



SCHOLAR COACH, INC.

AP ENGLISH LANGUAGE · FREE RESOURCE

AP English Language and Composition — Practice Exam 5: Answer Key, Explanations & Sample Essays

This file accompanies* Practice Exam 5. *It contains the answer key and skill codes for Section I, a full explanation of every multiple-choice question, and, for each free-response question, a rubric, scoring notes, and scored sample essays at the 6-, 4-, and 2-point levels. All passages, sources, and student drafts in the exam were written for this practice exam; the 1840s essay, the 1920s essay, and the 1890s commencement address are original compositions and are not the work of any real historical author.

Part 1: Section I Answer Key

Difficulty: E = easy, M = medium, H = hard. Skill codes follow the AP English Language framework (Reading skill categories 1, 3, 5, 7; Writing skill categories 2, 4, 6, 8).

Q#	ANSWER	SKILL	PASSAGE	DIFFICULTY
1	C	3.B	1 (1840s essay)	M
2	A	7.A	1	M
3	D	3.A	1	E
4	B	3.C	1	M
5	D	5.B	1	M
6	B	7.A	1	M
7	A	1.B	1	E
8	C	5.C	1	M
9	B	5.A	1	H

Q#	ANSWER	SKILL	PASSAGE	DIFFICULTY
10	D	7.B	1	H
11	A	1.A	1	M
12	B	7.A	1	H
13	B	1.A	2 (1920s radio essay)	E
14	D	7.A	2	M
15	C	5.B	2	M
16	A	3.A	2	M
17	B	7.B	2	H
18	C	5.C	2	E
19	D	3.A	2	M
20	A	3.C	2	H
21	C	1.B	2	M
22	B	5.A	2	H
23	D	1.A	2	M
24	A	3.B	2	E
25	C	2.A	3 (space funding draft)	E
26	D	4.B	3	M
27	A	8.B	3	M
28	C	4.A	3	M
29	B	6.B	3	E
30	D	8.A	3	M
31	C	6.A	3	H
32	A	2.B	3	H
33	B	4.C	4 (dress code draft)	H
34	A	8.A	4	E
35	D	6.B	4	E
36	C	8.B	4	M
37	C	6.A	4	H
38	B	2.B	4	M

Q#	ANSWER	SKILL	PASSAGE	DIFFICULTY
39	D	4.A	4	E
40	A	2.A	4	M
41	D	2.B	5 (bilingual education draft)	M
42	B	4.C	5	H
43	D	6.B	5	M
44	A	4.A	5	E
45	C	8.B	5	M

Letter distribution: A = 11, B = 11, C = 11, D = 12. **Difficulty distribution:** E = 11, M = 23, H = 11. **Skill distribution:** 1.A/1.B = 5; 2.A/2.B = 5; 3.A–3.C = 7; 4.A–4.C = 6; 5.A–5.C = 6; 6.A–6.C = 5; 7.A–7.C = 6; 8.A–8.C = 5.

Part 2: Explanations for Section I

Passage 1 (Questions 1–12)

1. Answer: C. [Skill 3.B – identify the overarching thesis.] The thesis is the claim the whole essay serves: that people should trust their own perceptions (“Every soul comes into the world carrying a sealed letter addressed to itself alone”), stop seeking approval (“we stop asking,” line 46), and accept the possible cost of disapproval (“a company worth any solitude,” lines 54–55). Choice C captures all three parts. (A) is the opposite of the writer’s position; he describes custom as a force that makes new thought “feel unwelcome” (lines 20–21), not as a protection. (B) is an overreach: the writer states that private judgment “errs daily” (line 12), so he cannot be claiming it is infallible. (D) misreads the fifth paragraph, which says that habitual contradiction makes a person “as much his neighbor’s slave” (lines 39–40) as habitual agreement does.

2. Answer: A. [Skill 7.A – how a comparison contributes to the tone and meaning.] The coat image has two halves: it “may cover me,” so the borrowed opinion works well enough on the surface, “but it will never fit,” so the wearer is “forever tugging at the sleeves” (lines 7–8). That is exactly the claim in A. (B) names a device (clothing imagery) but invents an effect; the passage says nothing about fashion. (C) wrongly turns a figure of speech into an attitude about clothing. (D) overstates: the writer objects to adopting thoughts without examining them, not to anyone considering a thought another person has had.

3. Answer: D. [Skill 3.A – explain how evidence or an example supports a claim.] The traveler stumbles once and then decides to walk “with his eyes shut” (lines 14–15). The image is absurd on purpose; it shows that abandoning all private judgment because it occasionally errs is a disproportionate response. (A) uses the word “noon” but ignores the point of the analogy. (B) is the reverse of the writer’s reasoning, since the traveler’s resolve to blind himself is presented as foolish. (C) is a reasonable general lesson (“be more careful”) but not what this image says; the traveler does not become more careful, he becomes blind.

4. Answer: B. [Skill 3.C – explain how a claim is qualified through concession.] “Let no one suppose that I set up the private judgment as a tribunal that cannot err. It errs daily” is a concession. The next sentence clarifies the actual claim: it is “the only tribunal to which I have access” (line 12). So the writer concedes fallibility while

redirecting the argument to necessity. (A) is not supported; the essay applies self-trust broadly. (C) has the wrong target: the concession addresses a possible misreading of his claim, not an accusation of arrogance. (D) is wrong because the third paragraph does not refute a counterexample; it explains how custom operates.

5. Answer: D. [Skill 5.B – explain how a paragraph functions within the organization of the text.] Having defended private judgment in paragraph 2, the writer asks in paragraph 3 why people nevertheless give it up. His answer is that custom “does not argue; it assumes” and makes dissent feel unwelcome, and people mistake the resulting fear for modesty. That is the “social mechanism” in D. (A) is wrong because paragraph 3 offers no historical evidence. (B) misreads the young man at the table, who is a cautionary example, not a model of virtue. (C) misplaces the objection: the objection appears at the start of paragraph 4 (“I am aware of the objection,” line 29), not in paragraph 3.

6. Answer: B. [Skill 7.A – how word choice and figures contribute to meaning.] “Fear wearing modesty’s bonnet” personifies fear as someone dressed in a respectable costume. The line follows “It is not modesty”: the apparent virtue is really cowardice in disguise. (A) is wrong because the writer is not excusing the young man; he says the young man “is calculating the price of his dinner” (lines 24–25). (C) reverses the sense; the writer treats fear as unadmirable. (D) overgeneralizes a claim about one counterfeit virtue into a claim about all virtues.

7. Answer: A. [Skill 1.B – explain how a writer demonstrates understanding of an audience’s beliefs and concerns.] The writer anticipates that listeners will fear “as many creeds as citizens” and that “the commonwealth will dissolve into a quarrel of private lanterns” (lines 30–31). He assumes his audience cares about communal order, and the paragraph answers that concern. (B) is not supported; “I am aware of the objection” is courteous, not impatient. (C) is contradicted by the fact that he stops to answer an objection. (D) misreads the sentence, which treats the objection as “grave” only if its premise were true.

8. Answer: C. [Skill 5.C – recognize methods of development.] The paragraph rests on an extended analogy: one sun enters two windows, one with a green curtain and one with a red, and “two honest minds” consulting “the same sun” reach “the same noon.” The analogy argues that independent observers of the same source converge. (A) names narration, which does not appear. (B) misidentifies the paragraph as tracing a causal chain; the writer denies the effect (disorder) rather than tracing it. (D) names a comparison of two societies, but the paragraph compares nothing of the kind.

9. Answer: B. [Skill 5.A – describe the line of reasoning and how a paragraph advances it.] Paragraph 4 answers the charge that self-trust produces disorder. Paragraph 5 opens “Nor do I counsel a sullen singularity,” blocking a second misreading, that self-trust means contradicting others for its own sake. Both paragraphs defend the thesis against misinterpretation, one from the side of social order and the other from the side of contrariness. (A) is wrong because nothing in paragraph 5 retracts paragraph 4. (C) is wrong because the writer introduces no unanswerable objection. (D) is wrong because paragraph 5 contains no historical examples and does not return to the sun analogy.

10. Answer: D. [Skill 7.B – how sentence structure shows relationships between ideas.] The first sentence negates (“is not a posture to be struck”), and the second affirms in parallel (“It is a consequence to be accepted”). The structure redefines nonconformity: it follows from honest perception and is not a goal in itself, which fits the next sentence about sometimes standing in “the majority” and sometimes “alone.” (A) is wrong because both sentences are short. (B) is wrong because there are no stacked subordinate clauses. (C) is wrong because neither sentence is a question.

11. Answer: A. [Skill 1.A – identify the exigence of a text.] The passage opens with “most of us spend our years handing it about the neighborhood, begging others to read it for us,” and ends with a plea to “stop asking.” The occasion for the essay is the habit of seeking approval before forming a view. (B) invents a religious controversy; the word “creeds” appears only inside an objection. (C) is unsupported; education is not discussed. (D) is unsupported; the essay’s dissenters face the disapproval of neighbors (“He will be called obstinate”), not government persecution.

12. Answer: B. [Skill 7.A – identify tone.] The final paragraph is earnest in its claim that a self-possessed mind is “a company worth any solitude.” It is also wry: “He will be called obstinate, and perhaps he will be obstinate” concedes the criticism with a smile, and “the world . . . will go on hiring its opinions and lending them out at interest” is dry humor. (A) misses the humor. (C) pairs a hostile tone (“indignant,” “sardonic”) with a paragraph that is gentle and encouraging. (D) fails because the paragraph is personal and exhortative (“What, then, is asked of us?”), not detached.

Passage 2 (Questions 13–24)

13. Answer: B. [Skill 1.A – identify the components of the rhetorical situation, including the purpose of an opening.] The writer closes the anecdote by saying the schoolmaster’s remark “contains, I think, both the promise of the new invention and the difficulty” (lines 10–11). The story is therefore a concrete way into a two-sided assessment: paragraphs 2 and 3 will take up the promise and the difficulty in turn. (A) is unsupported; no comparison with city dwellers is made. (C) is wrong because the writer treats the schoolmaster with affection, not criticism. (D) is wrong because the writer’s credentials as a technical expert are never mentioned; he is a commentator on civic life.

14. Answer: D. [Skill 7.A – how a comparison contributes to meaning.] A horse seen “in harness” is seen at work, not only as it looks standing still. By comparing the public to a judge of horses, the writer suggests that hearing a President speak, “his hesitations, even his breathing,” gives better evidence than “report” (line 21). (A) reverses the point, since the writer says the new evidence makes the public “harder to flatter.” (B) misreads “harness” as a statement about managing presidents. (C) contradicts the sentence, which says that voters judging by direct evidence are more discerning.

15. Answer: C. [Skill 5.B – explain the relationship between paragraphs.] Paragraph 2 calls radio “the town meeting enlarged to the dimensions of a continent.” Paragraph 3 begins “But the resemblance is partly a flattery” and points out what the comparison omits: the town-meeting participant “was obliged to rise and answer.” Paragraph 3 therefore complicates paragraph 2’s comparison without rejecting radio’s promise. (A) is wrong because paragraph 3 offers no statistics. (B) overstates; the writer says the resemblance is “partly” flattery and goes on to grant the promise again in the conclusion. (D) misreads the town meeting, which is used for comparison, not for history.

16. Answer: A. [Skill 3.A – explain how evidence supports a claim.] The writer cites the town meeting to show what deliberation requires: a speaker who “had to meet a neighbor’s eye” and a listener “obliged to rise and answer.” The evidence supports the claim that listening alone is not deliberating (line 30). (B) borrows the phrase “unsparing editor” but misreads it as a ranking of neighbors against newspaper editors. (C) is not argued; efficiency is never discussed. (D) imports a comparison of honesty that the passage does not make.

17. Answer: B. [Skill 7.B – how sentence structure shows relationships between ideas.] “We have multiplied the ear without enlarging the tongue” sets two parallel noun phrases (“the ear” and “the tongue”) against each other with a verb pair (“multiplied” and “enlarging”). The balanced structure compresses the paragraph’s argument: more people receive speech, but no more people answer it. (A) is wrong because the sentence is short and its main point is not withheld. (C) is wrong because it has no dependent clauses. (D) misidentifies the tone; the sentence is not mock-heroic, and its word order is not inverted.

18. Answer: C. [Skill 5.C – recognize methods of development.] The paragraph moves from “Every village once had its own habits of speech” to “The same dance orchestra is now audible, at the same hour, in Maine and in Oregon.” The development is contrast between a variety that has been lost and the uniformity that replaces it. (A) overreads the sentence about the air being “let out by the hour”; the paragraph does not trace advertising as the cause of the decline of any music. (B) is wrong because there is no narrative of one day’s schedule. (D) is wrong because the writer does not define terms; he characterizes them.

19. Answer: D. [Skill 3.A – identify the claim a piece of evidence supports.] “The same dance orchestra . . . the same jokes, the same hymns, the same cheerful gentleman advising the same breakfast food” is a list of identical things heard everywhere, supporting the claim in the next sentence that “Variety is being retired in favor of what is merely widespread.” (A) overreaches; the writer says he does not charge advertisers with villainy. (B) is not claimed anywhere. (C) is unsupported; the writer does not say anything about the suitability of musical forms for broadcast.

20. Answer: A. [Skill 3.C – explain how claims are qualified.] The writer concedes that the advertiser is not a villain, but pivots with “I charge him with a very natural desire to be agreeable,” then labels the result “a stupefying drug.” The concession keeps the criticism but changes its target from motive to effect. (B) is wrong because the objection to selling air time is maintained. (C) misreads the sentences; the responsibility remains with the advertiser’s practice. (D) is wrong because the writer is not accepting a counterargument but denying a stronger charge than he wants to make.

21. Answer: C. [Skill 1.B – explain how a writer anticipates the audience.] By listing earlier technologies that were met with “prophecy of ruin” that “none of these things quite occurred,” the writer assumes that readers know the earlier fears and may suspect today’s alarm is another example. The paragraph, which begins “Yet I should be ashamed to end as a mourner,” shows him taking account of readers who are tired of gloom. (A) is unsupported; the list is not nostalgic. (B) is the reverse of the assumption, since the writer is arguing that such beliefs have been mistaken. (D) is unsupported; radio’s novelty is not in question.

22. Answer: B. [Skill 5.A – describe the line of reasoning.] The sequence is: promise (paragraph 2), first reservation about participation (paragraph 3), second reservation about uniformity and commercialism (paragraph 4), historical perspective that tempers both (paragraph 5), and the deciding factor, listeners’ conduct (paragraph 6). (A) oversimplifies; the conclusion does not praise radio unconditionally. (C) is wrong because no general principle is stated and abandoned. (D) mischaracterizes the history, which appears in a single paragraph and does not claim that each technology improved citizenship.

23. Answer: D. [Skill 1.A – identify the purpose of a rhetorical choice.] The questions (“Will the man who hears the Senator at nine o’clock go to the post office . . . and dispute him?”) turn the abstract question of civic effect into specific acts. The next sentences make clear that the essay’s verdict depends on whether those acts occur. (A) is wrong because the questions are conditional, not despairing. (B) is unsupported; politicians are not challenged. (C) is wrong because they are not requests for information; the writer is not asking, he is framing.

24. Answer: A. [Skill 3.B – identify the overarching thesis.] The essay’s central claim appears in “The real question . . . is not what the loudspeaker will do to us, but what we shall do after it has stopped,” and in the final sentences: radio will be “the greatest school of citizenship” if it prompts argument and “only the most elaborate means yet invented of being spoken to” if it does not. (B) leaves out the writer’s claims about promise and his refusal to end “as a mourner.” (C) is the opposite of his view, since the writer says what occurred in earlier cases was “more interesting and more dependent on ourselves.” (D) takes the praise in paragraph 2 as the thesis and ignores the qualifications in paragraphs 3 and 4.

Passage 3 (Questions 25–32): Public Funding for Space Exploration

25. Answer: C. [Skill 2.A – write an introduction appropriate to the purpose and context.] The stated goals are to introduce the topic and engage general readers. Choice C frames the controversy in vivid, concrete terms (taxpayers, potholes, billions) that anticipate the objection in sentence 2. (A) is vague and does not frame an issue. (B) offers a fact that is accurate but does not engage readers or lead into the argument. (D) is a personal statement of preference that ignores the audience’s skepticism and moves toward an unsupported claim.

26. Answer: D. [Skill 4.B – write a thesis that requires proof and previews the structure.] Sentence 3 should make a defensible claim and preview the three supports used in the body: practical technologies (paragraph 2), long-term research that companies will not do (paragraph 2), and a shared purpose (paragraph 3). Choice D does this. (A) is a claim, but it has no preview (“many reasons”). (B) is a hedged personal opinion that previews nothing. (C) states a fact, not a claim requiring proof.

27. Answer: A. [Skill 8.B – combine sentences so the relationship is clear.] Sentence 7 explains why companies cannot be counted on, so “because” is the right link, and “while” correctly contrasts the short horizon of shareholders with the long horizon of basic science. (B) uses “so,” which reverses cause and effect. (C) begins with “Although,” which makes the first clause a concession and misrepresents the relationship. (D) is a run-on that strings independent clauses together with commas.

28. Answer: C. [Skill 4.A – select evidence to support a claim.] The claim is that benefits of basic space science can take decades. Choice C offers a specific, relevant example: early satellites in the 1960s, with the networks of weather and navigation signals that took decades of public investment to build. (A) is irrelevant to the claim. (B) is an unsupported assertion, not evidence. (D) supports the claim in sentence 5 (everyday products) but not the claim about delay.

29. Answer: B. [Skill 6.B – use transitional elements to guide the reader.] Paragraph 2 argues about practical returns, and paragraph 3 introduces a different kind of benefit. “Beyond its practical returns” connects back, and “harder to measure” prepares for the shift. (A) uses “In conclusion” too early, although the draft continues. (C) uses “On the other hand,” which signals contrast, but the third paragraph adds a benefit and does not oppose the second. (D) draws attention to the difference from technology without connecting the two.

30. Answer: D. [Skill 8.A – use diction to convey a tone.] The draft is formal and plain. Choice D retains that tone, preserves the meaning, and replaces the slang “kids” and “suddenly start asking” with “students” and “begin asking.” (A) is colloquial (“cracked a science book,” “the whole thing”). (B) is overwrought and archaic (“hitherto uncultivated,” “commence to inquire”). (C) changes the meaning: the original says students who had not considered science become curious.

31. Answer: C. [Skill 6.A – provide commentary that explains how evidence supports a claim.] Sentence 8 claims that space exploration gives a nation a shared goal; sentence 9 gives an example. The needed sentence must explain why the example shows that. Choice C explains: a divided public looks “in the same direction.” (A) adds a detail about engineers that does not address the claim. (B) restates the example. (D) turns to cost and away from the paragraph’s argument.

32. Answer: A. [Skill 2.B – show understanding of an audience’s beliefs, values, or needs.] The readers named in the stem worry about waste. Choice A keeps the writer’s position and answers the concern by calling for “clear goals” and public reporting of costs. (B) insults readers who disagree. (C) makes a sweeping claim that will not persuade skeptical readers. (D) offers an argument from tradition, which does nothing to address concerns about waste.

Passage 4 (Questions 33–40): School Uniforms

33. Answer: B. [Skill 4.C – qualify a claim using modifiers or concession.] Sentence 3 claims uniforms are “the answer to every problem,” which no evidence in the draft can support. Choice B concedes the limits (“Although they cannot cure every difficulty”) while still taking a clear position and previewing three supports. (A) keeps the overclaim and adds an insult. (C) abandons the position altogether. (D) qualifies so heavily (“might possibly,” “some,” “could”) that no defensible claim is left.

34. Answer: A. [Skill 8.A – use words to convey a tone.] The draft is formal. “Kids . . . total losers . . . everybody” is slang. Choice A replaces it with “students,” “excluded,” and “everyone,” keeping the meaning intact. (B) trades one casual register for another with idioms. (C) is stuffy and ornate (“financial wherewithal,” “obviates”). (D) is formal but adds an unsupported prediction about transfers.

35. Answer: D. [Skill 6.B – use transitions to show the relationship between ideas.] Sentences 4 and 5 describe one benefit, and sentence 6 begins a new, additional one. “Beyond easing social pressure” acknowledges the previous point and moves to the next. (A) “As a result” claims that the new benefit follows from the earlier one, which it does not. (B) “For example” would make the new idea an instance of the old one. (C) “Nevertheless” signals contrast with something, but nothing in sentences 4–5 opposes sentence 6.

36. Answer: C. [Skill 8.B – write sentences that convey ideas clearly and concisely.] The original sentence repeats “related to,” “disruptions,” and “dress-related.” Choice C keeps all the information in fewer words and a clear order. (A) is still wordy and misplaces “that was” in a confusing phrase. (B) makes “which are related to disruptions that were dress-related” an interruption that blurs what decreased. (D) is garbled; “halved, dress-related,” does not make sense as a modifier.

37. Answer: C. [Skill 6.A – develop a line of reasoning.] Sentence 5 is about students who cannot afford brands; sentence 8 extends the cost idea to families (“Families save money too”). Placing sentence 8 after sentence 5 keeps the cost-and-pressure points together and lets sentences 6–7 treat learning and discipline as a separate, evidence-supported point. Leaving it at the end (A) leaves the paragraph ending on a different topic from its opening. Placing it after sentence 4 (B) would interrupt the claim and its example. Placing it after sentence 6 (D) would put cost between a claim about concentration and the evidence for it in sentence 7.

38. Answer: B. [Skill 2.B – demonstrate an understanding of an audience’s beliefs.] The students who resent uniforms must be addressed respectfully if they are to listen. Choice B treats their concern as legitimate (“with good reason,” “deserves a serious answer”), which prepares the response in sentence 10. (A) calls them

“wrong,” which closes the audience off. (C) dismisses their concern as a distraction. (D) attacks critics and shifts away from students.

39. Answer: D. [Skill 4.A – provide specific evidence for a claim.] Sentence 10 claims that a uniform policy “can leave room for individuality.” Choice D gives a concrete example of a policy that does. (A) states a value but offers no evidence. (B) mentions uniforms in other settings, which does not address individuality in schools. (C) is evidence for the objection, not for the writer’s claim.

40. Answer: A. [Skill 2.A – write a conclusion appropriate to the purpose.] The final claim is that uniforms let “effort and talent, rather than income” stand out. Choice A turns that into a recommendation, which reinforces the line of reasoning and gives readers a purpose. (B) announces the essay’s topic and adds nothing. (C) introduces new information that distracts from the argument. (D) weakens the writer’s position and ends in indecision.

Passage 5 (Questions 41–45): Bilingual Education

41. Answer: D. [Skill 2.B – show understanding of an audience’s concerns.] Sentence 2 states a worry. A response aimed at skeptical readers should recognize the concern and then offer evidence. Choice D does so (“understandable,” then “studies . . . suggest otherwise”). (A) and (B) are condescending; they tell skeptics they are mistaken or uninformed. (C) dismisses parents’ worry with an unsupported assertion.

42. Answer: B. [Skill 4.C – qualify a claim.] The original claim that bilingual students “read English better than other students” is a sweeping generalization. Choice B limits it to “well-designed” programs, uses “often,” and sets a realistic bar (“match or surpass”) at a particular stage (“by the upper grades”). (A) makes the claim stronger with “always.” (C) qualifies so much that it no longer makes a claim. (D) changes the subject to other skills and abandons the claim about English.

43. Answer: D. [Skill 6.B – use transitional elements.] The second paragraph moves from academic results to life outside school. Choice D signals the shift in scope (“extend beyond the classroom”) and keeps the thread (“also”). (A) uses “Therefore,” implying that the earlier results cause the new benefits. (B) uses “In contrast,” but the ideas are complementary. (C) is vague and does not connect the paragraphs.

44. Answer: A. [Skill 4.A – select evidence.] Sentence 6 claims that many employers value two languages. Choice A offers specific evidence from employers (hiring managers) about the specific skill. (B) is a general remark about enjoyment. (C) is about enrollments, which is not evidence of employer demand. (D) is background about history, which is irrelevant to the claim.

45. Answer: C. [Skill 8.B – combine sentences to show the relationship.] Sentence 8 explains how bilingual education strengthens family bonds, so “because” fits. (A) is a comma splice. (B) “but” suggests contrast where there is explanation. (D) “however” likewise signals contrast and is inappropriate.

Part 3: How to Score Yourself

1. **Multiple choice.** Count correct answers from the table in Part 1 (45 maximum). There is no penalty for wrong answers. Multiply by 1.5 for a section subscore of up to 67.5.
2. **Free response.** Score each essay 0–6 using the rubrics that follow (Row A 0–1, Row B 0–4, Row C 0–1), or ask a teacher to do so. Add the three essay scores (18 maximum) and multiply by 4.58 for a subscore of up

to about 82.5.

3. **Composite.** Add the two subscores for an approximate composite out of 150.

APPROXIMATE COMPOSITE (OUT OF 150)	APPROXIMATE AP SCORE
About 105 or higher	5
About 87–104	4
About 65–86	3
About 45–64	2
Below about 45	1

These bands are approximate. The College Board does not publish a fixed conversion, and cutoffs vary from year to year. Treat the table as a rough guide for practice, not a prediction.

Worked example. A student answers 32 multiple-choice questions correctly ($32 \times 1.5 = 48$) and earns essay scores of 4, 3, and 4 ($11 \times 4.58 = \text{about } 50$). The composite is about 98, in the approximate range for a 4.

Diagnosing your results. Sort your missed questions by skill code. Misses in 3.A–3.C and 5.A–5.C point to trouble tracing claims and the line of reasoning. Misses in 7.A–7.C point to difficulty explaining how diction and syntax create an effect. Misses in 2, 4, 6, and 8 usually mean you chose a revision that was grammatical but did not accomplish the writer’s stated goal. Reread the stem before looking at the choices.

Part 4: Question 1 (Synthesis) — Rubric, Scoring Notes, and Sample Essays

4.1 Rubric (6 points)

Row A: Thesis (0–1 point)

SCORE	DESCRIPTION	TYPICAL RESPONSES
0	The response does not present a defensible thesis.	Restates the prompt (“Colleges are debating whether to be test-optional”); summarizes the issue (“There are pros and cons to going test-optional”); lists what the sources say without taking a position; takes a position on something other than the prompt (for example, whether the SAT is a good test, with no stand on permanent test-optional policies).

SCORE	DESCRIPTION	TYPICAL RESPONSES
1	The response presents a defensible thesis that takes a position on whether colleges should adopt permanently test-optional admissions policies.	"Colleges should make test-optional admissions permanent, provided they explain how applications without scores are read." "Colleges should return to requiring scores, with free preparation and fee waivers." "Colleges should adopt test-optional policies permanently because the evidence shows wider access without a loss of persistence."

Decision rules. The thesis may be one sentence or several, and may appear anywhere in the response. It must take a position; it may not merely list considerations. A thesis that previews a line of reasoning earns the point but is not required to. A conditional position ("should, if . . .") earns the point if it commits to a recommendation. A defensible position is one the sources can support, though the student need not have cited the support in the thesis. A thesis earns the point even if the body of the essay does not fully support it.

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.	Copies lines from one source; says "Source A shows that test-optional is good" with no further detail.
1	Provides evidence from or references to at least two sources. Commentary summarizes the sources rather than explaining how they support the argument.	"Source A says applications went up. Source C says tests help students from small schools. Both are important to the debate."
2	Provides evidence from at least three sources. Commentary explains how some of the evidence relates to the argument, but the response does not establish a line of reasoning, or the reasoning is faulty.	Body paragraphs each treat one source ("Source A shows . . . Source D shows . . . Source F shows . . .") with some explanation, but the paragraphs are interchangeable and do not build on one another.
3	Provides specific evidence from at least three sources to support all claims in a line of reasoning. Commentary explains how some of the evidence supports the line of reasoning.	Claims follow logically and each draws on specific data or quotations; the commentary sometimes explains the connection and sometimes only repeats ("This shows that test-optional helps students").

SCORE	DESCRIPTION	TYPICAL RESPONSES
4	Provides specific evidence from at least three sources to support all claims in a line of reasoning. Commentary consistently explains how the evidence supports the line of reasoning.	Each piece of evidence is followed by an explanation of what it shows, why it matters for the argument, and how it connects to the next claim; sources are placed in conversation with one another (one source qualifies, extends, or challenges another).

Decision rules. Evidence must come from the sources; references must be specific enough to show the source is actually being used ("the table in Source D," "Reiss's remark in Source A"). A response with a 4 must have no grammar or mechanics errors that interfere with communication. Responses that treat every source as a standalone pro or con, or that summarize, generally score 1–2. A response may earn the highest point values only if the line of reasoning is the student's own and the sources serve it.

Row C: Sophistication (0–1 point)

SCORE	DESCRIPTION
0	Does not demonstrate sophistication of thought or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation.
1	Demonstrates sophistication of thought and/or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation by doing any of the following consistently: (1) crafting a nuanced argument by identifying and exploring complexities or tensions across the sources; (2) articulating the implications or limitations of an argument, perhaps by situating it within a broader context; (3) making effective 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: sweeping generalizations offered as context ("Throughout history, education has been important"); only hinting at other arguments or including a token counterargument that is dismissed in a sentence; oversimplifying the complexities in the sources; ornate or inflated language that does not strengthen the argument; a single sophisticated sentence that is not part of the argument as a whole.

4.2 Scoring notes specific to this prompt

What a defensible thesis looks like. The task asks for a position on *permanent* test-optional policies. Acceptable positions include (a) yes, permanently test-optional; (b) no, require scores (possibly with supports such as fee waivers and free preparation); and (c) yes, but only with conditions (clear communication, a published description of how applications without scores are read). A thesis such as "Test-optional policies have advantages and disadvantages" does not earn Row A. A thesis about "the SAT" in general, with no stand on the policy, does not earn Row A.

What strong responses might argue.

- **Yes, permanent test-optional, on access.** Source D shows 9,840 applications rising to 12,260 (about 25 percent) and the Pell-eligible share rising from 24 to 28 percent. Source A reports first-generation

enrollment rising from 22 to 29 percent. Source F supplies a mechanism: a required score tells capable, lower-income students “they didn’t belong.” Strong responses note that Source D’s footnote warns the data do not prove cause.

- **Yes, because scores are not needed to predict persistence.** Source B finds that non-submitters earned grades about a tenth of a point lower but “were retained and graduated at nearly identical rates.” Source D shows the same gap (3.16 versus 3.05) with retention steady (84 to 85 percent). Strong responses explain that first-year GPA is not the same as persistence.
- **No, require scores, on informational value.** Source B finds that scores add predictive power beyond high school grades, especially at institutions with many differently graded high schools. Source C argues that for applicants from schools with few advanced courses a score may be “the only window” the admissions reader has. Strong responses address the equity claim head on rather than ignoring it.
- **No, because “optional” is not really optional.** Source E (the asterisk and the overflowing “SCORES” drawer), Professor Reiss’s remark in Source A (“we have just made it a secret”), and Source C’s “riddle” suggest that applicants who do not submit are at a disadvantage. Strong responses distinguish a flawed design from a flawed principle.
- **Conditional yes.** Permanent test-optional policies with transparent criteria (Sources A and F) respond to the objections in Sources C and E. Strong responses explain why *permanence* matters (Source F’s “younger brother” remark) and why the policy is not test-blind (scores remain available to those who benefit, per Source B’s final paragraph).
- **Tension between sources.** Source B’s last paragraph says scores are most informative for the students test-optional policies are meant to help. Sources C and F both claim to speak for low-income students and reach opposite conclusions. Strong responses use this tension to qualify their own position.
- **Reading the quantitative and visual sources critically.** Strong responses translate Source D into plain language and note its limits (averages, no causation). They interpret Source E as an argument about the gap between a policy’s label and its practice, not simply as an attack on the policy.

Common traps.

- Summarizing sources one at a time (“Source A says . . . Source B says . . .”) without a line of reasoning; paragraphs that could be reordered.
- Using “this shows that” commentary that repeats the evidence.
- Treating Source D as proof that test-optional policies *caused* the changes.
- Treating Source E as merely “funny” without interpreting the asterisk.
- Ignoring “permanently” and writing about whether tests are good or bad in general.
- Citing only two sources, or citing a third in a single clause.
- Writing a token counterargument (“Some people disagree, but they are wrong”) without engaging a source’s evidence.
- Misreading Source B as saying scores are useless; the study says they add a modest amount of information and are not needed to identify students who will persist.

4.3 Sample Essay: 6 out of 6

(Approximately 810 words.)

Every admissions policy is a bet about what a college cannot see. For most of a century, American colleges bet that a three-hour test could reveal what grades could not. The sources suggest that the bet was a poor one to make mandatory and a reasonable one to leave available. Colleges should adopt permanently test-optional admissions, but only if they define “optional” honestly; the evidence for dropping the requirement is stronger than the evidence for keeping it, and the best objections to the policy are really objections to ambiguity, which a clear and lasting policy can remove.

The strongest case for the change is that a requirement does damage before an application is ever read. In the Tri-State Board’s review (Source D), fourteen public colleges that stopped requiring scores saw average annual applications rise from 9,840 to 12,260, and the Pell-eligible share of the first-year class rise from 24 to 28 percent. The report is careful to say that these averages do not prove cause, but a counselor, Tamsin Okafor, supplies a plausible mechanism (Source F). For years she “watched capable kids look at a single score and decide they didn’t belong at a four-year school.” A required score works as a signal as well as a measurement: it tells a first-generation student whose family cannot pay for tutoring that the door is closed before anyone has looked at the transcript. Eastbrook State’s rise in first-generation enrollment from 22 to 29 percent (Source A) is what the removal of that signal looks like in practice.

The serious objection is that colleges lose information, and the scholarly study in Source B concedes the point: across 41,000 students, scores added predictive power beyond high school grades. Yet the same study shows how small the loss is. Students who enrolled without scores earned first-year grades about a tenth of a point lower, but “the two groups were retained and graduated at nearly identical rates.” Source D shows the same pattern, with submitters averaging 3.16 and non-submitters 3.05 while retention across the colleges edged up from 84 to 85 percent. A gap of a tenth of a grade point is real, but an admissions office is not trying to forecast first-year grades to the hundredth. It is trying to admit students who will persist to a degree, and on that measure the sources give little reason to believe scores are needed.

The weakest point of test-optional policies, and the one on which Oyelaran and the cartoonist are right, is that “optional” sometimes is not. In Source E, a banner announcing “TEST OPTIONAL!” hides fine print reading “Optional, but we do notice who doesn’t,” beside a filing cabinet whose “SCORES” drawer overflows while the “NO SCORES” drawer is nearly empty. Professor Reiss says in Source A that if half the class submits scores, “we have just made it a secret,” and Okafor reports students asking weekly whether to send an “okay” score. Oyelaran calls the result “a riddle.” The remedy is not a return to a requirement, which would restore the chilling effect described above, but the thing Admissions Director Greer claims for Eastbrook: telling every applicant the rule. A policy that is permanent, published, and specific about what the college will read in place of a score is the only version families can trust. Permanence matters for this reason too. As Okafor observes, a student should not have to wonder whether the rule will change before her younger brother applies.

Test-optional admissions will not remove inequality from college entrance, and it will not make an admissions office’s work easier; Source A reports a reading season three weeks longer. But the choice is not between a perfect measure and an imperfect policy. It is between a requirement that screens out some capable students before they apply and an option that, honestly administered, lets each student decide which evidence best represents her. Colleges should make that option permanent, and make it honest.

Scoring commentary.

- **Row A: 1.** The thesis is in the first paragraph and takes a clear, conditional position on the exact question: colleges should adopt permanently test-optional policies if they define “optional” honestly.

- **Row B: 4.** The response uses specific evidence from six sources (A, B, C, D, E, F) in a clear line of reasoning that builds: access gains, then the information-loss objection, then the strongest complication, then the problem of ambiguity, then the remedy. Commentary consistently explains how evidence supports the reasoning. For example, the writer explains that a score works “as a signal as well as a measurement,” and that a tenth of a grade point matters less than persistence. Sources are placed in conversation: Source F supplies a mechanism for Source D; Source B’s last paragraph qualifies the writer’s own earlier claim and is linked to Source C. The writing is clear and free of errors that interfere with communication.
- **Row C: 1.** The essay develops a nuanced argument by exploring a real tension across the sources (scores help the very students the policy is meant to help) and resolves it by distinguishing test-optional from test-blind. It also states the limits of its own claim (inequality is not removed; the reading season lengthens). The style is consistently clear and persuasive without being ornate.
- **Total: 6/6.**

4.4 Sample Essay: 4 out of 6

(Approximately 500 words.)

Colleges should adopt permanently test-optional admissions policies because they open the door to more students and because test scores are not as important for success in college as people think. The sources show that the benefits of going test-optional outweigh the problems.

The biggest benefit of test-optional admissions is that more students can apply. In Source D, a table from a state report, the average number of applications at the fourteen colleges went from 9,840 to 12,260 after they stopped requiring scores. The share of students from low-income families also went up from 24 to 28 percent. This shows that test-optional policies help students who might not have applied before. Source A also says that first-generation students at Eastbrook State went from 22 percent to 29 percent of the class. Together these sources show that going test-optional gives more people a chance, which is important because college can change a person’s life. Of course the table does not prove that the policy caused the change, but the numbers are still a good sign.

Another reason is that test scores are not needed to tell who will do well in college. In Source B, the researchers say that students who did not send scores got grades that were only a little lower, but they graduated at about the same rate as students who did send scores. This means that colleges can still admit students who will succeed without the test. Source D agrees because the retention rate stayed about the same, going from 84 to 85 percent. So the test does not seem to matter that much for whether students stay in college.

Some people argue that tests should be required. Source C is written by an admissions dean who says that a test score is sometimes the only window he has into students from small rural schools. This is a good point because those schools may not have many advanced classes. However, test-optional policies do not stop these students from sending their scores. If a rural student has a high score, she can still send it. So the dean’s concern is not a good reason to make the test required for everyone.

There are also some problems with test-optional policies. The cartoon in Source E shows a college with a sign that says “Test Optional” but the fine print says that they notice who does not send scores. This shows that some students may feel nervous about not sending scores. Source F also says that students are confused about whether to send a score that is okay. To fix this, colleges should be clear about the rules, like the counselor says. If colleges are clear, then the problems will be solved.

In conclusion, colleges should make test-optional permanent. It lets more students apply, it does not hurt the success of students in college, and the problems can be fixed by making the rules clear. Students deserve a fair chance, and test-optional policies give them one.

Scoring commentary.

- **Row A: 1.** The first sentence takes a clear, defensible position on permanent test-optional policies and gives reasons.
- **Row B: 3.** The essay uses specific evidence from at least three sources (D, A, B, with C, E, and F also used) to support each claim in a simple line of reasoning: access, then persistence, then the objection, then the remedy. The numbers from Source D and Source B are accurate and specific. The point is held at 3 because the commentary is uneven. At times it explains (the point about the rural student still being free to submit a score is a genuine response to Source C), but often it only restates the evidence ("This shows that test-optional policies help students who might not have applied before"; "So the test does not seem to matter that much"). The cartoon in Source E is mentioned but its asterisk is not interpreted beyond "students may feel nervous," and the claim that "the problems will be solved" if rules are clear is asserted, not shown. Sources are used one at a time and are not put in conversation.
- **Row C: 0.** The essay acknowledges counterarguments but disposes of each in a sentence or two. It does not explore a tension among the sources (for example, that Source B finds scores most informative for the students the policy is meant to help) and does not consider the limits of its own claim beyond a brief nod to Source D's caution. The conclusion repeats the thesis and relies on a general statement ("Students deserve a fair chance").
- **Total: 4/6.**

4.5 Sample Essay: 2 out of 6

(Approximately 340 words.)

I think that colleges should be test optional forever because it is better for students. A lot of students are stressed out about the SAT and ACT and they dont do good on one test even if they are smart. Test optional policies fix this problem.

Source A says that at Eastbrook State College they stopped asking for scores and the applications went up by a third. It also says that more first generation students came to the college. This means that test optional is a good thing for colleges because more people want to go there. The director said that students with a strong transcript get a real look now.

Source F is an interview with a counselor. She says that her students are the first in their family to go to college and they cant pay for prep courses. She says that kids look at one score and think they dont belong. So test optional helps these students because they dont have to send their score.

Some people think the tests are good, like the dean in Source C. But I think that the tests are not fair because rich families can pay for tutors. So colleges should not use them. In Source D there is a table that has a lot of numbers about the colleges and in Source B there is a study. These also show that test optional is good.

Source E is a cartoon about a college that says test optional. It is kind of funny because the students are looking at the sign with a magnifying glass. The cartoon shows that some colleges might not be honest, but I think most colleges are honest and just want to help students get in. Source D also had a graph about colleges and the GPA

of students, and it showed that students who did not send scores did fine.

In conclusion, test optional is the best choice for colleges and students. It gives everyone a chance and does not make students feel bad. Colleges should keep it forever.

Scoring commentary.

- **Row A: 1.** “Colleges should be test optional forever” is a clear position on the prompt, though it is not developed. It meets the minimum standard of a defensible thesis.
- **Row B: 1.** The essay refers to at least two sources (A and F, with brief mentions of B, C, and D), but the commentary is summary. The sentences about Source A and Source F retell what each says and conclude that “test optional is a good thing.” The reference to Sources B and D (“These also show that test optional is good”) is vague bundling with no specific evidence; the table and study are named but no data from them is used. Source C is mentioned, but the dean’s argument is replaced by an unsupported claim about tutors (“the tests are not fair”), so the essay does not engage the evidence. No line of reasoning connects the paragraphs.
- **Row C: 0.** There is no nuance, no consideration of tension among sources, and no discussion of limitations. The essay offers a generalization (“It gives everyone a chance”).
- **Total: 2/6.** Grammar and mechanics errors (“dont,” missing commas) do not interfere with communication but would prevent a top Row B score in any case.

Part 5: Question 2 (Rhetorical Analysis) — Rubric, Scoring Notes, and Sample Essays

5.1 Rubric (6 points)

Row A: Thesis (0–1 point)

SCORE	DESCRIPTION	TYPICAL RESPONSES
0	The response does not present a defensible thesis that analyzes the writer’s rhetorical choices.	Restates the prompt (“Crane conveys her message about the obligations of an education”); describes the speech (“Crane talks about debts and giving back”); names only the appeals (“Crane uses ethos, pathos, and logos”); gives a thesis about the topic, not the speaker’s choices (“Education is a responsibility”).

SCORE	DESCRIPTION	TYPICAL RESPONSES
1	The response presents a defensible thesis that analyzes the writer's rhetorical choices.	"By recasting a diploma as a receipt and sustaining a financial metaphor of debt and repayment, Crane turns a ceremony of achievement into a charge to repay what others have given." "Crane builds the graduates' pride through history and then channels it into obligation through a three-part structure that widens the circle of responsibility."

Decision rules. The thesis must make a claim about *choices* the writer makes, not only about the message. A thesis that identifies choices by description ("Crane compares education to a debt and then lists three debts") earns the point as readily as one that uses terms. The thesis may be one or more sentences and may appear anywhere in the response. A thesis that merely restates the prompt, or states only that Crane uses appeals or "devices," does not earn the point. A thesis earns the point even if the body of the essay does not fully support it.

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

SCORE	DESCRIPTION	TYPICAL RESPONSES
0	Restates the thesis, repeats the provided information, or offers information irrelevant to the prompt.	Paraphrases the orienting paragraph; mentions that the speech was given in 1894 with no use of the text.
1	Evidence is mostly general; commentary mostly summarizes the speech.	Retells the speech paragraph by paragraph ("First she says . . . then she says . . ."); names devices without locating them.
2	Provides some specific evidence to support claims; commentary explains how some of the evidence relates to the writer's argument, but the response does not establish a line of reasoning, or the reasoning is faulty.	Quotes the "receipt" and the "three debts," saying they "emphasize her point" or "appeal to emotion," with paragraphs that could be reordered.
3	Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning. Commentary explains how at least one rhetorical choice in the passage contributes to the writer's argument, purpose, or message.	A clear line of reasoning; explains, for example, how the metaphor of debt reframes the diploma and what that does for the graduates' sense of duty; other choices are named but less fully explained.

SCORE	DESCRIPTION	TYPICAL RESPONSES
4	Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning. Commentary explains how multiple rhetorical choices in the passage contribute to the writer's argument, purpose, or message.	Consistently explains what each choice does for the audience and the purpose (metaphor, history, structure, imperatives, concession, closing), shows how the choices work together, and connects them to the occasion.

Decision rules. Specific evidence means words, phrases, or clearly described moves from the text. Multiple instances of the *same* choice (for example, three examples of anaphora) support the fourth point only if each is shown to advance the argument in a distinct way. Responses at 4 explain how the choices shape the interpretation of the passage as a whole. Grammar or mechanics errors that interfere with communication prevent the fourth point.

Row C: Sophistication (0–1 point)

SCORE	DESCRIPTION
0	Does not demonstrate sophistication of thought or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation.
1	Demonstrates sophistication of thought and/or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation by doing any of the following consistently: (1) explaining the significance or relevance of the writer's rhetorical choices given the specific rhetorical situation (here, a college president in 1894 addressing women graduates, their families, and a board of trustees who include former doubters); (2) explaining the purpose or function of the passage's complexities or tensions (for example, that she asks for repayment of what was "given freely," or that she tells graduates they are "free" and then binds them); (3) explaining how the writer's choices work together or build an effect, so that the argument has force and impact; (4) employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive.

What does not earn the point: sweeping statements about women's history that are not tied to the text; examining individual choices without relating them to each other or to the situation; hinting at a tension without explaining its function; oversimplifying the speech as simply "inspirational"; ornate language that does not strengthen the analysis.

5.2 Scoring notes specific to this prompt

What a defensible thesis looks like. A defensible thesis names at least one concrete choice (the debt metaphor, the use of history, the three-part structure, the imperatives, the closing) and links it to Crane's purpose: persuading the graduates to see their education as an obligation to others. Describing choices in plain language ("she turns the diploma into a receipt") is as acceptable as using terms.

What strong responses might argue.

- **The extended financial metaphor** (*receipt, fund, deposit, inheritance, bond, debt, interest, bill, dividend, principal*) reframes an education as something *borrowed* from others. It makes obligation feel concrete, suits an audience that includes trustees and families who think in terms of accounts, and organizes the speech from its first image ("A diploma . . . is a receipt") to its last accounting ("what you did with the principal").
- **The opening reversal** ("I will not tell you this morning that you have arrived") defies the expected celebration, seizes control of the occasion, and prepares the audience for a charge instead of a compliment.
- **The history of the doubters' prophecies** (lines 5–14) gives Crane credibility as an institutional witness, then converts the graduates into evidence ("you are the answer"). Her conciliatory aside ("most of whom were sincere and several of whom are now my friends") acknowledges that some trustees and faculty were doubters and allows them to remain in the audience without defensiveness.
- **The catalog of benefactors** ("It was paid for by . . .") uses parallel structure and concrete figures (the widow, the trustee, the mothers, the first women) so that the debt is owed to specific people, not an abstraction. The paradox "What is given freely is not given without condition" moves the audience from gratitude to responsibility.
- **The three-part structure** ("You owe, first . . . second . . . third") widens the circle of obligation from oneself (the truth) to one's neighbors to future women. Each debt closes off a likely way out: private intellectual comfort, withdrawal into "a private garden," or satisfaction at being the first.
- **Short imperatives and concrete verbs** ("Teach. Nurse. Organize.") translate obligation into action, while "agitate for the amendment of the law" gives the speech a political edge appropriate to a time when women could not hold some offices. The lamp "set under a bushel" is a biblical allusion that adds moral weight.
- **Concession and tension.** "I do not presume to prescribe your stations" and the claim that the obligation is "a property of the mind" make the demand attainable for women whose lives will differ. The closing line, "you are free. Be worthy of it," holds freedom and obligation together, and the request for "a report" rather than "a dividend" shows that the debt is repaid forward, not back.
- **Shifts in tone.** From the commemorative and slightly stern opening, to the proud and pointed historical middle, to the practical and exhortative debts, to the intimate trust of "I have never known one of you to leave a bill unsettled," which flatters the graduates into the conduct she asks for.

Common traps.

- Listing devices ("metaphor, anaphora, rhetorical question") with no explanation of what they do.
- Naming "ethos, pathos, and logos" as the choices, rather than describing the concrete move that creates the appeal.
- Calling the speech an "essay" or Crane "the author" and the audience "readers," or ignoring the occasion (a commencement before graduates, families, and trustees).
- Summarizing the speech paragraph by paragraph.
- Treating the financial language as a single comparison instead of a sustained pattern that structures the whole speech.
- Claiming a device that is not in the text (for example, calling a single question an "extended series of rhetorical questions").
- Asserting that the speech "appeals to emotion" without saying which emotion, in whom, and to what end.

5.3 Sample Essay: 6 out of 6

(Approximately 840 words.)

A president at commencement could say the expected things: congratulations, gratitude, hope. In June 1894, before young women whose university had admitted women for only fifteen years, Harriet Lowell Crane says something harder. By recasting a diploma as a receipt and sustaining the language of debt from her first sentence to her last, by turning the graduates into the answer to their critics, and by dividing the obligation into three widening debts, Crane converts a celebration of achievement into a charge to repay what others have given.

Crane's opening move is a refusal. "I will not tell you this morning that you have arrived," she says, then offers a definition that startles: "A diploma is not a destination; it is a receipt." On a morning designed for pride, she shifts attention from what the graduates have achieved to who has paid. The financial language that follows (a "fund," a "deposit," an "inheritance," a "bond") does not stay in one sentence; it organizes the speech. By the end, she promises that the graduates will "pay with interest" and that none has ever "left a bill unsettled," and she asks them to return "not a dividend, but a report: what you did with the principal." The sustained metaphor makes duty concrete for an audience of trustees and families who think in accounts, and it makes the closing feel like an accounting that has been coming all along.

Her second choice is to use history to give the graduates a role. She recalls the "gentlemen of learning and influence" who predicted failure "within a twelvemonth," and she lists their prophecies: Greek would weary the female mind, mathematics would break the female constitution. These claims, quoted back to the room, now sound absurd, which is the point. She then says, "you are the answer," and imagines every examination as "a sentence in a reply." The graduates are no longer only beneficiaries; they are evidence in an argument still being conducted on behalf of "every girl who has not yet been permitted to ask the question," which shifts their loyalty to girls they will never meet. Her tone toward the doubters is strategic too. Calling them "sincere" and "several of whom are now my friends" lets trustees and faculty who may once have been skeptics stay comfortable while the point lands.

The turn from pride to obligation is completed in the catalog that follows. "It was paid for by the widow . . . and by the trustee . . . It was paid for by mothers who sold their own books." The parallel structure piles up creditors, and each is a person, so the debt is owed to people and not to an abstraction. The maxim that follows, "What is given freely is not given without condition," states the speech's logic: a gift that cannot be repaid in kind must be repaid forward.

Crane then asks, "What, then, do you owe?" Her three-part answer ("You owe, first . . . second . . . third") widens the circle of obligation from the self to the neighbor to the future. The first debt, to the truth, is the most private: "ask it, above all, of yourselves, when you discover that your opinions happen to coincide with your comforts." The second is to the neighbors, and here her style changes. The lamp "set under a bushel" is a familiar biblical image, but the imperatives that follow ("Teach. Nurse. Organize.") are short and practical, and they end in a bold instruction: "when the law forbids you the chair, agitate for the amendment of the law." Before an audience of trustees, that clause acknowledges barriers the graduates will meet and authorizes them to challenge those barriers. The third debt faces forward ("Then make the next room . . . a little larger"). Each debt closes a likely escape: private study, withdrawal into "a private garden," or satisfaction at having been first.

A concession keeps the demand from seeming impossible. "Some of you will marry, and some will not," she says, and "I do not presume to prescribe your stations." The obligation is "a property of the mind" and can be discharged "at a bench or at a bedside." By asking only for "the ordinary things of life with minds that have been

taught to see," Crane makes a very large claim feel attainable. She then anticipates resistance with a question, "Is it too much to ask?", and answers it in three confident words. Her tribute that she has never known a graduate to leave a bill unsettled persuades by flattery: it assumes the conduct she hopes for.

The closing line, "you are free. Be worthy of it," holds the speech's central tension. Freedom and obligation seem opposed, but for these women freedom is the thing that was given, newly and by others, and therefore the thing owed. In Crane's hands, the metaphor of debt is not cold bookkeeping; it teaches the graduates that the doors they walked through stay open only if they keep them so.

Scoring commentary.

- **Row A: 1.** The thesis names three specific choices (the receipt metaphor sustained as debt, the use of history to make the graduates "the answer," and the three widening debts) and links them to Crane's purpose of making obligation feel like loyalty.
- **Row B: 4.** Specific, accurate evidence supports every claim in a clear line of reasoning that follows the speech's logic: redefine the diploma, explain who lent the education, establish that gifts carry conditions, specify the debts, and make the demand attainable. The commentary consistently explains how *multiple* choices contribute to the message: the sustained metaphor (making duty concrete and framing the closing), the history (turning graduates into evidence and shifting loyalty outward), the conciliatory aside (managing the trustees), the catalog and maxim (grounding debt in persons), the structure of three debts (closing off escapes), the imperatives and the "agitate" clause (translating obligation into action), and the concession (making the demand attainable). The writing is clear and controlled.
- **Row C: 1.** The essay explains the function of a tension within the speech (freedom and obligation) and connects the metaphor, the conciliatory tone, and the "agitate" clause to the particular rhetorical situation (women graduates, doubting trustees, a recent coeducational experiment). It also examines how choices relate to each other rather than treating each in isolation. The style is consistently vivid and purposeful.
- **Total: 6/6.**

5.4 Sample Essay: 4 out of 6

(Approximately 470 words.)

In her commencement address to the women of the Class of 1894, Harriet Lowell Crane uses money language, a list of the people who helped the graduates, and repetition of the words "you owe" to convince the graduates that their education comes with a responsibility to give back. Her speech makes the audience feel grateful and then makes them feel they have a duty.

Crane begins by comparing a diploma to a receipt. She says, "A diploma is not a destination; it is a receipt." This is surprising because most people think a diploma is a prize, but she says it proves that someone else paid for it. She continues the comparison by using words like "fund," "deposit," "inheritance," and "interest." These words make the graduates think of education as something they borrowed, so they feel they have to pay it back. At the end she says they should return "a report: what you did with the principal." This shows that the comparison is carried through the whole speech and ties it together.

Next, Crane reminds the audience about the people who helped the graduates. She says that the university was opened to women fifteen years ago and that some men said it would fail. Then she says "you are the answer." This makes the graduates feel proud because they proved the men wrong. She also lists the widow, the trustee,

and the mothers who “sold their own books.” This is pathos because it makes the audience feel emotional about the sacrifices other people made. The list shows that many people gave things so that the graduates could be there, so the graduates should be thankful.

After this, Crane tells the graduates what they owe. She repeats “You owe, first,” “You owe, second,” and “You owe, third.” The repetition makes it easy to follow and helps the audience remember. The three debts are to the truth, to their neighbors, and to the people who come after. For the neighbors she says “Teach. Nurse. Organize.” The short sentences are strong and make the reader want to act. By telling them specific things to do, she shows that the obligation is real.

Near the end, Crane asks, “Is it too much to ask?” and answers “I think not.” A rhetorical question like this makes the audience think and agree with her. She also says that she has never known one of them “to leave a bill unsettled,” which is a compliment. This makes the graduates want to live up to what she thinks of them.

Overall, Crane’s speech is effective because she uses these strategies to persuade the graduates. By the end, the audience is likely to feel they owe something to others. Her last line, “you are free. Be worthy of it,” leaves them with a strong message to remember.

Scoring commentary.

- **Row A: 1.** The thesis identifies specific choices (money language, a list of helpers, repetition of “you owe”) and links them to Crane’s purpose of convincing graduates they owe something back. It goes beyond restating the prompt.
- **Row B: 3.** The essay provides specific evidence (the “receipt” line, “fund,” “deposit,” “principal,” the widow and mothers, “You owe, first,” “Teach. Nurse. Organize.”) in an orderly line of reasoning that moves from gratitude to duty. At least one choice is explained in terms of its effect: the money language makes the graduates “think of education as something they borrowed, so they feel they have to pay it back,” and the reversal of the diploma’s meaning is noticed. The point is held at 3 because the commentary on the other choices is thin or generic. “This is pathos because it makes the audience feel emotional” labels an appeal without saying which emotion or why it matters for the argument; “the repetition makes it easy to follow and helps the audience remember” describes a general effect of any repetition, not what it does here; “a rhetorical question like this makes the audience think and agree” could apply to any speech. Some sentences (“This shows that the comparison is carried through the whole speech”) only repeat the evidence.
- **Row C: 0.** The essay does not connect the choices to the particular situation of 1894 and women graduates beyond a single mention, does not discuss any tension in the speech, and does not show how the choices work together. The conclusion generalizes (“her speech is effective because she uses these strategies”).
- **Total: 4/6.**

5.5 Sample Essay: 2 out of 6

(Approximately 330 words.)

In this speech Harriet Lowell Crane uses ethos, pathos, and logos to convey her message about the obligations of an education. She wants the graduates to understand that they have to give back. She is very persuasive and uses many rhetorical devices to get her message across.

Crane uses ethos because she is the president of the university so the audience trusts her. She also talks about the history of the university and the men who said women would fail. That shows that she knows what she is talking about.

She uses pathos when she lists all the people who helped the graduates, like the widow and the mothers who sold their books. This makes the audience feel sad and grateful. It emphasizes that the graduates did not do everything alone.

She uses logos when she says that they owe three debts. She says "You owe, first, a debt to the truth," "You owe, second, a debt to your neighbors," and "You owe, third, a debt to those who come after you." This is repetition and it makes her argument logical. The graduates have a debt to the truth, to neighbors, and to the future, so they should do something about it.

Crane also uses metaphors. For example, she says that a diploma is a receipt. A metaphor compares two things to make a point. She uses this to show the graduates that someone paid for their education. She uses the words "interest" and "principal" too. This is a good way to make her point.

At the end she asks a rhetorical question, "Is it too much to ask?" This makes the audience think. Then she says "Go, then" and "you are free. Be worthy of it." This is a strong ending and it makes the audience feel inspired to do something with what they learned.

In conclusion, Crane uses many strategies to convey her message about obligation. The speech is very effective and the graduates will be inspired to give back.

Scoring commentary.

- **Row A: 0.** The thesis ("uses ethos, pathos, and logos to convey her message . . . uses many rhetorical devices") restates the prompt and names the appeals without making a claim about the specific choices Crane makes or how they work.
- **Row B: 2.** The essay provides some specific evidence (the three "You owe" lines, the diploma as "a receipt," "interest," "principal," the widow and the mothers, "Is it too much to ask?") and offers some explanation of how a few items relate to the argument (the receipt "shows . . . that someone paid for their education"; the list "emphasizes that the graduates did not do everything alone"). There is no line of reasoning: the paragraphs are organized by the three appeals and could be reordered, and much of the commentary is generic ("This makes the audience feel sad and grateful"; "This is a good way to make her point"). Some labels are used loosely (the "You owe" lines are called logos and "repetition" with no explanation of why that is logical), and the rhetorical situation of 1894 and women graduates is mostly ignored.
- **Row C: 0.** There is no discussion of the complexity of the speech or its context, and the conclusion is a generalization.
- **Total: 2/6.**

Part 6: Question 3 (Argument) — Rubric, Scoring Notes, and Sample Essays

6.1 Rubric (6 points)

Row A: Thesis (0–1 point)

SCORE	DESCRIPTION	TYPICAL RESPONSES
0	The response does not present a defensible thesis.	Restates the prompt ("Comparison can be good or bad"); summarizes the issue ("People compare themselves to others all the time"); equivocates without a position ("There are many sides to this question"); defines comparison without taking a position.
1	The response presents a defensible position on the extent to which the claim that "comparison is the thief of joy" is valid.	"The saying is largely valid for the kind of comparison that social media encourages, but comparison with a rival's skill or with one's own earlier self can produce a deeper joy." "The claim is mostly invalid: comparison is how people set standards and improve, and the joy of achievement depends on it." "The claim is entirely valid."

Decision rules. The thesis must respond to the prompt by taking a position on the extent of the claim's validity. It may be a qualified position ("valid when . . . but not when . . ."), but it must commit to a view and not merely list considerations. It may be one or more sentences and may appear anywhere. A thesis earns the point even if the body does not fully support it. A thesis that restates the prompt, or offers only a vague opinion ("Comparison is bad"), without a response to the *extent* of validity, may be judged defensible if it takes a clear position; an equivocal "it depends" with no further position is not.

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

SCORE	DESCRIPTION	TYPICAL RESPONSES
0	Restates the thesis, repeats the prompt, or provides information irrelevant to the prompt.	Repeats the stimulus.
1	Evidence is mostly general; commentary does not explain the relationship between evidence and thesis.	Broad statements ("Many people feel bad when they compare themselves to others on social media"); anecdotes without analysis.

SCORE	DESCRIPTION	TYPICAL RESPONSES
2	Provides some specific evidence; commentary explains how some evidence relates to the argument, but there is no line of reasoning, or the reasoning is faulty.	Two or three examples (an athlete, a friend, an app) that each repeat the same point ("This shows comparison is bad") and could be reordered.
3	Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning. Commentary explains how some of the evidence supports the line of reasoning.	Claims build logically, with accurate and specific examples; commentary sometimes explains and sometimes only restates.
4	Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning. Commentary consistently explains how the evidence supports the line of reasoning.	Every example is followed by an explanation that links it to the key term ("joy" or "comparison") and to the next claim; the essay defines terms, anticipates objections inside the line of reasoning, and avoids merely stacking examples.

Decision rules. Evidence may come from reading, history, current events, observation, or experience. Specificity matters more than genre. A personal anecdote can earn credit when the response explains its relevance to the abstract claim. A response may not earn the fourth point if errors in grammar or mechanics interfere with communication.

Row C: Sophistication (0–1 point)

SCORE	DESCRIPTION
0	Does not demonstrate sophistication of thought or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation.
1	Demonstrates sophistication of thought and/or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation by doing any of the following consistently: (1) crafting a nuanced argument by identifying and exploring complexities or tensions (for example, that comparison is unavoidable, or that "joy" and "contentment" are different); (2) articulating the implications or limitations of the argument, perhaps by situating it within a broader context; (3) making effective 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: sweeping generalizations ("Since the beginning of time, humans have compared"); a token counterargument ("Some people think otherwise, but they are wrong"); a vague hint at other perspectives; oversimplifying the question into "comparison good/comparison bad"; ornate language that does not advance the argument.

6.2 Scoring notes specific to this prompt

What a defensible thesis looks like. A defensible thesis takes a position on the *extent* to which comparison steals joy. Strong positions typically (a) say the claim is valid for some kinds of comparison and invalid for others, and name the distinction; (b) argue the claim is largely valid, with limits; or (c) argue it is largely invalid because comparison is the basis of standards, learning, and achievement. A simple “I agree” or “I disagree” can earn Row A but sets up weak development.

What strong responses might argue.

- **The claim is valid for curated comparison.** Social media supplies a constant stream of other people’s finished moments (vacations, engagements, awards), so a user compares his messy middle with their highlights. The result is envy or dissatisfaction, not information.
- **The claim is invalid because standards are comparative.** A “personal best” is a comparison with one’s own earlier self; a rival’s performance can show what is possible. Bannister’s four-minute mile was followed within weeks by another runner’s, which suggests that another person’s success can change what an athlete believes she can do.
- **The distinction that matters is what is compared.** Comparing *outcomes* (rank, popularity, possessions) tends to produce anxiety; comparing *methods* (how she practices, what he reads) produces learning. Comparing with a peer in the same field differs from comparing with a celebrity in another.
- **The direction of comparison matters.** Research on Olympic medalists’ reactions has been cited to suggest that bronze medalists, comparing themselves to athletes who got no medal, can look happier than silver medalists, who compare themselves to the winner. This supports the claim, but it also shows that the thief is the *direction* of comparison, not comparison as such.
- **“Joy” needs definition.** Contentment (satisfaction with what one has) and joy (the delight of striving or achieving) can pull apart. A learner may be uncomfortable while comparing herself to a better player, yet find greater joy in the improvement that results.
- **Comparison is unavoidable.** Judgments such as “tall,” “fast,” or “enough” are comparative. The question is therefore not whether to compare but how deliberately, with whom, and for what purpose, and the saying works better as a warning about careless comparison than as a law.
- **Counterexamples from literature and history.** Strong responses may use works about rivalry and envy (for example, the stories of Salieri and Mozart, or of Cain and Abel), the history of scientific or artistic rivalries, or school and sports experiences, provided the response analyzes the example in relation to joy and comparison.
- **Limits of the response.** A sophisticated response may acknowledge that people differ in how they respond, that some environments (for example, grade rankings) force comparison, and that the benefits of comparison depend on a sense of security.

Common traps.

- Binary framing (“comparison is good” or “comparison is bad”) with no analysis of when and why.
- A paragraph on social media that consists of generalizations about teenagers (“everyone feels bad”) with no specific example.
- Three examples that all prove the same point and could be shuffled.
- A personal anecdote with no explanation of how it supports the claim.
- Never defining “joy” or “comparison,” or confusing comparison with envy or with competition.

- A token counterargument paragraph (“Some people say comparison helps, but this is not true”) that never engages the counterargument.
- Stating as fact that a particular president said the quotation, or relying on the attribution as evidence; the stimulus makes clear that the source is uncertain, and the validity of the claim does not depend on who said it.
- Unsupported statistics presented as fact.

6.3 Sample Essay: 6 out of 6

(Approximately 820 words.)

Comparison does not steal joy the way a thief steals a wallet, by force and without our cooperation. It steals joy only when we hand it the keys, and we do so mostly by comparing ourselves with the wrong thing. Used to measure a curated image of someone else’s life, comparison is an efficient destroyer of contentment. Used to measure a specific skill, or our own past selves, it is often the very thing that turns effort into joy. The saying is therefore valid as a warning about one kind of comparison, but false as a law about all of it.

The strongest case for the saying lies in the kind of comparison that social media makes constant. A scrolling user sees a friend’s engagement, a classmate’s acceptance letter, and an acquaintance’s vacation, each one a finished highlight, and compares them with her own unfinished Tuesday. The comparison is rigged, because she is measuring her entire interior against other people’s exteriors. What she gets from this is not information, since nothing in a photograph tells her how her friend actually spends the rest of her days. She gets only a feeling of falling short. Here the saying is exactly right: no standard is being applied, nothing can be learned, and whatever pleasure she had in her own day has been taken from her.

But the same mind that is damaged by a highlight reel is built to be improved by a rival. In 1954, Roger Bannister ran the first mile under four minutes, a barrier many had considered a physical limit. Within weeks another runner, John Landy, broke it as well. Landy’s legs had not changed in forty-six days. What had changed was his belief in what a human body could do, and he knew it because he had a specific, public performance to compare himself against. If comparison were simply a thief, this would be a story of two athletes robbed of satisfaction. It is instead a story of an athlete who found a measure of his ability that he did not know he possessed. This suggests that what separates the scroller from the runner is not whether they compare, but what they compare. Landy compared his *performance* to another’s, in a skill they both practiced, and it showed him how to improve. The scroller compares her *life* to another’s, in no skill at all, and it shows her nothing.

The direction of comparison matters as well. Psychologists who studied the faces of Olympic medalists have reported that bronze medalists can appear happier than silver medalists, apparently because the bronze medalist is thinking of the athletes who went home with nothing, while the silver medalist is thinking of the one who won. This supports the saying, since the silver medalist’s joy is plainly stolen. But it also refines it. Both athletes won an extraordinary achievement; the thief was not comparison but the habit of looking upward at the one person who was ahead. The same athlete who feels robbed on the podium may, in the training room the next month, use that very comparison to design a better stroke. The act is the same; the joy it produces depends on whether it is being used to judge oneself or to learn.

This is where the word “joy” needs care. If joy means contentment, a serene satisfaction with what one has, then any comparison threatens it, because comparison always reveals a gap. But there is another kind of joy that does not survive without comparison at all: the delight of getting better. A violinist who plays a passage a little

more cleanly than she did last month feels it only because she has a standard, and a “personal best” is nothing but a comparison with one’s earlier self. Remove comparison and one has not freed joy; one has removed the means of noticing progress. The honest version of the saying should therefore be modest: comparison endangers *contentment* wherever it leads us to value ourselves by someone else’s position, and it supplies *joy* wherever it shows us a distance we can actually cover.

None of this makes comparison safe. Some environments force it, such as class rankings or the leaderboard of an app, and a person without a stable sense of her own worth may find even a good comparison corrosive. The point is not that comparison is harmless but that it is unavoidable. We cannot call a runner fast, a sentence clear, or a life enough without a standard of reference. The useful question is not whether to compare but whom to compare with, and for what. Ask it of a stranger’s vacation photos, and the answer is: for nothing, and so do not. Ask it of a rival who runs a better mile, and the answer may be: to learn that the barrier was never where you thought. Comparison is a thief only when it has nothing to give back.

Scoring commentary.

- **Row A: 1.** The thesis takes a clear, qualified position on the extent of the claim: valid as a warning about comparing oneself with a curated image, false as a universal law, because comparison with a skill or an earlier self can create joy.
- **Row B: 4.** Specific, accurate evidence (a scrolling user’s experience of finished highlights, Bannister and Landy in 1954, the reported study of Olympic medalists, a violinist’s personal best) supports each claim in a line of reasoning that builds: comparison of the wrong kind steals joy; comparison of performance gives joy; direction of comparison matters; the meaning of “joy” must be defined; comparison is unavoidable and should be directed. The commentary consistently explains the link. For example, it explains why Landy’s improvement came from a changed belief rather than changed physiology, and why the silver medalist case both supports and refines the saying. A counterargument is handled inside the line of reasoning (the Bannister paragraph answers the social-media paragraph, and the final paragraph acknowledges forced comparison).
- **Row C: 1.** The essay identifies and explores a real tension (comparison can endanger contentment yet supply the joy of progress), distinguishes two meanings of “joy,” and states the limits of its own position. The style is consistently clear and vivid (“measuring her entire interior against other people’s exteriors”; “Comparison is a thief only when it has nothing to give back”).
- **Total: 6/6.**

6.4 Sample Essay: 4 out of 6

(Approximately 470 words.)

The saying “comparison is the thief of joy” is mostly true because when people compare themselves to others, they usually end up feeling worse about what they have. Comparison can sometimes motivate people, but more often it takes away happiness, especially in today’s world of social media.

Social media is the biggest example of how comparison steals joy. Every day teenagers see pictures of their friends on vacation, getting awards, or looking perfect. Even if they were happy before, they start to feel like their own lives are boring. I have seen this happen to my friends, who said they felt bad after looking at a classmate’s posts about a trip to Europe. This shows that comparison makes people less happy with what they have. People also post only the good parts of their lives, so the comparison is not even fair.

Another example is sports. Athletes compare themselves to other athletes all the time. In the Olympics, some silver medalists look less happy than bronze medalists even though they did better. This is because the silver medalist is thinking about how close they came to gold, while the bronze medalist is just happy to get a medal. This shows that comparison can take away joy even when someone has done something great. The silver medalist should be proud, but comparing to the winner ruins it.

Comparison also hurts people in their hobbies. A student who likes to draw may start posting her art online, and then she sees another artist her age with thousands of followers. She might stop drawing because she thinks she will never be as good. When this happens she loses the joy that drawing used to give her, and she loses it because of the comparison and not because her drawings got worse. This is a clear example of the thief taking something that was already hers.

Some people say comparison can help you improve. For example, a student who sees that a classmate got a better grade might study harder. That is true, and I have done it myself in math class when I saw that my friend got a higher score on a test. It made me study harder for the next test and I improved. However, this kind of comparison is only good when it is used in a small way. Most of the time comparison makes people jealous instead of motivated, and jealousy is not a happy feeling. So even though comparison can be useful, it still takes away joy more than it helps.

In conclusion, comparison is the thief of joy because it makes people unhappy with what they have, as shown by social media and sports. People should try to focus on their own lives instead of comparing to others so they can be happier.

Scoring commentary.

- **Row A: 1.** The thesis takes a clear position: the claim is “mostly true,” with a nod to comparison’s occasional motivational value.
- **Row B: 3.** The essay provides specific evidence (social media posts about a trip, the silver-versus-bronze medalist example, the math-class anecdote) that supports each claim in a coherent line of reasoning: social media, then sports, then the counterargument and a limited concession. The explanation of the Olympic example is real commentary (“the silver medalist is thinking about how close they came to gold, while the bronze medalist is just happy to get a medal”). The point is held at 3 because much of the commentary only restates the evidence (“This shows that comparison makes people less happy with what they have”), the social-media example relies on a generalization about “teenagers,” and the claim that jealousy outweighs motivation “most of the time” is asserted, not shown. The examples in the first two body paragraphs make essentially the same point and could be reordered.
- **Row C: 0.** The counterargument is acknowledged and answered, but the answer is one sentence (“this kind of comparison is only good when it is used in a small way”). The essay does not explore what separates helpful from harmful comparison, does not define “joy,” and ends on a generalization (“People should try to focus on their own lives”).
- **Total: 4/6.**

6.5 Sample Essay: 2 out of 6

(Approximately 330 words.)

I agree that comparison is the thief of joy. When people compare themselves to others they always feel bad and then they can not enjoy their life. This is true for everyone.

For example, on social media there are many people who post pictures of their lives. Everyone wants to look like they have a great life so they post the best things. When other people see this they compare their life to the other person and they feel sad. I know people who feel bad because they see their friends having fun without them. This is why comparison steals joy from people.

Also comparison happens at school. Students compare their grades to other students and the ones that get low grades feel bad about themselves. Some students even stop trying because they think they will never be as smart as the other kids. Teachers should not put grades on the wall because it makes comparison worse. When students are not comparing they can enjoy learning more.

In sports it is the same. Practice is supposed to be fun, but many players stop enjoying it when they are always worried about who is the best on the team. If a team loses a game they compare themselves to the winners and feel like losers. Even a famous athlete can feel bad if another athlete is better than them. A thief is someone who takes something that is not theirs, and comparison takes away your joy, so the saying is true.

Some people think that comparison is good because it makes you work harder, but I do not agree because it is better to just be yourself. Everybody is different and should not be compared to others. Theodore Roosevelt said that comparison is the thief of joy, and he was a president so he knew what he was talking about.

In conclusion comparison is the thief of joy and people should stop comparing themselves to others.

Scoring commentary.

- **Row A: 1.** "I agree that comparison is the thief of joy" is a position on the claim, though it is stated without qualification and without defining what is meant by comparison or joy. It meets the minimum standard for a defensible thesis.
- **Row B: 1.** The evidence is general. The social-media, school, and sports paragraphs offer broad claims about what "everyone" or "students" feel, and the single personal reference ("I know people who feel bad because they see their friends having fun without them") is not developed. The commentary mostly restates the claim ("This is why comparison steals joy from people"), and the examples do not build on one another. The counterargument is dismissed in one sentence with an unsupported assertion ("it is better to just be yourself"). The appeal to Roosevelt is an appeal to authority; the stimulus itself says the attribution is uncertain, and the validity of the claim does not depend on who said it. The essay's claim about "a thief" does attempt to examine the metaphor, which keeps the essay at 1 and not 0.
- **Row C: 0.** The essay offers sweeping generalizations and a flat conclusion without nuance, qualification, or an exploration of tension.
- **Total: 2/6.**

End of Answer Key

Want a plan built around **your** student?

BOOK NOW →