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AP ENGLISH LANGUAGE · FREE RESOURCE

The Synthesis Essay Step by Step

This guide walks you through Question 1 of the AP English Language and Composition free-response section: the synthesis essay. It covers the 15-minute reading period, how to annotate six sources, how to find the conversation among them, how to build a thesis and line of reasoning, and how to cite. It includes a complete worked example (original six-source mini-prompt, annotated plan, a 6-point essay with margin commentary, and a 3-point essay with what went wrong), checklists, and two practice prompts. Answers and scoring notes are in the Answer Key at the end.

What the Synthesis Question Is

Section II of the exam is 2 hours 15 minutes and worth 55 percent of your score. It opens with a **15-minute reading period** for the synthesis sources; you may begin writing at any time, and you may move among the three essays freely. Each essay is scored 0–6 and the three are weighted equally. The suggested pacing in the booklet is 15 minutes of reading and planning plus about 40 minutes of writing for Question 1.

Facts about the question (from the College Board materials and Chief Reader Reports):

- You receive a short introduction to an issue of public concern, then **six sources lettered A–F**.
- Every set contains **at least one visual** (photograph, cartoon, infographic) and **at least one quantitative source** (graph, table, chart).
- Your task is to **develop a position** and **synthesize at least three of the sources** into a coherent essay.
- Prompts take two common shapes: **value** ("the value, if any, of...") and **factors** ("the most important factors that ... should consider when...").
- You cite by letter ("Source C") or by author/description in parentheses.

The Scoring Rubric in Plain Language

ROW	POINTS	WHAT EARNS IT
A: Thesis	0–1	A defensible position that responds to the prompt. Not a restatement, not "there are pros and cons."

ROW	POINTS	WHAT EARNS IT
B: Evidence and Commentary	0–4	Specific evidence from at least three sources, linked into a line of reasoning by commentary that explains <i>how</i> the evidence supports your claim.
C: Sophistication	0–1	Nuance: exploring tensions or complexities across sources, situating the argument in a broader context, or consistently vivid and purposeful style.

The Row B ladder is where most points are won or lost:

SCORE	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE
1	References two or more sources; commentary mostly summarizes.
2	Evidence from three or more sources; some explanation, but no line of reasoning or a faulty one.
3	Specific evidence from three or more sources supports all claims in a line of reasoning; commentary explains <i>some</i> of it.
4	Same, and commentary consistently explains how evidence supports the line of reasoning.

Remember that grammar and mechanics errors “typical of unrevised, timed writing” do not lower your score, unless they are so frequent that they interfere with communication, in which case they can block the fourth point in Row B.

The 15-Minute Reading Period: Minute by Minute

MINUTES	TASK
0:00–1:00	Read the prompt twice. Underline the verb and the object (“develop a position on the value, if any, of...”). Note whether it is a value or factors prompt.
1:00–10:00	Read the sources in order, annotating each in one pass (see codes below). About 90 seconds per text source; 45 seconds for each visual or graph.
10:00–12:00	Sort sources into camp s and role s. Choose your three to four.
12:00–15:00	Draft your thesis and a three-step line of reasoning . Write them in the margin or the notes box.

You may keep reading and planning after minute 15; the reading period is a floor on organization, not a wall. But do not start writing a full paragraph before you have a thesis and an order.

Annotation Codes

Use a tiny code system. In Bluebook you can highlight and use the notes feature; on paper, use margin marks.

MARK	MEANING
+	This source supports the idea that the thing has value / the factor is important
–	This source challenges the idea
~	Mixed or conditional
?	Something puzzling, a tension with another source
#	Specific number or fact worth quoting
"	A short phrase worth quoting (3–8 words)
→ B	Connects to or conflicts with Source B
WHO	Who is speaking and what do they want?

For each source, write a **one-phrase stance** at the top: "A: savings but not for everyone." That phrase is the seed of your commentary.

Reading a Visual or Quantitative Source

For a cartoon or photograph, use **OPTIC**: **O**verview (one-sentence summary), **P**arts (figures, objects, colors), **T**itle/Text (captions, labels), **I**nterrelationships (how the parts relate), **C**onclusion (what the creator argues). For a graph or table, answer three questions in plain words: *What is being measured? What is the biggest difference or trend? So what?* Always translate the number into a sentence: not "the bar is 19%," but "nearly one in five more teachers applied."

Finding the Conversation Among Sources

The Chief Reader Reports repeat one message: strong essays put sources **in conversation**, using one to extend, complicate, or challenge another. Weak essays march through sources one at a time ("Source A says... Source B says..."), or bundle them vaguely ("As seen in Sources B, C, and E").

Ask these questions as you annotate:

1. **Who agrees with whom, and for different reasons?** Two sources may both support a policy, one for money and one for health.
2. **Who disagrees about facts, and who disagrees about values?** A fact dispute can be settled by evidence; a value dispute needs a choice.
3. **Which source answers an objection raised by another?**
4. **Which source adds a condition?** ("It works, but only if...")

5. **Whose interest is behind each source?** An administrator, a parent, and a researcher weigh the same facts differently.
6. **Which source seems strong but has a limit?** (A survey of one district; a 5-year-old study; an advocacy group.)

Sentence frames that put sources in conversation (adapted from the 2025 Chief Reader Report and teacher materials):

- "While Source A emphasizes , **Source D reveals** ."
- "Source C's data complicates the claim in Source B by ____."
- "Source E extends Source A's point from ____ to ____."
- "Although Source F opposes this view, its own evidence about ____ actually suggests ____."

Building a Defensible Thesis and a Line of Reasoning

The Thesis

A thesis for synthesis must **take a position** that sources can support. It can be qualified. It should do more than say "there are benefits and drawbacks." Useful shapes:

- "Although [concession], [claim] because [reason 1] and [reason 2]."
- "[Policy] is valuable not because of [the obvious reason] but because of [the real reason]."
- "[Issue] is less a question of ____ than of ____."

Row A test. Ask: could a reasonable reader disagree? Does it respond to the prompt (value? factors?)? Is it more than a restatement?

THESIS	VERDICT
"The four-day school week has pros and cons."	0: no position
"Schools are changing their schedules."	0: fact
"A four-day week is valuable to small rural districts, but only when paired with strong support for families."	1: position with condition

The Line of Reasoning

A line of reasoning is a sequence of claims in which **each builds on the one before**. If your body paragraphs could be shuffled without changing the essay, you have a list, not a line.

Four reliable shapes for synthesis:

1. **Stakeholder sequence:** who benefits first, who is affected next, who bears the cost, what it means for the decision.
2. **Cause → effect → condition:** what the policy does, what follows, what has to be true for it to work.
3. **Claim → complication → resolution:** a first-level benefit, a challenge to it from another source, then a synthesis that holds both.
4. **Short-term → long-term:** immediate effects, then the effects over time.

Write each body-paragraph claim as a full sentence and read them in order. Together they should *argue*.

Choosing Your Sources

- Use **three or four**, not all six. Depth beats coverage.
- Include sources that **disagree** with each other or with you; you can use them to qualify your argument.
- Use at least one **visual or quantitative** source if it truly helps, and translate it into words.
- Use **two or more sources in most body paragraphs**; that forces conversation.

Citing Properly

You may cite by letter or by name. Both of these are fine:

- "According to Source C, nearly one in five more teachers applied..."
- "The district report (Source A) shows..."

Rules of thumb:

- Cite **every time** you use a source's information, whether quoted, paraphrased, or summarized.
- Prefer **short embedded quotations** (3–8 words) woven into your own sentence over long block quotes.
- Name the source's **role** when it matters: "the superintendent's memo (Source F)" signals self-interest.
- Do not cite sources you did not read or use vaguely ("the sources show").
- Never fabricate a quotation.

Synthesis vs. Summary

SUMMARY	SYNTHESIS
Source A says X. Source B says Y.	Source A and Source B disagree about , which suggests .
The writer shows the graph.	The graph's 19 percent increase supports my claim that ____.
Organized by source	Organized by your ideas
Sources are the point	Your argument is the point; sources are evidence
"This shows that..." followed by a restatement	Commentary adds an idea the quote does not already contain

The 2024 Chief Reader Report offers a diagnostic: a three-column chart with **quote**, **summary**, and **explanation**. If your third column only repeats the second, you are summarizing. The third column must say *why this matters to your thesis*.

The Body Paragraph Formula

For each body paragraph:

1. **Topic sentence**: a claim that advances your line of reasoning (not "Source A is about money").
2. **Evidence 1**: a specific detail from a source, embedded.

3. **Commentary 1:** explain how the evidence supports the claim (2 or more sentences).
4. **Evidence 2:** a second source that confirms, complicates, or extends.
5. **Commentary 2:** put the sources in conversation and tie back to the thesis.
6. **Link sentence:** set up the next claim.

Commentary starters: "This matters because...", "The effect of this is...", "In other words, ...", "This complicates...", "Taken together, ...", "This suggests the decision depends less on ___ than on ___."

Full Worked Example

Everything in this section was written for this guide. The sources are **fictional**; the people, districts, and numbers are invented for practice and do not describe real places or studies.

The Mini-Prompt

Over the past decade, a growing number of small and rural school districts have moved from a five-day school week to a four-day week, typically by lengthening the remaining school days and closing on Fridays or Mondays. Supporters point to savings and teacher recruitment; critics point to childcare and learning time. Carefully read the following six sources, including the introductory information for each source. Then synthesize material from at least three of the sources and incorporate it into a coherent, well-written essay that develops a position on the value, if any, of a four-day school week.

In your response you should do the following: respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible position; select and use evidence from at least three of the provided sources to support your line of reasoning; explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning; use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument. You may cite the sources as Source A, Source B, etc., or by using the descriptions in parentheses.

Source A (Newspaper report) *The following is excerpted from a news article in a regional newspaper, 2023. (Written for this guide.)*

"When the Harlan Valley School Board voted last spring to cut the school week to four days, board members cited a budget gap of \$410,000 and the loss of two bus routes. The district's superintendent said the change would save about 2 percent of operating costs, mostly in fuel, utilities, and substitute pay. 'It is not a dream solution,' she told the board. 'It is a way to keep the doors open.' Parents packed the meeting. Some wept with relief; others said they did not know what they would do with their children on Fridays."

Source B (Op-ed by a teacher) *The following is excerpted from an opinion column by a veteran high-school science teacher, 2023. (Written for this guide.)*

"I spent twelve years watching good teachers leave my district for towns that paid a few thousand dollars more. Since we went to four days, we have received applications from people who would not have looked at us before. A three-day weekend sounds like a perk, and it is; but it is also time to grade, to plan, to see a doctor, to be a person. And I find that on Monday I am a better teacher. I know the objections about learning time. But a rested teacher in a 50-minute class beats an exhausted one in a 45-minute class."

Source C (Graph, shown as a table) *The following data table is adapted from a fictional survey of 40 rural districts that adopted four-day weeks, conducted by an education policy group, 2022. (Written for this guide.)*

MEASURE, COMPARED WITH THE YEAR BEFORE THE CHANGE	DISTRICTS REPORTING
Teacher job applicants increased	78%
Operating costs decreased by more than 3%	18%
Operating costs decreased by 1-3%	55%
Student attendance improved	63%
Parents reported childcare difficulty on the off day	71%
Standardized reading scores declined	35%
Standardized reading scores unchanged or improved	65%

Source D (Academic study excerpt) *The following is excerpted from a research summary by two education economists, 2021. (Written for this guide.)*

"Results are mixed and depend on implementation. In districts that lengthened each school day by at least 50 minutes and offered optional enrichment on the off day, math scores showed no significant change. In districts that lengthened the day by less than 30 minutes, the total instructional hours fell by an average of 8 percent, and math scores declined modestly, especially among students eligible for free lunch. We caution against treating 'the four-day week' as a single policy."

Source E (Cartoon) *The following is a described editorial cartoon from a rural weekly newspaper, 2022. (Written for this guide.)*

Description: A tired parent in work boots stands at a front door holding a lunch box and a ring of keys. Behind her, three children in pajamas wave from a couch. A wall calendar shows Monday through Thursday in black and Friday circled in red with the word "?" over it. A speech bubble from a neighbor reads: "Long weekend, huh?" The parent's thought bubble reads: "Who watches them?"

Source F (District memo) *The following is excerpted from a memo from a district superintendent to parents, 2023. (Written for this guide.)*

"Beginning next fall, Friday will be a 'Community Day.' The district will offer a low-cost program at the elementary school from 7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. for families who need it, staffed by our own paraprofessionals and funded by the savings from fuel and utilities. Older students may take dual-credit courses online or work with approved employers. We recognize that a shorter week asks more of families. We believe that, with support, it asks less of the budget and more of our best teachers' time with students."

Step 1: Annotate and Sort (the 10-minute pass)

SOURCE	STANCE (ONE PHRASE)	KEY SPECIFICS	WHO IS SPEAKING?
A	savings are real but modest; "keep the doors open"	\$410,000 gap; about 2%	news report quoting board, parents
B	helps recruit and sustain teachers	applicants; "better teacher"	teacher, personal view

SOURCE	STANCE (ONE PHRASE)	KEY SPECIFICS	WHO IS SPEAKING?
C	most districts: more applicants, small savings, childcare problems	78%; 55%; 71%; 35%	policy group, survey
D	outcomes depend on implementation	50 min vs 30 min; 8% hours; free-lunch students	researchers
E	childcare burden	"Who watches them?"	local cartoonist
F	district fixes childcare with Friday program	7:30 to 5:00; funded by savings	district, self-interested

Camps: A, B, C (applicants) lean positive; E and C (71% childcare) lean negative; D and F are **conditional**: D says the day's length and enrichment matter; F is the district's attempt to meet the objection in E.

Conversation found: E raises the childcare problem; C confirms it is widespread (71%); F is the district's answer, funded by A's savings. D adds that learning outcomes depend on whether the lost day is made up. That is a chain: *money* → *teachers* → *childcare* → *learning*, with conditions at each link.

Tension worth exploring (for Row C): the same savings that make the change possible are the ones that pay for the fix, so the policy may be valuable only for districts that spend what they save on the families it burdens.

Step 2: Thesis and Line of Reasoning

Thesis: *A four-day school week is valuable for small districts, not primarily as a money-saving device, but as a way to keep and attract teachers, and it only delivers that value when districts use their savings to protect students' learning time and families' childcare.*

Line of reasoning (claims in order)

1. The financial case is real but modest, so it cannot be the main justification. (A: 2%; C: only 18% saw savings above 3%.)
2. The stronger benefit is teacher recruitment and retention. (B, C: 78% more applicants.)
3. The costs fall on families and learning, and they vary. (E, C 71%, D: hours lost.)
4. So the value depends on what districts do with the savings. (F, D.)

Sources used: A, B, C, D, E, F (six is more than required; the essay below leans on five). Each paragraph uses at least two.

Step 3: The 6-Point Essay with Margin Commentary

Commentary appears in brackets after each section. In your own essay you would not include it.

When the Harlan Valley School Board voted to shorten the school week, its stated reason was a budget gap of \$410,000 (Source A). But the district's own superintendent called the change "not a dream solution," and the evidence across the sources suggests why. A four-day school week is valuable for small districts, not primarily as a way to save money, but as a way to keep and attract teachers; and it delivers that value only when districts spend their savings on protecting students' learning time and families' childcare.

Commentary: Context sentence uses a specific detail from A and then a quotation to reveal that even the district is lukewarm. The thesis (last two sentences) takes a position, names a primary value (teachers), and sets a condition (spend savings on learning and childcare). That previews the line of reasoning. Row A: earned. Note that it does not merely echo the prompt.

The financial argument, though the one most often cited, is real but modest. The superintendent in Source A estimates savings of “about 2 percent of operating costs,” a figure that fits the survey in Source C, where 55 percent of districts saw cuts of only one to three percent and just 18 percent saw more than three. These are meaningful numbers to a district that must “keep the doors open,” but they are not transformative. A policy justified by savings alone would therefore be thin ground to stand on, because the savings come with costs that the budget line does not record. That gap between what is saved and what is spent elsewhere is what the rest of the sources help to explain.

Commentary: Topic sentence is a claim (modest, not the main justification), not a label. Two sources (A and C) are combined, and the commentary adds an idea beyond the data: “thin ground” and costs “the budget line does not record.” The last sentence is a link that sets up the next claim. This is what “line of reasoning” looks like: paragraph 2 raises a problem that paragraph 3 solves.

The stronger benefit is human rather than financial. A veteran teacher in Source B reports that after the change, his district began to receive applications “from people who would not have looked at us before,” and Source C indicates this is no isolated case: 78 percent of surveyed districts saw more teacher applicants. For small rural districts that lose good teachers to towns paying “a few thousand dollars more,” a three-day weekend works as a form of compensation that costs the district little. The teacher’s claim that a rested teacher outperforms an exhausted one is a personal view, and Source C does not measure it directly; nevertheless the application numbers suggest his experience is not unique. The four-day week, then, may be best understood as a recruitment tool that happens to also trim costs, which reverses the way the policy is usually defended.

Commentary: Moves from the weaker case to the stronger case: each paragraph builds. Evidence is specific (a quoted phrase, “78 percent”). The writer evaluates the source honestly: Source B is “a personal view” and Source C “does not measure it directly.” That is sourcing awareness and commentary, not summary. The final sentence “reverses the way the policy is usually defended” is a payoff that belongs to this essay’s argument.

Yet the benefit to teachers is paid for by others. The cartoon in Source E, in which a tired parent holds her keys and wonders “Who watches them?”, puts a human face on the finding in Source C that 71 percent of districts reported childcare difficulty on the off day. Learning may suffer as well, though less uniformly. Source C shows reading scores unchanged or improved in 65 percent of districts, but 35 percent saw declines, and the researchers in Source D explain the difference: when districts lengthened the school day by less than 30 minutes, instructional hours fell by about 8 percent and math scores dropped, especially among students eligible for free lunch. This pattern matters because it identifies who bears the risk: working families and lower-income students, the very groups with the fewest alternatives. A policy that helps recruit teachers by shifting costs onto the most vulnerable families cannot be called valuable without qualification.

Commentary: The paragraph pairs a visual (E) with data (C) and then brings in D to explain why outcomes diverge. D and C are put in conversation: C shows a split, D explains it. The commentary ("This pattern matters because it identifies who bears the risk") adds a new claim rather than restating. The last sentence returns to the thesis's qualified "value." Four sources now used: A, B, C, D, E.

The conclusion that follows is that the value of the four-day week depends on what a district does with its savings, and Source F shows one answer. The superintendent's memo promises a low-cost "Community Day" program from 7:30 to 5:00, "funded by the savings from fuel and utilities." The arrangement is revealing: the money that justified the change is the money that repairs its worst side effect. But the memo comes from the district, which has an interest in presenting the plan favorably, and the program serves younger children while older students are offered online courses and employers, a solution that may not work in a town with few employers. Source D's findings point to the other necessary condition, a longer school day that restores lost instruction. Taken together, the sources suggest that the four-day week is not a good or bad policy in itself but a trade whose value is set by the commitments that come with it.

Commentary: The writer uses F as the district's answer to E, exactly the "conversation" the Chief Reader describes. She identifies F's self-interest (rhetorical awareness of source), notes a limit (rural employers), and connects D back to the thesis condition. The final two sentences articulate a complexity: the savings fund the fix, so the policy's value depends on the district's choices. This is the Row C move: situating the argument in a broader tension, not just a hedge. Row C: earned. Row B: 4, because specific evidence from five sources supports every claim in a progressing line and commentary explains consistently.

Score: Row A 1, Row B 4, Row C 1 = 6.

Step 4: The 3-Point Essay and What Went Wrong

The following essay is a deliberately weaker sample of the kind that earns about a 3.

Many schools are changing to a four-day week. Some people think this is a good idea and some people think it is a bad idea. There are many pros and cons to the four-day school week. In this essay I will look at both sides.

Source A says that the school board voted to cut the week to four days because of a budget problem. It says they would save about 2 percent. This shows that the four-day week saves money. Source B is by a teacher. He says that he got more applications when they changed. He says he is a better teacher on Monday. This shows that teachers like the four-day week.

On the other hand, Source E is a cartoon about a parent. She is asking who watches the kids. This shows that parents have a problem with childcare. Source C is a table. It says 71 percent of parents had childcare problems.

In conclusion, the four-day week has good things and bad things. It saves money and teachers like it, but parents have childcare problems. Everyone should think about both sides before they decide.

Scoring: Row A 0 (no position; “pros and cons” and “both sides”). Row B 2 (evidence from four sources, but commentary only summarizes, with no line of reasoning). Row C 0. A reader might award Row A 0, Row B 2: total 2. Even if a lenient reader gives 3, the problems are the same.

What went wrong, point by point

PROBLEM	WHERE IT SHOWS	FIX
No thesis	“In this essay I will look at both sides.”	Take a position: “valuable if...”
Source-by-source summary	Paragraphs begin “Source A says,” “Source B is,” “Source E is”	Organize by your claims, with two or more sources per paragraph
Quote + restatement commentary	“This shows that the four-day week saves money.” (it says “about 2 percent”, which is modest)	Say what the evidence <i>means</i> for your argument
No line of reasoning	Paragraphs could be reordered with no change	Make each claim build on the one before
Sources not in conversation	E and C placed side by side, but never connected or compared with A or B	“Source C’s 71 percent confirms the problem E dramatizes”
Weak conclusion	“Everyone should think about both sides”	End with the implication or condition
No sophistication	Treats all information as equal	Explore the tension (savings fund the fix)

Notice that this student actually read the sources well. The problem is not comprehension; it is that the essay has no argument of its own.

Pacing the Whole Synthesis Task

PHASE	MINUTES	OUTPUT
Reading and annotating	10	One-phrase stance per source
Planning	5	Thesis plus 3–4 claims, sources assigned
Writing	35–40	Intro (3–4 sentences), 3 body paragraphs, brief conclusion
Review	2–3	Check citations and thesis

Target length is roughly 500–700 words. If time runs short, drop the conclusion; **never** drop the thesis or a body paragraph.

Checklists

Before You Write

- ☐ I know whether the prompt asks for value, factors, or another task.
- ☐ Each source has a one-phrase stance.
- ☐ I have a defensible thesis that is more than pros-and-cons.
- ☐ I have 3–4 claims in an order that builds.
- ☐ Every body paragraph has at least two sources.
- ☐ I translated the graph or table into plain words.

While You Write

- ☐ Each topic sentence is a claim, not a source label.
- ☐ Each piece of evidence is followed by commentary that adds an idea.
- ☐ I name the sources' roles when that matters (teacher, district, researchers).
- ☐ I put at least two sources in conversation.
- ☐ I cite every use of a source.

After You Write

- ☐ My thesis appears in the introduction (or clearly somewhere).
- ☐ My conclusion adds significance rather than repeating.
- ☐ I explored at least one tension or limitation.
- ☐ Any grammar errors will not block understanding.

Common Mistakes (From the Chief Reader Reports)

1. Source-by-source structure ("Source A says...").
2. Quote followed by paraphrase, with "this shows that" and nothing new.
3. Vague bundling: "As seen in Sources B, C, and E."
4. A thesis that lists pros and cons.
5. Ignoring part of the prompt (writing about a school week in general when the prompt is about the value of the policy).
6. Treating the visual or graph as decoration instead of evidence.
7. Treating each source as simply pro or con instead of seeing conditions.
8. A formulaic counterargument paragraph that never connects to the thesis.

Two Practice Prompts

Sources below are described briefly. Practice by finding or writing the full sources (see "Building Your Own Practice Sources" below) or by using released prompts from AP Central.

Practice Prompt 1: Real-Time Navigation Apps (modeled on a recent exam topic)

Prompt shape (value): Develop a position on the value, if any, of using real-time navigation apps for everyday travel.

Sources (described, original):

- **A:** A news article reporting that neighborhood streets once quiet now carry heavy traffic because apps reroute drivers.
- **B:** A graph showing the percentage of adult drivers who use a navigation app, rising from 40 to 85 percent over ten years.
- **C:** An op-ed by a delivery driver explaining how an app saves her an hour a day.
- **D:** A researcher's summary suggesting that people who rely on turn-by-turn directions form weaker mental maps.
- **E:** A photograph of a driver following a phone mount into a flooded road.
- **F:** A city transportation department memo discussing data sharing with app companies.

Plan questions: What is the real value (time, safety, independence)? Who bears the cost? Which sources disagree about the *kind* of value?

Practice Prompt 2: Public Spaces and Phones (original)

Prompt shape (factors): Develop a position on the most important factors a high school should consider when deciding whether to restrict student cell phone use during the school day.

Sources (described, original):

- **A:** A principal's letter explaining a phone-free pilot in the cafeteria.
- **B:** A table showing survey results from students and teachers on distraction and mood.
- **C:** A cartoon showing a classroom of students each looking down at a glowing screen while the teacher lectures to the wall.
- **D:** A parent's op-ed arguing that phones are necessary for emergency contact.
- **E:** A researcher's excerpt on academic achievement in schools with and without bans.
- **F:** A student's essay arguing that phones also help with accessibility, translation, and learning.

Plan questions: Which factors matter most (learning, safety, equity, enforcement, trust)? Which source complicates another?

Building Your Own Practice Sources

You can create unlimited practice by pairing a prompt from the archive with sources you find yourself: a news article, an opinion piece, a statistic, a cartoon, a government report, and a study abstract. Then follow the same procedure: stance phrase, camps, conversation, thesis, line of reasoning.

Answer Key

Worked-Example Scoring Summary

ESSAY	ROW A	ROW B	ROW C	TOTAL
6-point essay	1	4	1	6
3-point essay	0	2	0	2 (at most 3 with a lenient read)

Practice Prompt 1: Model Planning Notes

- **Possible thesis:** "Real-time navigation apps are valuable for individual drivers but costly to the communities and the skills they overlook, so their value depends on whether cities and users plan for the side effects."
- **Possible line of reasoning:** (1) Individual benefits are real (C, B: adoption) → (2) The benefits shift costs onto neighborhoods (A, F) → (3) There are hidden personal costs, such as weaker navigation skill (D) and overtrust in the screen (E) → (4) So the value depends on shared responsibility (F, A).
- **Source conversation:** C and A show the same behavior (rerouting) from two perspectives: the benefit to one driver is the burden on a street. D and E both warn of overtrust.
- **Row C moves:** explore the tension between individual and collective value; note that B's growth shows how many people accept the trade.

Practice Prompt 2: Model Planning Notes

- **Possible thesis:** "The most important factors in any phone policy are what it does to learning time and what it assumes about trust, since safety and equity concerns can be met without all-day bans."
- **Possible line of reasoning:** (1) Learning and attention (B, C, E) → (2) Safety and communication (D) can be addressed through narrower rules (A) → (3) Equity and accessibility (F) show a blanket ban can harm some students → (4) Trust and enforcement determine whether any rule works (A).
- **Source conversation:** D and F argue that phones serve legitimate needs; E suggests that outcomes differ by how bans are designed, which complicates both B and C.
- **Row C moves:** situate the question in the broader issue of how schools balance control with student responsibility.

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

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