



Chief Reader Report on Student Responses: 2023 AP[®] English Language and Composition Set 2 Free-Response Questions

• Number of Students Scored	562,328		
• Number of Readers	2,550		
• Score Distribution	Exam Score	N	%At
	5	58,029	10.32
	4	110,997	19.74
	3	146,624	26.07
	2	165,818	29.49
	1	80,860	14.38
• Global Mean	2.82		

The following comments on the 2023 free-response questions for AP[®] 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: Vertical Farms

Max Score: 6

Mean Score: 3.58

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 vertical farming 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 vertical farms to the future of agriculture. 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, 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 vertical farms to the future of agriculture.” Unlike some education-centered prompts from recent years, this prompt dealt with material that was outside most students’ personal experience. Overall, students struggled at times to situate the specific information of the sources within the more general context of agriculture: student errors were often one of scale. For example, it was not uncommon for responses to take the position that vertical farming would replace open field agriculture entirely, which was an overextension of the sources. Students were generally more prepared to talk about adjacent issues such as climate change and world population growth, and many attempted to create connections to these more familiar topics, sometimes with great success. When evaluating the responses, it was essential to recognize that a claim supported by “adequate evidence that is clearly explained” could be a valid component of a line of reasoning, even if a student with more personal experience of agriculture could present counterarguments that were external to the sources provided. It took care to distinguish these responses with ones that represented “simplistic, inaccurate, or repetitive explanations that don’t strengthen the argument.”

The sources were generally accessible; there were relatively few misreads, and even fewer that resulted in a faulty line of reasoning. The sources provided a wealth of evidence both in support of vertical farming and presenting problematic elements of vertical farming. Generally, Readers found the arguments in the sources against vertical farming to be somewhat stronger, but students overwhelmingly chose to write responses focusing on the benefits of vertical farming. One possible factor was that the supportive stance was far more straightforward, and students felt more comfortable simply explaining the advantages; taking the counter position required the more complex task of first explaining the proposed advantages and then explaining the objections to those advantages. Students may have been reluctant to attempt this, or they simply did not consider such an option. However, students who rigidly addressed only the advantages often fell into a pattern of summarizing or paraphrasing rather than offering explanations. The accessibility and wealth of

provided evidence worked against students in these cases, as they could construct lengthy responses that never went past summary and paraphrase.

There was an uptick in responses that substituted an attempt at rhetorical analysis for synthesis and explanations; students would dedicate significant time to explaining the rhetorical situation of sources, based on the bibliographic information. They would also make claims regarding the intent of the speaker for a particular source (“The author of Source A wants to show that vertical farming is profitable”). These efforts generally represented a description of the source rather than evidence and commentary and did not usually contribute to the response’s line of reasoning. In some cases, the rhetorical situation was connected to the line of reasoning with an explanation, but these were uncommon.

The vast majority of responses demonstrated that students understood that the task was to create a line of reasoning. This is a meaningful improvement from when the new scoring guide was introduced and a vast improvement from when the synthesis task was first introduced. Very few students organized their responses by source, as was common in the past. Most students at least attempted a clear thesis and organized their response into paragraphs that made a specific claim. Many included a transitional element in their topic sentence. However, many responses did not develop their line of reasoning any more specifically than that. The most successful responses continually built their line of reasoning, with connective words, phrases, and sentences as an intrinsic part of every explanation of evidence within their paragraphs. This was especially true when students attempted to juxtapose two or more sources: lower-scoring responses often consisted of evidence of multiple sources included under a single topic sentence but no attempt to explain their relationship or even relevance to each other.

Many high-scoring responses consisted primarily of two substantial body paragraphs, though some certainly had more. There were many responses that contained three body paragraphs that were all too brief to present a claim, evidence, and a clear explanation, let alone build a connection to another idea. It created the impression that students may be skipping explanations to save time because they have the misconception that they need three body paragraphs for a response to be complete. In other cases, the students may have been moving on because they were unsure how to construct an explanation and so moved on to an additional piece of evidence instead. These responses were generally low scoring because there was no line of reasoning in the disjointed paragraphs.

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

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Weaker responses had statements that were positioned as theses but in fact consisted of equivocation (“There are advantages and disadvantages to vertical farms”) or were statements of fact, specifically about how others feel (“Scientists say vertical farms will revolutionize agriculture”).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stronger responses presented theses that qualified the issue, even slightly. A minimal case might be “Vertical farms offer advantages for the future, but <i>disadvantages</i> in the present.” A more nuanced qualifier would be “Despite the high implementation costs and undeveloped technology, in the long run vertical farms will be an essential element in developing world-wide food security.”

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rather than construct a line of reasoning that consisted of evidence that referenced at least three of the provided sources and explained how that evidence related to the student’s argument, weaker responses substituted a mixture of direct quotes, which would be attributed with close paraphrase and summary of adjacent lines. Students seemed to feel that the paraphrases constituted explanations and did not recognize that they were not building a line of reasoning. For example, students would write something such as: “Instead of building from scratch one can repurpose ‘shipping containers and abandoned warehouses’ (Source B), which will allow old infrastructure to be used in a new way and provide food.” In this case, what appears to be an explanation is really a direct paraphrase of the next line in Source B and does not constitute an explanation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger responses explained the sources by articulating implications or connections that the student has built or inferred. For example, a response might follow the observation that vertical farms can be built in “shipping containers and abandoned warehouses” (Source B) with an explanation of how urban areas that contain abandoned warehouses are also likely to be in need of access to fresh produce, or observe that if the taste of produce from vertical farms is superior to that of field crops (Source A), then vertical farming would increase the amount of vegetables people eat, and so increase public health.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students would craft a counterargument as a way to “articulate the limitations of an argument ... by situating it within a broader context” but fail to do so in a way that meets the standard for the Row C point. At times, students would correctly identify that a statement from a source represents a counterargument to their response, but rather than engage with the source, they would simply dismiss it. For example, students often correctly identified the argument that the high price of vertical farming was a barrier to its adoption, but they simply identified that it was a counter or made a simple statement that cost was less important than the issue of food insecurity with no explanation or discussion. Other times, students did develop an argument in response to the claim in the source, but they did not situate it within the broader context of their line of reasoning as a whole. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger responses engaged with the counterclaim in an extensive discussion that was an important element in the overall line of reasoning that situated the particular claim within a broader context. For example, some students countered the argument about the high price of vertical farming by suggesting that new technology is often prohibitively expensive, but costs go down over time, and then they defended that claim by using historical examples, such as consumer electronics, to illustrate how that process would happen. This approach situated the claim about the current cost of a technology within the broader context of long-term implications of this technology.

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

The fundamental skill of synthesis is the ability to identify and develop connections between ideas. Students often focus on the idea of evidence as “support” for their claim, which leads to cherry-picking quotes that seem to “support” their thesis. Stronger responses explain those quotes; weaker responses paraphrase them. However, in both cases the scope of the essay is limited because the student is only evaluating connections as a binary—they support or they do not. To fully engage in conversation with the sources, students need to approach the synthesis task with a broad understanding of how ideas can connect—in addition to supporting the same claim, they can be in opposition, they can look at the same concept through different lenses, or with different priorities, or on different scales. They can represent a cause, an effect, an exemplar, an underlying principle, a problem, a solution, an old misconception, a new truth, or an exception. It is only by coming at synthesis with an understanding of the complex ways ideas interact that students can truly engage with the sources.

To develop this skill, teachers need to model developing and explaining these connections between ideas for students and provide opportunities to practice developing and explaining those connections themselves. This can be in formal writing, but it also can be through class discussion, concept maps, quick-writes or almost any other classroom practice. The key element is to provide opportunities and hold students accountable not just for identifying connections but explaining the connections in depth. It is especially effective to build those connections across units or classes. The larger a student’s internal library of connections, the more readily they can build connections within and among sources on the synthesis prompt (and in all areas of academic or intellectual exploration).

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 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. Simply filter the Question Type for FRQ: Synthesis.
- Many of the [AP Daily Videos](#) located in AP Classroom will support building students’ skills specifically for the Synthesis FRQ. The videos that accompany Units 3, 6, and 9 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 Synthesis skills.
 - Unit 3: Skill 6.A Daily Video 2
 - In this video, students learn how to develop meaningful and appropriate commentary for the synthesis essay. This lesson will help students respond to the sources, which is highlighted in the “Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps” table above.

- Unit 6: Skill 4.A Daily Video 1
 - This video focuses on integrating alternate and supporting perspectives within a paragraph, which might assist students in determining connections between sources.
- Unit 9: Skill 4.C Daily Video 2
 - This lesson instructs students about how to use transitions to qualify arguments and can support students to develop nuanced positions, as addressed in the first row of the “Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps” table.

Question 2

Task: Rhetorical Analysis

Topic: Rita Dove Commencement Address

Max Score: 6

Mean Score: 3.39

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

Students responding to this question were expected to read a 2016 commencement address given by Rita Dove about wishes she has for her graduating students, and then write an essay that analyzes the rhetorical choices Dove makes to convey her message about what she wishes for her audience of graduating students. Students were expected to respond to the prompt with a thesis that presented a defensible position; provide evidence to support their line of reasoning; explain how the evidence supported their line of reasoning; and use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating their argument.

As per the Course and Exam Description, students were expected to read and understand the rhetorical situation, discuss the speaker’s rhetorical choices for that particular 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?

Based on the scoring guidelines, many responses created a defensible thesis by stating the rhetorical choices along with the perceived message or purpose of the speech. The majority of responses mentioned at least two to three rhetorical choices in an attempt to create a defensible thesis. Students generally focused on Dove’s wishes for the graduates and how those wishes convey her desire for them to obtain the same success and self-actualization she has experienced. In other responses, students mistook the accessibility of the prompt and responded with a vague thesis that often did not specifically state the message, rhetorical choices, or purpose, such as “Dove’s speech is successful because she chooses to give wishes to her audience.” Often theses such as these would not lead to effective analysis of the text. The primary objective of the thesis is to respond directly to the prompt and identify the rhetorical choices to be analyzed in the response; however, students’ responses did not need to focus on the universal idea of success and self-actualization. In many cases, responses would begin with thesis statements that would not mention rhetorical choices in the introductory paragraph but would continue to discuss specific rhetorical choices and restate a more specific thesis in the conclusion.

Stronger responses clearly drew connections between the rhetorical choices and the development of Dove’s message. In general, device-driven responses performed neither better nor worse than pattern-of-organization responses. Some essays used descriptions of functions and phrases instead of naming devices specifically. For example, some responses used description of “personal stories” instead of using the device (“anecdotes”), which is as acceptable as naming the precise device. The most common rhetorical choices discussed were appeals to ethos, repetition of “I wish you,” references to known figures, and anecdotes, which had the most effective discussions. Some students discussed how Dove’s use of personal stories affected her audience and created an inspirational tone. The most effective analysis of the anecdotes noted that Dove provided experiential illustrations of each of her three wishes in order to help the graduates see the values as applicable in their own lives. Some responses focused on the perception that Dove chose to emphasize her personal experiences or other’s personal stories of perseverance to convey self-actualization.

Also, explanations of repetition appeared in all levels of responses: each of these responses exploring repetition used the “I wish you” statement as an example. The emerging responses were inclined to explain that the purpose of each statement was to “keep the audience interested”; more developed discussions specifically clarified that Dove chose to focus on the idea that she wanted her advice to be conveyed as hope she had for the graduates because of her personal connection with them. Other responses focused on references to known figures. Emerging responses mentioned Dove’s references to Percy Bysshe Shelly or Lupita Nyong’o as a way that Dove “establishes credibility or creates ethos” but could not elaborate on how this choice related to purpose or the development of the message. Most discussions did not extend past a cursory discussion of how it relates to the audience. More developed responses were able to discuss both the function and the purpose: “Dove uses the reference to Nyong’o to illustrate the relevance of preparation and giving ‘150%.’” More nuanced discussions of the rhetorical choices chose to discuss the contrast between universal definitions of words such as “hunger” and Dove’s definition, as well as the complex syntax which used hyphens to convey humor and subtext. For example, “Dove uses hyphens to provide her humorous interpretations of words or situations” or “The difference in the definitions moves the words from a broad understanding to her personal meaning.” These discussions indicated the student’s awareness of Dove’s implicit purpose to empower the graduates with a sense of agency and autonomy.

Developing a sophisticated level of analysis required elaborating on the themes of the speech, such as perseverance, curiosity, and knowledge. Many students attempted to earn the Row C point by specifically discussing the relevance of the idea of “wishes” in the rhetorical situation. These responses discussed the relevance of this rhetorical choice to this particular audience at this particular time, such as “For students who might toss Dove’s ‘wishes’ aside as sentimental, these anecdotes inform them of the ways the abstract concepts Dove discusses have practical applications in real life.” Many responses addressed some aspect of the complexities/tensions or rhetorical situation but did not earn the point because although they made a reference to a relevant observation, it was not part of the student’s argument. Others focused on how Dove used her personal stories of growth and perseverance to invite the graduates to “be bold enough” to explore their own abilities to achieve success. Many responses sought to earn the point in Row C through vivid/persuasive style. The more effective responses consistently used vivid and persuasive language throughout, instead of in one portion.

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

Some students had difficulties creating defensible statements by merely stating rhetorical choices without a specific claim about the message or connection to a purpose. Often responses would state that the purpose was “strengthen the speaker’s message” or “relate to the audience.” Some students failed to explain the function of ethos within this specific speech, falling back on broad statements about “establishing credibility” or “relating to the audience” that would be weakly attached to a rhetorical choice (“Dove mentions Lupita Nyong’o to be relatable to this young audience.”). The majority of students pointed out that she references Percy Bysshe Shelly, but the weaker responses tended to explain that the reference was to “grab the reader’s attention” or “because they are both poets.” The discussions were not connected to this particular rhetorical context. Students often focused on the repetition of “I wish you ...,” 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 Dove made that speech. Students struggled to explain the text through a limited perspective of listing devices and not by discussing Dove’s strategic actions or ideas. For example, “Dove conveys a message of perseverance and empowerment by sharing her personal journey and definitions.” Students who attempted to focus on this method of discussion often would summarize the text because the actions would not be connected to purpose. In these cases, the students would have benefited from experience with a wider variety of ways of approaching the concept of “rhetorical choice.” Finally, in

the discussions most common with ethos, students can and did make observations using those appeals, but often responses used them without fully explaining the why or development of the message. With analysis of speeches, ethos seems to be the commonly used appeal because it can easily be connected to credibility, but responses rarely elaborate on the purpose of establishing credibility in that particular rhetorical situation.

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some students misunderstood the concept of a defensible statement and often used vague language, such as “Dove uses various rhetorical choices to create her message to the students.” Such vague statements fail to make a claim substantial enough to create a line of reasoning, and therefore, students would lean on summary or random direct quotes to complete their responses. Some students did not specify the rhetorical choices that would be discussed and often replaced naming the specific choices in the thesis with the words “rhetorical choice.” Either the student was limited in knowledge of rhetorical choices or did not understand what to identify. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> While many students were able to articulate the specific rhetorical choices, the more developed theses connected the choices with a clear purpose which allowed the line of reasoning to be effectively developed throughout the essay. For example, “Dove’s use of anecdotes, repetition of ‘I wish you’ and humor communicates her message of perseverance to empower the graduates with the understanding that they have everything they need within them to be successful.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students used ethos as a rhetorical choice when discussing her relationship with the graduates, like “She wants to establish credibility,” but they failed to establish a connection with purpose. Students can identify rhetorical choices, but they are challenged to connect those choices to purpose. “Dove repeats ‘I wish you’ because she wants to get her point across.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stronger responses effectively explained the way Dove develops ethos and how it communicated her “encouragement” and “empowerment” of her audience. These responses more fully connected the appeal to her rhetorical purpose.

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

Students would benefit from learning to reach for more depth of analysis. In the classroom, teachers could require students to write three to five sentences analyzing one element or rhetorical choice in a piece they are studying in class. While this may be difficult for many young writers, the practice throughout the year can help students learn to go beyond the obvious and surface-level effects to provide more insightful commentary.

Subsequently, embedding quotations is a skill that students need to practice. Doing this will help students rely less on the speaker’s words and more on their own in their responses, thus developing their own commentary. They would also benefit from practicing paraphrasing in order to reference longer pieces of evidence without quoting large chunks in order to allow them time and space to focus on their analysis. Students need to learn to include what the speaker says in the text, but to focus on *how* the speaker says it (the choices they make) and *why* they say it (the impact of those choices on an audience to achieve a purpose). Providing sentence stems to scaffold instruction could be helpful. Teaching students to include the phrase “in order to” in the discussion of evidence and/or an author’s rhetorical choices will help them connect the choices to the purpose, leading to a better depth of analysis.

To help students build a line of reasoning, teachers can help them practice using transitions within ideas presented in a paragraph as well as between paragraphs. This establishes a connective thread among ideas, thus clarifying and enhancing the line of reasoning. Again, providing sentence frames to scaffold instruction can prove beneficial.

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 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.
- 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. Simply filter the Question Type for FRQ: Rhetorical Analysis.
- Many of the [AP Daily Videos](#) located in AP Classroom will support building students’ skills specifically for the Rhetorical Analysis 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 2: Skill 1.B Video 2
 - For students needing additional support in discussing ethos, this video specifically addresses techniques a writer uses to appeal to an audience. This lesson supports students in their understanding and analysis of the appeal, which is a skill addressed in the “Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps” column above.
 - Unit 4: Skill 1.A Daily Video 3
 - This lesson focuses on identifying the choices the writer makes given the purpose of the rhetorical situation. Exploring this concept will strengthen student’s ability to connect the selected choices to the rhetorical situation, which was a “Common Misconception/Knowledge Gap” referenced above.
 - Unit 8: Skill 7.B Daily Video 2
 - This video discusses how writers provide additional information through modifiers to address an audience’s needs/and/or advance a purpose. While focused on the grammatical concept of modifiers, this lesson will help students hone close reading skills used to better identify the audience’s values.

Question 3

Task: Argument

Topic: Carlos Curbelo on persuading others

Max Score: 6

Mean Score: 3.33

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

Students responding to this question were expected to read a quote about persuading others from a 2018 interview with Carlos Curbelo and then write an essay that argued their position on the extent to which Curbelo’s claim about persuading others is valid. Students were expected to respond to the prompt with a thesis that presented a defensible position; provide evidence to support their line of reasoning; explain how the evidence supported their line of reasoning; and use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating their argument.

As per the Course and Exam Description, 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 the 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?

This year’s argument asked students to respond to the following: “In a 2018 interview about the importance of collaboration, then United States Representative Carlos Curbelo stated: ‘If you’re trying to convince someone that they need to get involved in an issue or perhaps change their thinking on an issue, trying to scare them is not always effective and can actually sow resentment.’ Write an essay that argues your position on the extent to which Curbelo’s claim about persuading others is valid.”

The prompt itself was both accessible and understandable for most students. They had at their command numerous personal examples of the scare tactics to which Curbelo refers. Their study of history and awareness of contemporary events also served them well. In addition, the question allowed students to draw on their study of persuasion methods in AP English Language, though fewer made this connection than anticipated.

There were nuances to the quotation that not all students embraced. The prompt provides the context that Curbelo was considering collaborative situations specifically, which students could use to create a more sophisticated argument. In the quotation, Curbelo refers to both actions and thinking, providing students with two very different possible pathways for exploration. He acknowledges scare tactics are not always effective, which suggests students, too, could think about when they might be, leading some students to challenge Curbelo’s claim. Then, the prompt closes with the invitation to argue the *extent* to which it is valid. Many responses instead chose a more simplified binary approach agreeing or disagreeing with Curbelo. While these responses could be successful, they often limited the parameters of the argument unnecessarily: “Due to historical and personal evidence, I agree with Mr. Curbelo’s statement.”

Most responses earned the thesis point. However, a number appeared to ignore the specific task, choosing instead to write about persuasion in general. Other responses began with unpromising general ideas about persuasion but eventually worked their way to scare tactics and their impact. Every prompt is an invitation, or, as it is worded in the first bullet listing what the response should do: “Respond to the prompt ...” In

ignoring, or only skimming, the provided quote, some students crafted responses that were not as successful.

In terms of evidence, the responses presented varied relevant support: the American Revolution, Nazi Germany, personal experiences at home and school, social media, popular films, and even works of literature (*1984*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*) were well represented. The specificity of evidence was a determining factor in performance. There was a marked difference between the response that developed a discussion of the Cuban Missile Crisis versus the one that stated, “A person in power might use fear tactics to target a group of people they despise to sway public opinion against those chosen subjects.” Hypothetical examples can reach an appropriate level of specificity, but too often they devolve into vague generalities that do not truly illustrate the point or offer much by way of commentary. The responses drawing on actual examples and providing specific details were frequently more successful. Many responses demonstrated a strong knowledge of history, of literature, and of current happenings in the country and even the world, but others seemed to force those connections with insufficient detail. As students demonstrated their skill at identifying specific details in order to build their argument, they benefited most from whatever came from their own authentic worlds and understandings, whether academic or not; discussing parental conflicts and Disney princesses with sincerity and specificity worked better for some than reaching for amorphous hypotheticals or half-remembered historical examples.

Evidence itself does not prove anything. It only has life in the essay when situated in support of the position. The commentary accompanying the evidence allowed responses to solidify the line of reasoning and clarify the argument. Struggling responses frequently got caught up in the example rather than what it proved. Better ones made at least an assertion of the thesis connection though sometimes without much integration. The stronger ones used the evidence in clear support of the argument and relied on developed commentary to extend, clarify, and elevate the argument: “Although one side may be ‘right,’ they both think they are right. There are many perspectives upon any current event and the way to influence such is by appealing through their values, not scaring them into helping them.”

Stronger responses were carefully structured with claims about the topic that helped form the line of reasoning. Rather than presenting three arbitrary examples each proving the same point, they explored reasons why or ways their position was true, often placing those claims in the topic sentences. The better responses demonstrated that a line of reasoning is not about the number of paragraphs or a list of transition words, but truly means “[l]ogical organization and cohesive presentation where all portions work together in service of the argument.”

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

An argument involves taking a reasoned position that the student reaches after considering the prompt fully, carefully, and from multiple points of view. Students make claims about that topic, exploring reasons why and ways their view is true. They marshal support for that position, discussing the most germane evidence in ways that make clear how those details support their position. Many students accepted this invitation wholeheartedly.

There were responses, however, that reflected confusion on the task itself. Some students did not see the link between the two paragraphs of the prompt. Some approached argument as though the prompt is a basic question asking for a simple and straightforward response, often falling back on simplistic or repetitive commentary. Others failed to consider audience, the way there is a transaction of sorts that occurs between writer and reader. In short, the prompt, like the world, is complex, and students are invited to appreciate that complexity and share their understanding of it.

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weaker responses discussed persuasion broadly without delving into Curbelo’s precise claim, such as “I agree that persuading others is not valid because of the natural consequences & the problems it causes.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger responses engaged directly with the prompt, exploring the nuances of the question. For example, “This claim that using fear to persuade people on a certain issue is ineffective and does more harm than good is partially true. The most effective way to convince someone about the effects of a certain issue is to be honest, and the truth is sometimes scary.” • Responses that introduced Curbelo and then focused on the larger implications of his ideas could be equally successful, as in “When trying to collaborate with others, the most important thing is one’s openness to other’s perspectives, because a lack thereof can lead to conflict and will not result in productive collaboration.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weaker responses relied on general evidence that left the argument with little support, leading to sweeping generalizations that didn’t strengthen the argument: “If you’re at a store and someone is screaming at you to get a free sample, chances are you’ll buy that sample.” Responses such as this tended to respond to the prompt in a more simplistic manner and often failed to establish a line of reasoning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger responses emphasized the details within their examples in order to develop the argument fully and specifically, such as “Take the sport of volleyball, no matter how many times a player could be told to hit cross court instead of down the line, if they aren’t putting in a considerable amount of effort to fix that problem, it won’t change. Now add an ultimatum ... By adding incentive, you might notice a change in heart.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weaker responses did not discuss evidence (“This led to resentment towards my family for attempting to scare me out of thinking”) or provided commentary that was labored. In part this was because of trying to connect to the thesis too quickly and abruptly (“This shows how scaring someone to support what you want may steer them the other way”). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger responses fully developed the discussion of the evidence and thoroughly connected it to the thesis: In a paragraph on climate change that supports scare tactics, one response stated, “Rather, prevention efforts must be maximized to the greatest extent possible. This can be seen across the country as climate change protestors are striking in masses, advocating for environmental justice. Their efforts have been recognized by world leaders and have elicited promises toward climate reparations—a step toward crisis mitigation.”

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In a paragraph on “Howl” opposing tactics, “[Ginsberg] refused to be silenced by scare tactics and fear-mongering. Scare tactics rarely get anything. Curbelo’s claim was valid in that the use of scare tactics only causes people to feel attacked and double down.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weaker responses held to one idea—often a variation on Curbelo being right/wrong—without exploring the topic more fully. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stronger responses did not simply hold to examples of why the thesis was true but explored other possible views and engaged with them. For example, in an essay writing against Curbelo’s basic point, one response considered the nuance by writing, “Still, threats do work. Just take a look at history—what is mutually assured destruction if not a threat of death upon the start of war? We are experiencing a perhaps unprecedented peace and successful international alliance (NATO) from it. But, ultimately, attempt at persuasion through force have also led the tragedy. The United States History ...”

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

Reading is at the heart of the AP English Language course, and teachers want to work with students on extending those critical reading skills to the unpacking of any prompt. Providing students numerous invitations to write for various audiences and purposes, often in untimed, process situations, will help students as writers develop skills they can then use in the on-demand exam situation. Students can benefit from having their own reading, knowledge, and experiences validated as a legitimate part of the inventing (brainstorming) process, and teachers can help them work on improving how they give voice to that evidence on the page. Teachers can work with them on extending their thinking beyond the initial examples that come to mind, which may not fit the demands of the rhetorical situation as well as students might initially think. Students need exposure to, and practice with, various methods of arranging an essay so that they allow the essay structure to emerge logically in response to the prompt. That way, they will avoid forcing the prompt to fit a predetermined organizational framework (three support paragraphs) or a series of required evidence categories (historical, literal, personal) that is not suited to it.

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 Unit 2, Unit 5, and Unit 8 [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 [Argument FRQs in the AP Classroom Question Bank](#) as a part of classroom practice for students. Simply filter the Question Type for FRQ: Argument.
- Many of the [AP Daily Videos](#) located in AP Classroom will support building students' skills specifically for the Argument 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 2B Daily Video 2
 - This video reminds students that they are crafting a response to a particular audience and provides examples of how to identify audience needs and values. This is helpful for students needing additional tutelage on reaching an audience who may agree or support their message.
 - Unit 4: Skill 4.B Daily Video 2
 - As described above, there are numerous ways the thesis point can be earned. This video focuses on writing an argumentative thesis that previews the line of reasoning, whether explicitly or implicitly. Exposing students to the varied formats of a thesis can provide them the tools to respond to the argument task in more specific ways.
 - Unit 6: Skill 4.B Daily Video 2
 - As described above in the “Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps,” students often struggle to construct a *defensible* position. This video provides strategies to making a position more argumentative.