

## Chief Reader Report on Student Responses: 2022 AP<sup>®</sup> English Language and Composition Free-Response Questions

• Number of Students Scored	520,771		
• Number of Readers	2,146		
• Score Distribution	Exam Score	N	%At
	5	53,999	10.4
	4	110,004	21.1
	3	126,068	24.2
	2	155,429	29.8
	1	75,271	14.5
• Global Mean	2.83		

The following comments on the 2022 free-response questions for AP<sup>®</sup> English Language and Composition were written by the Chief Reader Akua Duku Anokye, Associate Professor, Arizona State University. They give an overview of each free-response question and of how students performed on the question, including typical student errors. General comments regarding the skills and content that students frequently have the most problems with are included. Some suggestions for improving student preparation in these areas are also provided. Teachers are encouraged to attend a College Board workshop to learn strategies for improving student performance in specific areas.

## Question 1

**Task:** Synthesis

**Topic:** STEM Education

**Max Score:** 6

**Mean Score:** 3.56

### ***What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?***

Students responding to this question were expected to read six sources on the topic of STEM education and then write an essay that synthesized material from at least three of the sources and developed their position on the value, if any, of initiatives to improve STEM education and increase the number of students in the STEM disciplines. Students were expected to respond to the prompt with a thesis that takes a defensible position; use evidence from at least three provided sources to support their line of reasoning clearly, properly citing the sources; explain how the evidence supports their line of reasoning; and use appropriate grammar and punctuation in presenting their argument.

As per the Course and Exam Description (CLE-1.M, CLE-1.1), students were expected to be able to read the prompt, understand the task, use sources provided to write paragraphs that reflect their ability to establish claims and provide evidence, and demonstrate their understanding of prose and their ability to write using cogent, meaningful discourse.

### ***How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?***

This year's synthesis question asked students to develop a position on "the value, if any, of initiatives to improve STEM education and increase the number of students interested in the STEM disciplines." While some students seemed unfamiliar with the topic, those responses were much rarer. The topic was highly accessible for students, in part because their own education is often a product of those initiatives and also because the elements of STEM are such a part of their daily lives. There is a world of science and technology, and the prompt allowed them to discuss that world.

The sources themselves provided numerous pathways for students, several of them taking a qualifying position as related to balancing the need for humanities and STEM education, an approach emulated or adopted by many students. The sources were rich in arguments themselves; the question to which we returned as readers was this: What does the response do with the sources? As one table leader put it, lower scoring essays "mostly allow the sources to dominate the development of their claims." The richer responses made the topic their own, using the sources to build their own arguments. For example, rather than taking Marco Rubio's assertion in Source C at face value ("more welders and fewer philosophers"), one student chose to question it: "Why can't welders also be philosophers? With the integration of Arts and STEM, there could be welders who can quote a little Shakespeare."

Most students formed a clear position on the topic. They took defensible positions. The prompt invited students to consider both improvement and interest building, but few students accepted that full invitation, choosing instead to make broader arguments about STEM education. While that was acceptable, teachers can help their students by encouraging them to unpack any prompt in all its complexity. The scoring guide specifies that the thesis does not have to establish the line of reasoning. For some, choosing to place all ideas in the thesis led to awkward, often unparallel lists, or qualified arguments that labored with the topic: "Due to

these facts, the education system should continue and increase the number of students interested in the STEM disciplines, while still continuing to value the education of arts.”

More important, in terms of what we saw this year, is the evidence they choose and what they choose to do with it. We want to teach students that sources suggest possibilities, and no source inherently supports or refutes a particular position. Rather, students can look at the sources critically, considering carefully the implications of both what is, and is not, stated directly. Source F, for example, makes an argument against adding the Arts to STEM, yet many students used the author’s concession idea (“The arts are a source of enlightenment . . .”) in support of a pro-humanities argument. While some students did this knowingly and carefully, it sometimes reflected a more cursory read of the sources or a quick hunt for what they felt was support. Others slipped into what some of us refer to as “mighty leaps of logic” as they tried to make sources fit reasoning that the texts wouldn’t support.

**What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?**

Students did a solid job of reading the sources. A few did get confused by the arguments the sources made—with some seeing humanities education as already part of STEM—but most were able to engage with the sources correctly. They then made multiple claims in support, often looking at the value of STEM but then the need for the humanities. With evidence, we saw more students working to combine sources. This was often done as an additive form of reasoning, two sources that together supported the same or similar claims. That could work well, depending on the strength of the commentary. However, one path to Row C is “crafting a nuanced argument by consistently identifying and exploring complexities and tensions across the sources.” Fewer students took up this challenge. Teachers can encourage students to work on placing sources in true conversation with one another beyond binary approaches.

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A few did get confused by the arguments the sources made—with some seeing humanities education as already part of STEM—but most were able to engage with them correctly.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Essays that considered the evidence more carefully were more successful. Synthesis allows students to demonstrate that they are in control of the sources, engaging critically with the material, connecting ideas logically, and progressing purposefully through their arguments. Consider the difference between two responses that bring up the often-used Source E about MIT. The first holds closely to the source, slipping into paraphrase and an unsubstantiated idea about “interest.” The second, from one of the benchmarks, considers carefully the implications of the argument:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“This article really explains how STEM can be just as important as other areas and can be incorporated with those other areas to make it even easier to offer to students and to encourage them to be interested in the field</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<p>because it may contain elements of other areas they are interested in.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “Placing greater importance in the STEM field falsely attributes advancement and innovation to be purely dependent on science, technology, engineering and math; however it fails to recognize that the humanities facilitate the deep and original thinking necessary to effect such changes in society.”</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• However, one path to Row C is “crafting a nuanced argument by consistently identifying and exploring complexities and tensions across the sources.” Fewer students took up this challenge. Some readers describe how many responses see “each source as its own universe” versus those that explore the more nuanced relationships between sources.</li> </ul>	

**Based on your experience at the AP<sup>®</sup> Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?**

Teachers can help their students by encouraging them to unpack any prompt in all its complexity. They can also encourage students to work on placing sources in true conversation with one another beyond binary approaches. Teachers can continue to work with students on parenthetical documentation of their sources. Finally, teachers can work with students on different types of thesis writing, certainly letting them know that a central claim can exceed a sentence.

**What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?**

- Teachers will find example responses for this free-response question on the [AP Central AP English Language and Composition Exam page](#), along with scoring notes and specific commentary explaining why each point was or was not earned.
- The AP English Language and Composition [Course and Exam Description](#) includes a diverse collection of resources including the Instructional Approaches section, which has a dedicated description of approaches for the Synthesis FRQ.
- Teachers will find formative assessment practice for Synthesis in the Unit 3, Unit 6, and Unit 9 [AP Classroom Progress Checks](#). These FRQs are scaffolded to provide students support as they practice synthesizing sources and constructing their own argumentation.
- Teachers may also make use of the released [Synthesis FRQs in the AP Classroom Question Bank](#) as a part of classroom practice for students.
- Many of the [AP Daily Videos](#) located in AP Classroom will support building students’ skills specifically for the Synthesis FRQ. The videos that accompany Unit 3, 6, and 9 are particularly useful for students who need practice for this FRQ. Listed below are some of the AP Daily AP Daily videos that offer a range of entry points for students who are working to develop and refine their Synthesis skills.

- Unit 3: Skill 3.A Daily Video 1
- Unit 3: Skill 3.A Daily Video 2
- Unit 3: Skill 4.A Daily Video 1
- Unit 6: Skill 3.A Daily Video 1
- Unit 6: Skill 3.A Daily Video 2
- Unit 6: Skill 4.A Daily Video 1
- Unit 9: Skill 4.C Daily Video 1
- Unit 9: Skill 4.C Daily Video 2

## Question 2

**Task:** Rhetorical Analysis

**Topic:** Sonia Sotomayor’s message about her identity

**Max Score:** 6

**Mean Score:** 3.56

### ***What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?***

Students responding to this question were expected to read an excerpt from a 2001 speech delivered by Sonia Sotomayor at the University of California, Berkeley, School of Law when she was an appeals court judge and then write an essay that analyzed the rhetorical choices Sotomayor made to convey her message about her identity. Students were expected to respond to the prompt with a thesis that analyzes the writer’s rhetorical choices; select and use evidence to support their line of reasoning; explain how the evidence supports their line of reasoning; demonstrate an understanding of the rhetorical situation; and use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating their argument.

As per the Course and Exam Description (RHS-1.A, STL-1, CLE-1, REO-1), students were expected to be able to read and understand the rhetorical situation and address the strategic choices related to that rhetorical situation, explain how the writer/speaker’s rhetorical choices contributed to the purpose of the address, identify and describe their claims, and analyze and select the appropriate evidence to support their claims.

### ***How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?***

Readers found that the new rubric is having a positive effect on how students view the idea of a thesis. Virtually all responses at least attempted to craft a thesis, and most were successful. Students generally focused on Sotomayor’s relationship with her Latina identity; however, many students focused on other aspects as well: her identity as an American, a judge, a woman, or an immigrant. While thesis statements needed to address the prompt and analyze choices, they did not need to articulate a specific relationship between Sotomayor and her identity, although responses tended to be stronger when students could articulate that relationship at some point in the response.

Students addressed a wide variety of rhetorical choices in their responses. Traditional device-driven responses were the most common across all score points. Responses that were anchored in traditional rhetorical devices performed neither better nor worse than essays that took a broader approach to the types of choices a speaker makes. Some essays were also a hybrid of traditional devices and broader choices.

Among traditional devices, the most common devices discussed were appeals to ethos and pathos, imagery, anecdotes, repetition, and rhetorical questions. Of those, we saw the greatest range of interpretations in discussions of ethos: some students explored the way Sotomayor developed her ethos and how it functioned in her audience with great nuance. The most successful discussions of ethos focused on the choices Sotomayor made in order to establish her qualifications to speak on the topic of Latina identity, rather than the need to establish herself as qualified to speak at a commencement, or even more broadly as a trustworthy person.

Likewise, discussions of imagery ran the full range of depth of explanation: virtually all students pointed out that the food imagery was impactful, but the weaker responses tended to explain that the function of the imagery was to “grab the reader’s attention” or similar statements that were not tied to this particular rhetorical context. More nuanced explanations clarified that Sotomayor chose these foods to focus on because they would seem strange to many in her audience and then discussed the effect of that choice; others pointed out that the contrast between the dishes Sotomayor described and more common Mexican cuisine highlighted the underlying idea that identity is complex and that no one feature is definitive.

Other responses focused on rhetorical choices without using device-centered descriptions. They often used verbs instead of nouns: “Sotomayor described” or “Sotomayor focuses on.” These were not more or less successful than the device-centered responses. Many responses developed the idea that Sotomayor chose to emphasize her pride in her identity. This was a cogent insight that was developed across the full spectrum of depth and complexity. The more superficial responses recognized the element of pride but struggled to articulate either how it was conveyed through the speech and/or struggled to explain why Sotomayor chose to share her pride as an essential component of her identity: explanations stopped with the observation that pride was an element. Stronger responses were able to discuss both the how and the why: they identified her claims about her “unusual tastes” and many other ways pride was conveyed. They also identified the function of pride, such as to establish the importance of complex identities or to resist the narrative that it’s bad to be different, or as a call to action for others to embrace their own identities. Many students commented on the rhetorical choice to shift the focus of the narrative midway through, from a very personal reflection on identity to discussion of the place of identity in the broader context of American society. Many students picked up on the shift in pronouns from “I” to “we” and wrote about the significance of that shift with varying levels of complexity and understanding.

Students were drawn to the salad bowl/melting pot analogy. Weaker responses struggled to explain the significance and fell back on repeating or paraphrasing the provided footnote. Stronger responses correctly inferred that Sotomayor was describing her identity in a way that aligned with the “salad bowl” and explained why.

The prompt offered a wealth of ways to develop a sophisticated argument. Many students attempted to address the complexities and tensions in Sotomayor’s relationship with her identity. Some insightful approaches to this issue focused on the multifaceted nature of that identity, on her refusal to identify any one aspect as essential, and/or on the contrast between academic definitions and lived experience. Another approach was to discuss the inherent tensions between Sotomayor’s professional identity, as a judge, and her personal identity.

Another way to earn the row C point was to address the rhetorical situation. The prompt also offered a rich variety of ways to do that. Some students addressed how Sotomayor had to take into account her official status as a judge and representative of the American government, and so needed to take care to clarify that she was not rejecting her American identity. Some students explored the impact of Sotomayor’s speech on law school graduates who would likely be headed to positions of influence and power. Others focused on how Sotomayor used her own very personal stories of identity to invite her audience to explore their own complex identities with pride.

Few responses earned the point in row C solely through vivid/persuasive style. While there were many that were very well written, these responses tended to also qualify for the point using one of the other two criteria as well.

Many responses addressed some aspect of the complexities/tensions or rhetorical situation but did not earn the point because they made a reference to a relevant observation, but it was not part of the students' argument: for example, they quoted extensively from the "salad bowl and melting pot" metaphor but did not clearly explain its relevance to Sotomayor's point, or they described the rhetorical situation without explaining how it shaped her message about identity. The most successful papers earning the point for this row developed sophisticated observations about tension or situation throughout their response, coming back to the different ways Sotomayor addressed a central complexity or aspect of her rhetorical situation. There were also some excellent responses that dealt with the interplay of the tension between Sotomayor's multifaceted identity and her rhetorical situation as a speaker.

***What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?***

Some students failed to explain the function of ethos within this specific speech, falling back on broad statements about "establishing her authority" or "building trust" that would be weakly attached to a device ("Her conversational language connected with the audience"). Virtually all students pointed out that the food imagery was impactful, but the weaker responses tended to explain that the function of the imagery was to "grab the reader's attention" or similar statements that were not tied to this particular rhetorical context.

Students often focused on the repetition of "Latina," but many responses struggled to explain how the choice to repeat a word or phrase affected the way the audience experienced the speech, or why Sotomayor made that speech.

Students did at times struggle to place a rhetorical choice under the umbrella of a traditional device name. When it was an awkward or inaccurate label, students struggled to explain as clearly as they tried to discuss the text through an inaccurate lens, trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. In those cases, the students would have benefited from experience with a wider variety of ways of approaching the concept of "rhetorical choice." This was most common with ethos, pathos, and logos—students can and did make cogent observations using those lenses, but often responses used them without fully explaining the why or the how.

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some students failed to explain the function of ethos within this specific speech, falling back on broad statements about "establishing her authority" or "building trust" that would be weakly attached to a device ("Her conversational language connected with the audience").</li> <li>• Students often focused on the repetition of "Latina," but many responses struggled to explain how the choice to repeat a word or phrase affected the way the audience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While thesis statements needed to address the prompt and analyze choices, they did not need to articulate a specific relationship between Sotomayor and her identity, though essays tended to be stronger when students could articulate that relationship at some point in the response.</li> <li>• Some students explored the way Sotomayor developed her ethos and how it functioned in her audience with great nuance.</li> </ul>



<p>experienced the speech, or why Sotomayor made that choice.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The more superficial responses recognized the element of pride but struggled to articulate either how it was conveyed through the speech and/or struggled to explain why Sotomayor chose to share her pride as an essential component of her identity: explanations stopped with the observation that pride was an element.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The most successful discussions of ethos focused on the choices Sotomayor made in order to establish her qualifications to speak on the topic of Latina identity, rather than the need to establish herself as qualified to speak at a commencement, or even more broadly as a trustworthy person.</li> <li>More nuanced explanations clarified that Sotomayor chose these particular foods to focus on because they would seem strange to many in her audience and then discussed the effect of that choice; others pointed out that the contrast between the dishes Sotomayor described and more common Mexican cuisine highlighted the underlying idea that identity is complex, and no one feature is definitive.</li> <li>Stronger responses were able to discuss both the how and the why: they identified her claims about her “unusual tastes” and many other ways pride was conveyed.</li> <li>Many table leaders observed that the strongest essays came from students who could develop a position using a traditional device-driven approach when it was appropriate but who had the confidence and experience to speak about choices as they saw them when no traditional device would fit. Others noted that students who depended on specific paraphrase and short, precise quotes often wrote more clear and specific commentary than those who carefully transcribed longer stretches of text.</li> </ul>

***Based on your experience at the AP<sup>®</sup> Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?***

Many responses spoke of Justice Sotomayor as “Sonia.” While this did not have any impact on a student’s score, some readers were uncomfortable with what could be read as a dismissive way to address her. There were multiple requests that teachers address the issue of respectful address, especially of women. Teachers

can also help their students by encouraging them to delve deeper. For example, students often focused on the repetition of “Latina,” but many responses struggled to explain how the choice to repeat a word or phrase affected the way the audience experienced the speech, or why Sotomayor made that choice. Students also would have benefited from experience with a wider variety of ways of approaching the concept of “rhetorical choice.” This was most common with ethos, pathos, and logos—students can and did make cogent observations using those lenses, but often responses used them without fully explaining the why or the how. Another observation was that students who depended on specific paraphrase and short, precise quotes often wrote more clear and specific commentary than those who carefully transcribed longer stretches of text.

**What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?**

- Teachers will find example responses for this free-response question on the [AP Central AP English Language and Composition Exam page](#), along with scoring notes and specific commentary explaining why each point was or was not earned.
- The AP English Language and Composition [Course and Exam Description](#) includes a diverse collection of resources including the Instructional Approaches section which has a dedicated description of approaches for the Rhetorical Analysis FRQ.
- Teachers will find formative assessment practice for Rhetorical Analysis in the Unit 1, Unit 4, and Unit 7 [AP Classroom Progress Checks](#). These FRQs are scaffolded to provide students support as they practice examining the rhetorical situation and rhetorical choices that authors/speakers employ.
- Many teachers may also make use of the released [Rhetorical Analysis FRQs in the AP Classroom Question Bank](#) as a part of classroom practice for students.
- Many of the [AP Daily Videos](#) located in AP Classroom will support building students’ skills specifically for the Rhetorical Analysis FRQ. The videos that accompany Unit 1, 4, and 7 are particularly useful for students who need practice for this FRQ. Listed below are *some* of the AP Daily videos that offer a range of entry points for students who are working to develop and refine their Rhetorical Analysis skills.
  - Unit 1: Skill 1.A Daily Video 1
  - Unit 1: Skill 1.A Daily Video 2
  - Unit 1: Skill 1.A Daily Video 3
  - Unit 4: Skill 3.B Daily Video 1
  - Unit 4: Skill 3.B Daily Video 2
  - Unit 7: Skill 1.A Daily Video 1
  - Unit 7: Skill 1.A Daily Video 2
  - Unit 7: Skill 7.C Daily Video 1
  - Unit 7: Skill 7.C Daily Video 2

### Question 3

**Task:** Argument

**Topic:** Colin Powell on making decisions

**Max Score:** 6

**Mean Score:** 3.17

#### ***What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?***

Students responding to this question were expected to read a quote about making decisions from a 1995 autobiography by Colin Powell and then write an essay that argued their position on the extent to which Powell's claim about making decisions is valid. Students were expected to respond to the prompt with a thesis that takes a defensible position; provide evidence to support their line of reasoning; explain how the evidence supports their line of reasoning; and use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating their argument.

As per the Course and Exam Description, (CLE-1.0, REO 1.0, STL-1.R), students were expected to be able to select evidence to develop and refine their claims, use appropriate approaches of organization and reasoning to support their argument, and make stylistic choices that advance that argument.

#### ***How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?***

The prompt for the Argument Essay raised a number of questions. The prompt read: "Colin Powell, a four-star general and former United States secretary of state, wrote in his 1995 autobiography: '[W]e do not have the luxury of collecting information indefinitely. At some point, before we can have every possible fact in hand, we have to decide. The key is not to make quick decisions, but to make timely decisions.' Write an essay that argues your position on the extent to which Powell's claim about making decisions is valid."

The quotation and prompt were notably accessible this year: making decisions or gathering information in order to make decisions are familiar concepts for students of all backgrounds and abilities. Because of the prompt's accessibility, we could distinguish between responses that integrated the required skills and those that did not. Sometimes if a prompt is challenging, we struggle to know if student performance is based on their writing skills or understanding of the topic. That was not the case this year.

Most responses had identifiable theses that ranged from simple arguments (e.g., "I agree with Powell ..." or "It's important to gather as much information as possible before making a decision") to those that were more complex (e.g., "Not all decisions are equally significant and thus they require different levels of consideration before making them"). The few responses that included writing but did not receive the thesis point tended to be factual statements (e.g., "We're all faced with decisions in life"). However, even if a response started with factual statements early on, it most often stated at least some kind of defensible thesis later in the response.

This prompt measured students' abilities to provide evidence and connect that evidence to a larger argument through commentary. The weaker responses tended to note decision-making occasions, but they did little to develop their points or connect them back to a larger claim. The stronger responses did just that: they not only brought up examples and reasons but provided specific details about those decisions and developed them through the commentary to explain how they supported the larger claims.

*Evidence* used for this prompt—as for many recent argument prompts—is becoming synonymous with *examples*. Clearly, many students are being taught to generate three examples in specific areas and develop them in separate body paragraphs. Many times, this feels formulaic: one historic example, one from a novel, and one from current events. While these areas can provide effective fodder for examples, often they feel forced and underdeveloped, perhaps because students think this is the only way to develop an argument or line of reasoning. Some of the stronger responses this year took a single example—such as deciding about college or a specific historic case (e.g., Obama’s pursuit of bin Laden or JFK’s Cuban missile crisis)—and developed different claims about them over multiple paragraphs, which provided more depth and nuance than three quick examples from different areas.

As a result of the aforementioned, students are turning the argument essay into an **example essay**. They are merely saying that Powell’s idea is valid/invalid and giving some examples that demonstrate it being valid/invalid. Ideally, we’d like the students to take a position and support that position with actual premises (supporting claims on the rubric), but even when students are doing this in their thesis, they aren’t focusing on arguing those premises in the body of their essay. And for that, we are getting a lot of specious logic—i.e., *because of this one example I chose (that may or may not be correct), therefore my idea is correct*.

Ultimately, the type of evidence/examples developed in the response is less important than how specific the details are that the response develops and how well it makes the case to connect the example to the larger claim about decisions. For example, by far the most common example used as evidence this year was a student’s college decision. Some of these were done brilliantly, elaborating on the kind of information the student might or might not have when making this decision, and often noting that there is no way to gather all the information before having to make that weighty decision. However, the weaker (and more common responses) merely noted that college is a big decision, so it is important to gather information to make an informed choice. This type of response was on topic, but it didn’t deal with the part of Powell’s quote that suggests limits in time and/or access to information, so the response often felt flat or underdeveloped. Other personal examples performed similarly—relationships, athletics, jobs/internships, even fashion—and were only as effective as the specificity of details and connections they made to the argument through commentary.

Examples pulled from other arenas were also only as strong as the specific details and commentary. Many students used historic examples, which were apropos for this prompt. Not surprisingly, many examples came from United States history since many students take that course at the same time as AP English Language. We read many responses that included a situation from the American Revolution, Civil War, or World War II. Others, as with Obama or JFK mentioned above, were more current events, which also lent themselves to effective argument depending on how well the events were described and connected back to the argument. We saw many responses unpacking details around the current situation in the Ukraine, challenges responding to COVID, or problems with inflation and the economy. We may have seen fewer literary examples this year, though some responses looked at decisions made by fictional characters. The same could be said about popular culture: TV, movies, celebrity culture. They all had potential. While some examples were richer and easier to develop in relationship to the prompt, the choice of area mattered less than their development and support, which is what we want to see from this prompt.

***What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?***

The most common misunderstanding seen in responses was that students misread or misunderstood the word “timely.” The most common misuses were to either equate timely with quick or present the two as opposites. Timely simply means that something is done at the right or appropriate time. In some cases,

timely means quick (e.g., a bike rider making a quick decision based on a fast-approaching obstacle). In other cases, it could mean something less instantaneous (e.g., a student deciding on which college to attend). Besides the often-seen lack of differentiation between timely and quick, we saw students partitioning it further and talking about “time” available as a factor, i.e., even when a reasonable amount of time is available to make a decision, they cautioned again “overthinking” the problem and wasting valuable time. Responses were not penalized for not understanding the definition or nuance of the word “timely.”

Another common gap for students is that they often focused exclusively on the task and last sentence of the quote without noting or developing the important ideas in the first two sentences: “[W]e do not have the luxury of collecting information indefinitely. At some point, before we can have every possible fact in hand, we have to decide.” This earlier portion of the quote sets up the last sentence and creates a tension that makes the topic more interesting. Students who grappled with the challenges of decision making—that information isn’t always accessible before having to make a decision—had deeper and more interesting arguments to develop. Since many students seemed only to key in on the last sentence regarding quick and timely decisions, they didn’t have the same level of commentary in support, which resulted in a weaker line of reasoning. These shallower responses resulted in the type of quick, surface-level listing of three decisions in three different areas without much commentary or connection to the argument.

One way to address the surface-level responses is to help teachers understand the scoring guide language regarding “multiple claims.” In the “Decision Rules and Supporting Notes” section of Row B, the phrase “multiple supporting claims” is used several times to distinguish the 3rd and 4th points in that row from the lower scores. It’s possible that students and teachers are reading that language and assuming they are required to have examples from different areas—personal, literary, history, contemporary—in order to have “multiple claims.” Much of the training for question leaders and table leaders was to encourage raters to move away from counting examples and instead score based on how well the examples are detailed and connected to the argument with commentary to create a line of reasoning. We showed responses that effectively used only one arena—like a decision to drop a nuclear weapon to end World War II—and developed multiple claims about that decision. This seems to be an area that is worth further communication.

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Responses that were based on the difference between a quick decision and a thoughtful decision with little regard to the timeliness of the issue. Several thesis statements merely stated, “I agree ...” without developing the defensible claim: “I agree with Powell BECAUSE ...”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The stronger essays discussed the consequences, both positive and negative, of both <b>quick decisions</b> and <b>timely decisions</b>. One is not necessarily better or guarantees success.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Responses with erroneous information, such as Rosa Parks making a quick decision to keep her seat on the bus, or that the decision to drop the atomic bomb on Japan in World War II was quick.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Responses that dealt with the idea that information may be limited for any number of reasons and therefore, decisions often have to be made without all the information a person might want.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responses that discussed mundane decisions, such as what to eat for breakfast or the color of a shirt to purchase, followed in the next paragraph by a much more serious decision, such as using an atomic bomb. While some responses used these differences to demonstrate that not all decisions are equal, others provided no coherent transition or line of reasoning.</li> <li>• Responses that began with explicit agreement with Powell without fully acknowledging the nuance of his statement and then ultimately disagreeing with him by the end of the response without realizing it. Of course, many students try to “walk the fence” and agree/disagree <b>OR</b> disagree in part and try to argue both sides without the benefit of merely introducing and then mediating a refutation as part of a superior defense.</li> <li>• Responses that forced a certain number or type of examples regardless of their connection to the prompt.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responses that provided specific details regarding the examples they were using so that they demonstrated a connection with the quoted materials.</li> <li>• Responses that developed commentary about how the specific examples used in the essay helped to demonstrate the accuracy or appropriateness of the claims being made by the student.</li> </ul>
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***Based on your experience at the AP<sup>®</sup> Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?***

Some students might not have done as well on this prompt as they might have because I have a sense that they thought the prompt was “easy.” By easy, I mean this prompt was accessible. Making decisions does not seem like a hard question. Thus, I would guess that some students did not read the prompt as closely as they should have and moved instead into developing their three examples (see below for more). While the argument FRQ has the least amount of text for students to read, it’s still important for them to read it closely. The prompt and quote will have elements in them that should provide some level of tension or nuance that should be considered in the response. I often teach my students to slow this process down by not writing their very first thoughts. Perhaps (even in a timed testing environment), students would be well-served by writing down four or five ideas about what the quoted material is saying to spend more time thinking about the prompt and quote before rushing into the introduction.

Related to the suggestion above, I get a sense that so much of the preparation for this prompt focused on steering students to areas where they can find examples to use as evidence. Generating ideas for the examples seems less important in this case than locating the most effective examples that have the potential to be developed in support of the argument. I know many teachers tell students to include or avoid certain areas (e.g., yes to history or literature and no to popular culture or personal), but that advice isn’t universal. This year’s prompt allowed for good personal examples if the students spent enough time developing the details of their decisions and connecting back to the limitations in time and/or information. Focusing so much on which examples to use and how many might distract students from the more substantive issues like developing the details in the examples and providing commentary to explain their significance and appropriateness in support of a claim.

That leads to my final suggestion, which is actually in two parts: 1) specificity in describing the example and 2) commentary to connect the example to the claim. Responses that spent time developing specific details around the example were far better than those that merely listed or provided a short description. Using the most common response as an example, college decisions could be described in great or just surface-level detail. The best responses provided specifics about details that could be easily known (e.g., location, cost, reputation/ranking, strengths) while also providing other details that might not be as easily known (e.g., how well a student will adjust to being away from home, how hard the classes will be, if the student will find friends or a support network). The responses that provided more details about the context and situation were stronger and ultimately had more detail to write about in the commentary. Teachers should focus on helping students develop details and commentary so that the students' ideas and connections become the central feature of the response. The weaker responses again tended to feel more like formulaic lists with thin to no details and connections made.

***What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?***

- Teachers will find example responses for this free-response question on the [AP Central AP English Language and Composition Exam page](#), along with scoring notes and specific commentary explaining why each point was or was not earned.
- The AP English Language and Composition [Course and Exam Description](#) includes a diverse collection of resources including the Instructional Approaches section which has a dedicated description of approaches for the Argument FRQ.
- Teachers will find formative assessment practice for Argument in the Unit 2, Unit 5, and Unit 8 [AP Classroom Progress Checks](#). These FRQs are scaffolded to provide students support as they practice constructing their own argumentation.
- Many of Teachers may also make use of the released [Argument FRQs in the AP Classroom Question Bank](#) as a part of classroom practice for students.
- Many of the [AP Daily Videos](#) will support building students' skills specifically for the Argument FRQ. The videos that accompany Unit 2, 5, and 8 are particularly useful for students who need practice for this FRQ. Listed below are *some* of the AP Daily videos that offer a range of entry points for students who are working to develop and refine their Argument skills.
  - Unit 2: Skill 2.B Daily Video 1
  - Unit 2: Skill 2.B Daily Video 2
  - Unit 2: Skill 2.B Daily Video 3
  - Unit 5: Skill 6.A Daily Video 1
  - Unit 5: Skill 6.A Daily Video 2
  - Unit 8: Skill 8.A Daily Video 1
  - Unit 8: Skill 8.A Daily Video 2