers tend to overrate their own work. Add the three essay scores to find your **essay total** out of 18.

Step 3: Compute an estimated composite. Use this approximate formula:

$$\text{Composite (out of 150)} \approx (\text{MCQ raw} \times 1.5) + (\text{essay total} \times 4.58)$$

The multiple-choice section contributes up to 67.5 points and the free-response section up to 82.5 points.

Step 4: Convert to an estimated AP score. These bands are approximate only. The College Board does not publish its conversion, and it changes from year to year.

ESTIMATED COMPOSITE (OF 150)	APPROXIMATE AP SCORE
105 and above	5
87–104	4
65–86	3
45–64	2
Below 45	1

Example. A student who answers 33 questions correctly and earns essay scores of 4, 3, and 4 (total 11) has a composite of about $(33 \times 1.5) + (11 \times 4.58) = 49.5 + 50.4 \approx 100$, which falls in the upper range of a 4. A student with 38 correct and essay scores of 5, 4, 5 (total 14) has a composite of about $57 + 64.1 \approx 121$, in the range of a 5.

Reading your results.

- *Section I by skill category.* Use the answer-key table to tally misses by skill code. Reading codes (1, 3, 5, 7) and writing codes (2, 4, 6, 8) usually need different practice. If you miss several 5.x items, practice describing what each paragraph *does* in the argument. If you miss several 8.x items, practice choosing the revision that satisfies both the stated goal and the register of the draft.
- *Essays by row.* If you lose Row A, check that your thesis makes a claim about the writer's choices (Question 2) or takes a position (Questions 1 and 3). If you lose Row B, check that each piece of evidence is followed by commentary that says something the evidence does not. If you lose Row C, practice explaining the function of a tension in the passage or the sources.
- *Pacing.* If you did not finish a section on time, note where you slowed down. The reading sets are meant to take about 12 minutes each.

END OF ANSWER KEY

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